

**U.S.****Ruling: No Bible at Kindergarten Show-And-Tell**

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A kindergartner's mother cannot read Scripture during show-and-tell, the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals wrote in a split 2-1 opinion – becoming the latest judicial pronouncement over just how far religion can seep in to public schools.

According to the Associated Press, the Marple Newtown School District in suburban Philadelphia told plaintiff Donna Kay Busch in October 2004 that she could not read the Bible passages during her son's "All About Me" program. This is the prohibition that provoked the suit.

"Parents of public school kindergarten students may reasonably expect their children will not become captive audiences to an adult's reading of religious texts," Chief Judge Anthony J. Scirica wrote for the majority in affirming the lower court's holding.

Donna Kay Busch is the mother of Wesley Busch, a kindergarten student at Culbertson Elementary School of the Marple Newtown School District, who was age five at the time the controversy arose.

According to court documents, Busch describes herself as an Evangelical Christian and Wesley shares his mother's religious beliefs. Busch and Wesley routinely read the Bible together at breakfast and before going to bed, and Wesley often carries the Bible with him.

In October 2004, as a student in teacher Jaime Reilly's kindergarten class, Wesley participated in a curricular unit called "All About Me." The unit was part of the social studies curriculum and was designed to be a "socialization" program in which students would "identify individual interests and learn about others" and would "identify sources of conflict with others and ways that conflicts can be resolved," according to a transcript of the Scirica decision.

Each student in Reilly's class was featured during his or her own "All About Me" week, and during the designated week, the curriculum called for the student's participation in three ways. First, each student was given the opportunity to "share information about themselves "by bringing in "a poster with pictures, drawings or magazine cut outs of [his or her] family, hobbies or interests."

Second, the student was also permitted to bring a snack to share as well as a special toy or stuffed animal to introduce to the class. Third, Reilly invited parents to participate in the unit by visiting the school to "share a talent, short game, small craft, or story" with the class during their child's designated week, according to court documents.

As one aspect of Wesley's participation in his "All About Me" week, he made a poster with his mother that included photographs of himself with his hamster, his brothers, his parents, his best friend at the time, and a picture of a church cut out from construction paper.

Busch testified that she wrote what Wesley asked her to write under the picture of the church: "I love to go to the House of the Lord" or "I like to go to church" or "something like that." The poster was displayed in Wesley's classroom, and Wesley, like other students, had the opportunity to present his poster to the class and talk about the various items on it.

Since the school permitted the boy to discuss the poster that included references to his church as well as his family, pet and best friend, the poster was not at issue.

On October 15, 2004, Busch was scheduled to visit Wesley's class to participate in his "All About Me" week. She told Wesley that Reilly invited her to visit class and read his favorite book. When she asked him what he would like her to read, Wesley responded, "the Bible."

In a brief filed by the school district, however, attorneys for the district said the case was more about the mother's interests and motives than her son's. A family baby sitter described the boy's favorite book that year as the children's book "Brown Bear, Brown Bear," the district alleged.

"This case is not at all about Wesley -- it is all about Busch (and) Busch's (religious) mission," the brief said.

"This particular situation may not come up every day, but some version of it comes up often," said Emily J. Leader, the association's deputy chief counsel.

"It's probably not inherently harmful for children to hear a passage from the Bible, but it is going to be inherently harmful for kids to hear other things, something violent perhaps, that would be extremely disturbing to a 5-year-old," she concluded.

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