

Catholic diocese bans sex-ed class in leased Perth Amboy school

Posted by [cjrothma](#) April 06, 2009 05:30AM

Last summer, Perth Amboy High School officials helped solve a classroom space problem by leasing an empty Catholic school six blocks away.

It seemed a simple solution: Catholic officials promised to remove crucifixes and other religious symbols to comply with a federal law banning religious motifs in public schools. About 200 freshmen would take classes in the school that even had a gym. But public school officials didn't anticipate one restriction.



Mitsu Yasukawa/The

Star-LedgerPerth Amboy High School freshmen, who attended a human sex education class at the high school, were later were bussed back to Our Lady of Hungary, called East Campus.

Sex education that does not promote abstinence-only could not be taught on Catholic property. So the students now have to be bused to another location for one class.

Last week, the district started transporting the teenagers from Our Lady of Hungary school to the main high school campus for sex education.

"It was something that totally escaped us," said vice principal Jeffrey Hudanish, who oversees classes at the former Catholic middle school, which closed in June 2007, that Perth Amboy administrators call the "East Campus."

Public school officials learned of the conflict in October through a phone call from an attorney representing the Diocese of Metuchen, Hudanish said. However, a church official said the school had fair warning in the summer when the lease was signed.

The Perth Amboy busing solution is a twist on the issue of separation of church and state, but some public school officials wonder if it could become a trend.

In the last decade, New Jersey lost 113 Catholic schools that accommodated 44,300 students, said Brian Gray, a spokesman for the National Catholic Educational Association in Washington, D.C.

As more and more Catholic schools across the state close then lease empty classrooms to public schools, the question of where to teach sex education is likely to surface again, said John Rodecker, Perth Amboy school superintendent.

"As these (Catholic) schools are closing, and as (public) schools are interested in renting them, this is the groundwork," said Rodecker, who added the busing is working fine but is "a pain in the neck."

Other public school districts that rent Catholic schools are aware of the potential conflict but haven't had to deal with the sex education issue.

The East Brunswick Board of Education in Middlesex County is renting a Catholic school to house an elementary school that burned in July. Its lease with the Diocese of Metuchen for Corpus Christi School in South River says "the tenant further agrees that it will not teach sex ed in its classes," according to Trish LaDuca, spokeswoman for the East Brunswick schools. The school's oldest students are in fifth grade, LaDuca said.

"We teach body parts, girls getting their period," she said. "They don't actually get into the birds and the bees."

In New York City, public school officials are renting 17 Catholic schools, but most are for elementary school students. To get around the sex education issue, high school students forgo sex education until the summer or the next year when they're back at the public school building, spokeswoman Margie Feinberg said.

Gray said he didn't know of any cases in which public schools bused students off-site from a rented Catholic school because of a sex education conflict.

"I haven't heard of this twist before," said Gray.

In Perth Amboy, church officials say the sex education issue is covered in the lease and public school officials should have known the church would have a problem with that curriculum.

"They know ahead of time they cannot use those premises for any teachings that would be contrary to the Catholic church," said Monica Demkovitz, director of property management for the Diocese of Metuchen. "It's obvious that it's a Catholic building, and we would not want somebody in there teaching against our teachings."

Rodecker agreed, saying he understood the diocese's position all along. As for other school officials being surprised, he said the section of the lease about permitted use of the building was vague.

"It might have been skipped over before," he said.

The Perth Amboy Board of Education is paying \$160,000 to rent Our Lady of Hungary for the current academic year. School started in September, but five sex education classes deemed "sensitive" and conflicting with Catholic doctrine did not begin until last week.

Gregg Ficarra, Perth Amboy High's director of health and physical education, said he thinks the sex-education classes are hitting home.

Students are probably absorbing the information better because they are suffering an inconvenience to get it, he said.

"They'll remember it more, because of what they had to go through to get the information," he said.

In Perth Amboy, sex education is taught as part of health class during freshman year. State guidelines allow local districts to decide which year to teach it.

Preteen and teen pregnancy has been a concern in Perth Amboy, a city of 50,000 that is one of New Jersey's poorest school districts and receives Abbott funding. In 2005, the last year for which data is available, 55 girls ages 10 to 17 gave birth, according to the state Department of Health and Senior Services.

On a Friday in late March, 25 freshmen boarded a bus to the high school around 10:30 a.m. to hear a guest speaker from Planned Parenthood talk about sexually transmitted diseases.

The lecture was held in a large classroom at the high school with movie theater-style seating, and students were back at Our Lady of Hungary by 11:15 a.m.

Meaghan Stillwell, 15, said she thinks the busing is silly.

"It's not necessary. It is a Catholic school, but we're not being taught Catholic (doctrine)," she said.

Luis Cardona, also 15, said he learned a few things in the class.

"I didn't know you could catch (herpes) from unprotected sex," he said.

Roberto Morales, a health teacher who teaches sex education and accompanied the students on the bus, said the students ask questions about the topic "every day."

He pointed to a pile of index cards with anonymous questions on them. Students who have sexual-health questions while on the Catholic campus are told to write them on index cards and wait to go to the main campus to discuss them.

On one card was written, "I want to learn about Abortion and HIV. What happens if you have sex a lot of time?"

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Comments

grnnbareit says...

Funny stuff!

Apparently these school buildings are like foreign embassies, so the laws of the foreign power rule even though they are on US soil.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 9:33AM

doctorphil1 says...

Eailier to march the students across the street and hold the sex-ed class on the sidewalk. It is where most learn about it anyway.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 9:43AM

doctorphil1 says...

Easier to march the students across the street and hold the sex-ed class on the sidewalk. It is where most learn about it anyway.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 9:45AM

MaskedOG says...

Don't ban it, teach it. Kids need to know about sex and be taught everything correctly and accurately. There's more than preventing pregnancies. How about diseases and some that can ultimately lead to death? They bury their heads in the sand when it comes to nurturing our children and reinforcing the values some are taught at home while educating those who's parents are less likely to explain these matters to them. Bingo before education. Makes no sense what-so-ever. Just think how many lives could have been spared BEFORE the pedophile priests got hold of them and destroyed them.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 9:47AM

curleyque says...

Is the church paying property taxes on this income producing rental property?

Posted on 04/06/09 at 9:48AM

mo717 says...

Catholicism-- enslaving minds since 33 A.D. Obviously, this is no shock coming from an organization responsible for the Inquisition, the excommunication of Galileo, the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, not to mention Benedict's recent comments about how condoms won't help in the fight against AIDS

in Africa.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 9:50AM

Sisteranne says...

I'm Catholic and I have to say this is absurd. The school board is paying a lot of money for this school. Personally, I think the board should reconsider the lease and spend its money elsewhere as soon as it is legally feasible. Let the diocese get stuck for the money. Suppose the diocese didn't like the schools teaching about science or encouraging girls to have careers. Would the school district have to cave in on that, too?

Posted on 04/06/09 at 9:55AM

lindenite158 says...

Sisteranne was it absurd when they made them remove all religious symbols from the building? Whats wrong with instilling some morals in our young people. And since the land is now taxable as a profit making site the town wins. Go ahead and spend your money somewhere else so the Church can use it for tax exempt purposes. Or better yet just build a new school and pass that expense on to your taxpayers.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:09AM

mcmid says...

The best solution would be to purchase the empty school buildings. It is far cheaper to buy them than to build new ones. With the purchase, you remove any restrictions.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:18AM

baligirl says...

mcmid, I believe that is what the archdiocese is betting on anyway. The original plan was to push for illegal alien amnesty and less border control. This would have boosted enrollment especially in urban areas. They are still pushing for that but resistance is slowing things down. So leasing was an option but with the economy tanking the best solution may be a quick sale.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:25AM

jrz says...

And what will happen if it's taught?

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:26AM

GeorgeSchrub says...

mcmid above makes a good suggestion: buy the empty school buildings.

The problem with this logical solution is that Da Boyz what run New Joisey don't make any vig off of the straight purchase of existing buildings.

Da Boyz like the construction of new school buildings, even if they are right next door to existing, structurally sound buildings. When there's new construction, all of Da Boyz that run New Jersey, the unions, the construction companies, the state and local building inspectors, the local politicians, etc etc get to wet their beaks from the cash flow.

Got it now?

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:27AM

curleyque says...

Lindenite it is not absurd to remove all religious symbols from the building used for public school education.

Here in the United States we have freedom to practice religion, and freedom from it. People are allowed to choose the religion they want to follow and the religion they want their children to follow. That means Jewish and Muslim children should not be getting a public education in a building promoting Catholicism.

Would it be absurd if the city rented a Muslim owned building and your children has to spend the day in classrooms promoting Allah as the creator of the whole universe and Muhammad as his prophet?

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:32AM

lindenite158 says...

And why when it comes to what is fair its always for the other person. No one is promoting religion by having a cross on the wall. Its a matter of history. So once again I suggest if you want to use their buildings than abide by their rules or just build your own buildings. Its like any other lease theres rules.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:39AM

Sisteranne says...

Lindenite:

The school board ought to have read the lease more carefully -- if they agreed, then no problem. But once the diocese agrees to remove the crucifixes and signs the contract, it seems to me they don't have any say in the curriculum of what is now a public school. And remember, this is an Abbott district, and our tax dollars are what paid for this lease. I think what others are saying here is true -- that

perhaps the aim of the diocese is to get the district to purchase the school outright. And how much does it cost to bus the kids somewhere else for sex education? That comes out of your property taxes too.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:41AM

Sisteranne says...

And so, Lindenite, if you lease an apartment from someone who's very religious and insists that you got to their church or synagogue every week, that's OK?

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:42AM

MaskedOG says...

Where was the Catholic Church when all of the immorality was going on? On top of that, they lied and continued to deceive UNTIL it all hit the fan. In today's world, the more honest we are with our children and take time to talk to them, answer their questions and prepare them for life, the better off we all will be especially the youth who must face many challenges and hurdles along the way. Better to be prepared than live in denial.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:47AM

lindenite158 says...

The Church failed no one. The men who run the Church failed. Sisteranne don't be crazy the Church in renting the building is not asking anyone to believe what they believe. They laid down their rules when they leased the building and if the town who has loads of attorneys working for them didn't read it, shame on them. And to those that think the busing is expensive try building a new school if you don't like the rules.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:55AM

Malignancy says...

Lindenite, since when are morals only part of being religious to begin with? There are plenty of atheists and agnostics that simply have morals because they want to be better people and make the world a better place. Just because someone has (any religion) doesn't make them any better than anyone else. If you happen to be catholic or christian re-read the parable of the seeds till you actually understand it. Your own bible says it's WORSE to believe in god (and the moral implications associated with religion) after hearing the message just to get the reward of being absolved of your sins. In theory someone who doesn't believe in god at all, but believes in being just and moral simply for the sake of doing it is doing it for all the right reasons compared to someone who goes to church every sunday and follows all the rules just to get into heaven.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 11:15AM

politburo says...

The Church's past is irrelevant. They were within their rights to put these limits in the lease (this is not a residency lease.. equal housing laws do not apply). So that's that, imo.

But as for buying the buildings, while it would be cheaper upfront to buy them than build new ones, it might be cheaper in the long run to build new buildings when you factor in any necessary renovations/rehabilitation, improvements in energy efficiency, etc. But it's something the district could look into.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 11:16AM

curleyque says...

lindenite158

It's not just fair for the other person. If a large group of immigrants or members of a different religious community moved into your neighborhood you might need the rights guaranteed in the Constitution to protect you.

Thankfully we do have a United States Constitution to protect us from you forcing your beliefs on us.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 11:18AM

baligirl says...

"The Church failed no one. The men who run the Church failed."

Are you joking?

Malignancy, well said.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 11:23AM

jeff327 says...

What a shocker the Catholic church makes a bad decision. Boy that does not happen often. Only every other week. Keep looking to the invisible man in the sky for answers and this is what happens.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 11:39AM

Ferguson says...

lindenite:... "Whats wrong with instilling some morals in our young people."

What morals do you refer to? Priests molesting innocent children, then an entire religion covering it up? How ignorant of you.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 11:45AM

rusty99 says...

Is the church ok with the history classes when they teach about some guy Jesus Christ who started a religion and then got executed for his troubles...and didn't rise 40 days later, he stayed dead?

Posted on 04/06/09 at 11:51AM

diamgem says...

Okay I am confused it is alright for some old pervert to molest children disguised as someone they should be able to trust and then the church avoids scandal and save the molester from prosecution by transferring him all over but it is not okay to teach children how to protect themselves from getting infected with an STD or worse becoming HIV positive. The church pressed abstinence for centuries and their own emmissaries the priest and nuns are he biggest violators and they took vows of celibacy. And CurlyQue is right on with the TAX question rental property should be taxable income but moreover as a landlord the church should have no say about the teachings as long as NJ pays the rent on time.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 11:56AM

langdu1 says...

the entire school management should be fired for their stupidity. becuase of their actions, our tax dollars keep increasing very freakin year. Bad management should go away. the church contract should be reinvestigate: it creates more problem and litigations. the school program WAS there first, the church should not have any say in what programs the school should run....

Posted on 04/06/09 at 12:38PM

beeleevr says...

First of all, don't quote the Bible unless you understand it, that parable does NOT say don't believe in God. But let's stay on topic, the Church is being attacked because she is trying to adhere to the same high standards she has always taught and to not be swayed by changing culture. If we don't hold our kids to the highest standard then OF COURSE they won't meet that mark. That doesn't mean they won't be educated, they should know what goes on in the world, but we should be teaching them the BEST way to prevent disease and pregnancy, as well as spiritual and emotional health. And by the way, for every pedophile priest there are many more good men serving the Church and community.

Easy to forget about them and continue to attack.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 12:46PM

honkeie says...

Dont worry, The Give Act will soon make religion illegal....

Posted on 04/06/09 at 1:09PM

cost13 says...

There seems to be a fairly simple solution to this. Next year, instead of having the freshman class in the old catholic school, move the sophomore class over there. Then they can still teach the health class to freshman (as they should), and there's no issue. Unless the diocese would have a problem with them teaching drivers ed.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 1:58PM

woolgathered says...

All you have to do is give them too much sex ed, that will make them not want to do it at all. No sex ed means they have to find out for themselves what it's all about.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 2:25PM

baligirl says...

"And by the way, for every pedophile priest there are many more good men serving the Church and community."

The problem is that so many "good men" helped to shield those pedophiles while ignoring the suffering of the children. Sex Ed also teaches a child to respect and protect their body.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 3:16PM

llumpirenj says...

diamgem- is it right to murder unborn children? It isn't right to molest children either. Which is worse? Let's think here... Murder is worse. Also it is Catholic Property, so yes they can ban sex ed from being taught on Campus. TheDiocese of Metuchen is wise in enacting that little clause. Also more

First, to those who say are they paying taxes on the Property. It is church property, they don't have to pay taxes.

The Chruch has been discriminated against for the last half century. There is NO seperation of Chruch

and State clause in the Constitution. Also, since Church property is Church property, they can say what is permitted to be taught in the school, especially if it is contrary to fundamental parts of the Canon Law.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 6:52PM

woolgathered says...

llumpirenj are you INSANE? Clearly nothing bad has *ever* happened to you. Clearly.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 7:38PM

curleyque says...

Llumpirenj

Well, as long as they weren't murdering unborn children, I guess we can sweep that priests molesting little boys problem under the carpet.

On your scholarly claim that there is no separation of church and state in the Constitution, how about the First Amendment? That is the also the amendment that by some peculiar interpretation keeps government from taxing churches. It's also the amendment that guarantees freedom for the press and free speech so that you can express your opinions against abortion and not so much against molestation of children by priests.

You are correct that it is church property and they can put restrictions on its use when they rent it out. Perth Amboy officials were foolish to agree to those restrictions or thought that the need for space outweighed the expense and trouble of busing the kids around.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 8:30PM

exwctcfan says...

The 'proposed' lease drawn up by the Church lease should have been specific about what could and could not be taught.

If teaching sex-ed is specifically banned in the lease, the lease should NEVER HAVE BEEN SIGNED.

If, sex-ed is banned in the lease (and not having seen it, I can't say whether it is or isn't), then the Attorney for the Board of Education should be held accountable for the blunder, unless he/she advised against approving it, and the Board & Administration went against attorney advice.

If it is NOT specifically banned, then the Board of Ed should teach sex-ed in the leased facilities. OR - the Church should reimburse the school district for the added expense of bussing etc. plus an additional penalty for the loss of instruction time required to shuttle of children & staff.

Actually - whether it is in the contract or not, a **CLAUSE THAT IS ILLEGAL, CANNOT BE LEGALLY ENFORCED - IT IS INVALID**. It sounds illegal to me.

The article said:

>>>>"They know ahead of time they cannot use those premises for any teachings that would be contrary to the Catholic church," said Monica Demkovitz, director of property management for the Diocese of Metuchen. "It's obvious that it's a Catholic building, and we would not want somebody in there teaching against our teachings."

TEACHINGS CONTRARY TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S TEACHINGS??????

So, now public school educators have to always be Catholic scholars to know what you they can and cannot teach in **PUBLIC SCHOOL CLASSES** in a leased space that owned by the Catholic Diocese?

No landlord should have the right to tell a lessee who is a **PUBLIC** school district what they can and cannot teach in leased space. If the landlord is doing so in this case, it is clearly **NOT** a separation of church and state. The building is servinv as a **PUBLIC SCHOOL**.

The Church had to remove "the crucifixes and other religious symbols to comply with a federal law banning religious motifs in public schools."

The Church also needs to check its doctrine at the door. It has no force of law in a public school.

Posted on 04/06/09 at 10:34PM

obiwanisback says...

curlyque

The church probably catagorizes the payment received as a "donation in kind" which would allow the tax exempt status to remain. However, the Tax Assessor can review the lease and make a determination. If they did have to pay taxes it would be prorated for the time the building is in use (Sept-June)by the school district. Also, an unpopular can of political worms would be opened and the tax assessor is better off letting sleeping dogs lay. Lastly, the church would only raise the rent to cover the taxes and that would mean more out of the taxpayers pocket - which no taxpayer wants to hear.

Posted on 04/07/09 at 8:57AM

17tixe says...

Catholic bashing: the last acceptable prejudice.

Posted on 04/07/09 at 9:40AM

FloridaLou says...

If the school board didn't read the lease or thought they could slide one past the church they were just stupid. And in the list of all things that are wrong with the world, busing some kids for a couple of weeks hardly ranks near the top. And regardless of whether you believe that the tenets of the religion are sound they are enacted by mere men who are basically stupid creatures that make many mistakes. And that's true of all religions. The Church has every legal right to make the sex ed stipulation and the school board has every right to lease another building. And that Folks is America!

Posted on 04/07/09 at 11:33AM

disattyinblu says...

Apparently the rate on the lease isn't high enough.

Give the Catholic church enough money and you can do anything you want...

My buddy was raised catholic his whole life and his parents went to the same church for 30 years in Central NJ. When their son wanted to marry a Jewish girl it was Totally unacceptable to the church... then his father made a "Special Donation" of \$15,000 and suddenly it was FINE by the church... what hypocrites.

Trust me if the town pays enough money.. the church will allow the teaching of "Molestation 101" in their sacred building..after all the most sacred building to any catholic church isn't the place where they pray...it's the building with all the money in it...the BANK
In GOD WE TRUST.

Posted on 04/07/09 at 12:13PM

roberto188 says...

While I think NOT teaching contraception is absurd, the public schools missed this minor detail. Hey, if I rent an apartment and it says NO PETS, and I try to keep a pet is it the owners fault for being intolerant or my fault for not reading my lease agreement? Should have done their due diligence and read the fine print. No one to blame but themselves.

Posted on 04/07/09 at 12:50PM

Footer