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- Max Appel, Fellowship of Christian Athletes
- Van Berry, Police Officer
- Rebecca T. Bingham, Library Director (retired)
- Jane J. Chiles, Executive Director
- Catholic Conference
- Kevin Cosby, Minister
- Martin Cothran, Sr. Associate, The Family Foundation
- Doug Flynn, Banker
- Virginia G. Fox, Executive Director & CEO, KET
- Frank L. Hamilton, School Superintendent (retired)
- Everett Hoffman, A.C.L.U. of Kentucky
- Brereton C. Jones, Former Governor,
Commonwealth of Kentucky
- David Keller, Executive Director,
Kentucky School Boards Association
- Nancy Jo Kemper, Minister
- Bill McDonald, Minister
- Dr. James Robert Miller, Professor and
Department Chair, ECU
- Dr. James Robert Ogletree, Professor Emeritus, UK
- Kent Ostrander, Executive Director,
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- Virginia Paul Patterson, Educator
- Joe Rooks Rapport, Rabbi
- Col. Ronald D. Ray, Counselor at Law
- Jack L. Richardson, IV, Attorney
- Robert L. Russell, Senior Minister
- Robert L. Russell, Jr., Associate Minister
- Phillip J. Shepherd, Attorney
- Dr. Qaisar Sultana, Professor, ECU
- Dr. Beau Weston, Associate Professor, Centre College

Website: www.p-e-r-k.org

Education
about the Role
of Religion in
America's History
and Culture

All Kentucky public
school students, parents,
teachers, administrators,
school boards, site-based
decision-making councils

April 1, 1999

To All Kentuckians:

It has been with a great deal of pleasure that we have worked closely with the members of the PERK (Public Education and Religion in Kentucky) committee. This is a wonderful group of people who represent a great cross section of Kentucky. Their ideology spans the spectrum from the far left to the far right with many stops in between. We thank each of them for their most sincere efforts in developing this important work product.

It is our strong belief that no one has the right to change the history of America. Our history should be factually taught, otherwise we are giving our students a false education.

For a person to be truly educated they must understand the vital role that religion has played in the history and culture of this great country. It is, therefore, proper to focus on many of the primary source documents that accurately reflect, through their own words, the attitude and philosophies of our founding fathers.

The accompanying information should be helpful to all those who are charged with the responsibility of educating our children.

Most sincerely,



Breerton C. Jones



Nancy Jo Kemper

Website: www.p-e-r-k.org

DEAR FRIENDS: Dear Friends:

We believe that an educated person should have knowledge of the ways in which religion has contributed to our common life and heritage.

There has been much misunderstanding and confusion among school administrators, teachers, students, parents, school councils, and school board members concerning the study of the role of religion in American history and culture. For some months, a broadly representative group of citizens has been meeting to address the ways in which we might overcome such misunderstandings, and to offer some suggested direction for the teaching about religion's important place in many events of the history of our Commonwealth and nation. This group has included ministers, rabbis, and active lay people from many different denominational and religious traditions including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam; educators; youth workers; attorneys; and citizen activists.

We believe that an educated person should have knowledge of the ways in which religion has contributed to our common life and heritage. Too often, matters that relate to religion, and the vital role that religion may have played in the course of events or in the life of an individual who has made historic contributions to our nation and state, may be neglected out of fear of violating the First Amendment or the sensitivities or values of students and their parents.

COMMUNICATION

Communication:

“ We want to communicate to every teacher, parent, student, school board, school based decision-making council and school administrator...”

We want to communicate to every teacher, parent, student, school board, school based decision-making council and school administrator that:

- A comprehensive and complete approach to many subjects requires considering the role of religion. Schools and teachers should provide instruction about the role of religion and its influence in certain subject areas such as history, literature, the social studies, natural and physical science, music, and art.
- While teaching about the role of religion is essential to the education of our children, we want to affirm that public schools should do so without promoting, denigrating, or imposing any particular religion or point of view about religion.
- According to Kentucky Revised Statutes (KRS) 158, an act relating to religious liberty for students in Kentucky public schools, states that “neutrality to religion does not require hostility to religion.” The establishment clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution allows appropriate teaching about religion. Further, young people are free to express their religious points of view to the same extent and under the same circumstances that a student is permitted to express viewpoints on non-religious topics or subjects in the school.
- Thus, KRS 158.195 also says: “Local boards may allow any teacher or administrator in a public school district of the Commonwealth to read or post in a public school building, classroom, or event any excerpts or portions of:

the national motto; the national anthem; the pledge of allegiance; the preamble to the Kentucky Constitution; the Declaration of Independence; the Mayflower Compact; the writings, speeches, documents and proclamations of the founding fathers and presidents of the United States; U.S. Supreme Court decisions; and acts of U.S. Congress including the published text of the Congressional Record. There shall be no content-based censorship of American history or heritage in the Commonwealth based on religious references in these writings, documents, and records.” (Enact. Acts 1992, ch. 170, 4, effective July 14, 1992) Such documents are appropriate if they have a valid educational purpose without promoting one religion over another.

VALID EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE: Valid Educational Purpose:

“ One of the most important means for public schools to teach our students about the role of religion in various events ... may be found in the use of primary source materials.”

One of the most important means for public schools to teach our students about the role of religion in various events in the history of our Commonwealth and nation, and in the lives of history-making individuals, may be found in the use of primary source materials. For example, among the important historical documents that should be shared with students in our public schools are:

- *The Mayflower Compact*
- *The Declaration of Independence*
- *The Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights*
- *A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in Virginia (1784)*
- *The Northwest Ordinance (1787)*
- *The Preamble to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Kentucky*
- *Constitutions of the Original 13 Colonies*

There are writings and speeches of presidents, founding forebears, and others, that reflect the continuing influence of religion on America's heritage, or, particularly address issues about the place of religion in American life, including:

“ We would encourage educators to review other resources for teachers and schools who are seeking to enrich their courses...”

- *George Washington's Inaugural & Farewell Addresses, and his Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1789*
- *George Washington's Letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, RI, 1790*
- *Patrick Henry's "Give Me Liberty" speech*
- *James Madison's Memorial & Remonstrance*
- *Benjamin Franklin's Speech, calling for prayer during the Constitutional Convention, 1787*
- *Thomas Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists, (1802)*
- *Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, 1863*
- *Noah Webster's First American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828 (preface and word definitions)*

Further, there are a number of court cases which also present primary source materials about the role of religion in American life, including:

- *Holy Trinity v. United States, US Supreme Court, 1892*
- *Minersville School District v. Gobbits, US Supreme Court, 1940*
- *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette, US Supreme Court, 1943*
- *Everson v. Board of Education, US Supreme Court, 1947*
- *Zorach v. Clauson, US Supreme Court, 1952*
- *Engle v. Vitale, US Supreme Court, 1962*
- *School District of Abingdon Township v. Schempp, US Supreme Court, 1963*
- *Lemon v. Kurtzman, US Supreme Court, 1971, 1973*
- *Stone v. Graham, US Supreme Court, 1980*

These documents are available at:
www.p-e-r-k.org

WE RECOMMEND: We Recommend:

In addition to the primary source documents listed above, we would encourage educators to review other resources for teachers and schools who are seeking to enrich their courses with appropriate consideration of the role religion has played in history and society.

We recommend that school districts and professional organizations provide workshops and in-service training opportunities for teachers and school administrators to enhance skills and knowledge for teaching about the role of religion in American history and culture. We also recommend that school boards and school-based decision making councils review such documents as KRS 158.

We encourage our public and private colleges and universities to add to their curriculum course offerings to provide educators with the knowledge they need to teach about the role of religion in American history and culture.

S U M M A R Y Summary:

“ Some people incorrectly equate neutrality toward religion with the absence of study about religion.”

To have a well-rounded education, children need to study the vital role that religion has played in American history. Some people incorrectly equate neutrality toward religion with the absence of study about religion. In fact, avoidance of religion and exclusion of religious perspectives are anything but neutral or accurate. Students need to learn that religious beliefs, standards, and practices are central to the lives of many people, and they need to know that religious traditions and ethical systems are not marginal, but central to American history and culture. It is of crucial importance that school boards and site-based decision-making councils examine their policies and work to insure the full education of all Kentucky's children.