

THE SUPREME COURT DECISIONS ON PRAYER IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Congress shall make no law requesting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

-- First Amendment, U.S. Constitution

The decisions of the Supreme Court on the reading of the Bible and the use of prayer in the public schools were a step taken under the Constitution of the United States to protect our religious liberties, not to infringe upon them. In the First Amendment to the Constitution our Founders established the basic principle that the free exercise of religion is not to be encroached upon by any governmental action. This protection was extended to the laws of the states by the Fourteenth Amendment.

The decisions of the Supreme Court did not deny religion, did not deny the need for religious and spiritual education, or the necessity and efficacy of prayer; rather, the opinion of the Court declared the "tradition of reliance on the home, the church, and the inviolable citadel of the individual heart and mind."

After the decisions school authorities across the nation adjusted their procedures to accord with this new statement of the law. Conforming with the long-established PTA policy of cooperation with schools, PTAs should avoid bringing pressure to continue any practices that the constituted authorities find unlawful.

PTAs may continue their own inspirational exercises within their own meetings. Whether or not they meet in school buildings, PTAs are voluntary and private associations, and determine for themselves the observances that will meet their needs.

Remembering that responsibility in these matters belongs with home and church, thoughtful PTA members will also take new resolution for the moral and spiritual education of their children and youth, noting that not religious exercises alone but careful precept and example must achieve the spiritual strength and moral growth we seek for our young people.

Recognizing the diversity of beliefs and religious denominations among our nation's families, the responsibility for these matters must rest with the home and family. PTA members should accept the responsibility for the moral and spiritual education of their children and youth, noting that the spiritual strength and moral growth sought for our young people may be achieved through careful precept and example as well as through religious exercises.

Adopted: by the 1963 Board of Managers
Revised: by the 1987 Board of Directors
Reviewed: by the 1993 and 1998 Convention Resolutions Committee