



Focus on Religious Freedom

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Federal Guidelines Explain the Rights of Public School Students to Prayer and Religious Expression: Part 1

Decades of media deceit and anti-religious sentiments have conditioned Americans to believe that God and prayer have been removed from public schools. In fact, the 1962 Supreme Court decision in *Engel v. Vitale*, as officially summarized, was that there could not be an official state prayer which students would be required to recite at the beginning of each school day. Students' personal prayer was not part of the decision.

Extreme media headlines reported the court decision in black and white, dramatic and misleading terms so that even Americans favoring prayer in school felt forced to accept that there could be no prayer or religious expression in public schools.

In 1995 Pres. Clinton issued the first guidelines to religious expression in public schools clarifying that students had the right to private personal prayer as long as it was not school sponsored and not disruptive. Catholics for Freedom of Religion volunteers have taught thousands of student those guidelines.

There have been myriad court cases to prevent students from praying in school, wearing religious themed clothing, writing about their faith in class, asking for religious clubs, etc. Our volunteers have been told by many students of incidents in their schools of students denied the rights outlined by the government.

This scenario is changing. Revised guidelines were issued from the Dept. of Education on Feb. 5, 2026. These reflect the current religious freedom laws and make it clear that schools must allow students to live their constitutionally protected rights or face investigation and enforcement as each states determines is appropriate. These guidelines provide the principles governing religious expression and prayer, reporting requirements, and the suggested outline of an enforcement process for each state.

As we celebrate the risen Christ and the renewal of Easter graces, let us thank God for the blessings of living in the only nation founded on His gifts to mankind..."Among these is life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Let us renew our determination and be vigilant that our children do not lose their religious freedom when they enter the doors of America's public schools.

Read more: <https://tinyurl.com/2dh6k75s> <https://tinyurl.com/5ak83uej>