

Update: No Ban on Christmas

12.21.2007

After the stories about Christmas were published stating that Southwestern Oklahoma State University banned the word 'Christmas' or Christmas decorations, I made inquiries to discover if there was any basis to the reports. The university does not have a policy that bans the word 'Christmas' or Christmas decorations. However, some supervisors or department leaders within the university who meant well may have suggested to employees that caution should be taken with respect to Christmas decorations. One thing led to another and the result was that some mistakenly assumed that Christmas decorations were being prohibited. I have met with various staff members to get to the bottom of the matter and have also had a pleasant discussion with Mathew Staver, Founder of Liberty Counsel.

The university will continue to follow the law and to respect the right of all its staff members. Thus, the university will follow the general principles set forth by the courts regarding the display of religious symbols and/or Nativity scenes. A publicly sponsored Nativity scene on public property is constitutional so long as it is displayed in the context of other secular symbols of the holiday, like Santa Claus or a Christmas tree, so as not to appear to be endorsing a particular religion. A privately sponsored religious symbol or Nativity on public property where members of the public are permitted to display such symbols does not need an accompanying secular symbol to be constitutional.

In applying this general rule to the university, if a Nativity or other religious symbol of the holiday is displayed in a place open to the general public (like a lobby), the university will include secular symbols of the holiday in the nearby context. However, employees in their cubicles or offices may personally display a Nativity or other religious symbol of the holiday. In such setting, the employee need not include secular symbols of the holiday. Employees have always been and continue to be permitted to greet one another with the greeting 'Merry Christmas' or 'Happy Holidays.' The decision is up to each employee.

I trust that these guiding principles will clarify the matter regarding Christmas for the staff and the general public.

John Hays
SWOSU President

No Ban on Christmas

December 20, 2007

An attempt to be respectful of the diverse religious population at Southwestern Oklahoma State University has been misinterpreted as an attempt to ban Christmas on the Weatherford campus.

The rumor of this ban is not true.

The university attempted to prevent the appearance as a state agency of endorsing any particular religion.

John Hays
SWOSU President