



POLICY STATEMENT 62 PUBLIC PRAYER

POLICY DIGEST

Monitoring Unit: Finance & Administration
Initially Issued: May 18, 1987

I. PURPOSE

To establish policies relating to prayer at public meetings, events and ceremonies held on the campus of Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College.

II. BACKGROUND STATEMENT

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College is a public State university; therefore, the question of the appropriateness of public prayer at meetings, events, and ceremonies on campus must be considered on the basis of the application of the provisions of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution to specific situations. Since public prayer involves public utterances of a religious nature at an assembly of people, four clauses of the First Amendment must be considered. These clauses may be identified as follows:

Establishment and Free
Exercise Clauses

"Congress shall make no law
respecting an establishment of
religion, or prohibiting the free
exercise thereof....."

Freedom of Expression
Clause

"Or abridging the freedom
of speech...."

Freedom of Assembly
Clause

"Or the right of the people
peaceably to assemble...."

During the past two decades, Federal courts have been asked to answer questions growing out of the dilemma administrators face when they attempt to deal with conflicts resulting from interpretations and applications of these four clauses to public prayer on the campus of a public university. The resulting Case Law has established several useful principles which serve as the basis for establishing reasonable University policy governing public prayer. The most significant of these principles are as follows.

- A. A state university campus is a public forum "where the regulation of speech should be content-neutral and where religious speech cannot be prohibited." The existence of an open forum in a public university does not confer any imprimatur of state approval on religious sects or practices.
- B. The administration of a state university has the legal right to establish reasonable time, place and manner regulations to govern the exercise of First Amendment freedoms on campus.

III. GENERAL POLICY

With due consideration to all the provisions of the First Amendment to the Constitution, and relying on the Case Law applicable to public universities, the following policy statements are established.

- A. Meetings of recognized student and/or employee organizations. Each organization shall make the decision as to whether or not prayer is to be a part of its meetings and/or events sponsored by the organization.
- B. Outside organizations using University facilities and premises. Subject to the provisions of policies established by the Board of Supervisors, outside organizations may use University facilities when such facilities are not needed for University purposes. Each organization shall make the decision as to whether or not prayer is to be a part of its meetings and/or events sponsored by the organization.
- C. Official University events and ceremonies. The University administrator responsible for planning and staging a University sponsored event shall make the decision as to the appropriateness of including prayer as a part of the program.

Traditionally, prayer has been offered at many official functions of the University. This tradition, plus other factors, should be considered by the person planning and the person offering a prayer at an official event of the University. Public prayer at a University function should reflect a sensitivity to the religious pluralism of our Nation, State and University. It is appropriate for the person who prays in public to use language that addresses and emphasizes common beliefs so as to respect the diversity of religious beliefs and the freedom of religion of each person in attendance. The United States has legal requirements as well as a strong tradition of separating matters of church and state, which suggest the elimination of sectarian theological formulations of prayers at public events. Thus, the emphasis of a public prayer offered at a University event will differ from prayers offered in a private personal devotion or in public sectarian worship services.