

April 5, 1995

AGAINST PRAYER AMENDMENTS

This statement, originally issued in the 1980's by Protestant and Jewish leaders in Massachusetts, was revised and adopted by the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Council of Churches on April 5, 1995.

In order to protect our precious heritage of religious freedom and faith, the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Council of Churches opposes any Constitutional amendment on school prayers. As Christians we are a people of prayer - which is the basic reason why we oppose any public or political abuses of prayer.

We oppose prayer laws because they are insensitive to the rights and consciences of other religious traditions in our pluralistic society. These laws are disrespectful and discriminatory to the convictions of religious and non-religious minorities. Vital faith is voluntary; it witnesses by its love and fairness. Such faith refuses to impose or compel conformity to its devotional values.

We oppose prayer laws also because they implicate government in the affairs and practices of religion. By requiring schools to set aside time for students to offer public prayers, these laws involve the public schools - agents of government - in directing, administering, and supervising religious activities. Our religious freedom depends upon preventing any government interference, for or against, in our religious lives.

We oppose prayer laws, finally, in order to protect the integrity of prayer itself. Prayer is the lifeline of the faithful - the personal confessions, petitions, intercessions, and praise of persons in communion with God. Prayer is demeaned when it is enforced or divisive. Prayer is caricatured when it is used as a device by the state to promote discipline or prevent delinquency in schools. Prayer laws violate the integrity of prayer itself.

Contrary to some rhetoric, God is not and cannot be "driven from the public schools". Our God is not a resident of buildings nor limited by walls. Rather, God dwells in the hearts of the faithful, and they can and will pray with a still, small voice wherever they are, and without legal assistance.