



The Alliance Defense Fund has been involved in hundreds of cases in defense of religious freedom, the sanctity of human life, and traditional values. The stories below are just a small sampling of the ongoing battle to protect our religious liberty, reclaim what we have lost, and shape a future where religious freedom is affirmed.

## **THE CASE OF THE ELEPHANT DOLL**

In 1996, Christian parents whose children attended schools in the Bedford Central School District began to be alarmed. Their children were coming home with stories about bizarre occult, pagan, and New Age activities and teachings at school.

When the parents began checking into the facts, their alarm grew to outrage.

On Earth Day, a Bedford high school staged an elaborate Gaia (the goddess of the earth) worship ceremony. Students built an altar and then, to a chorus of drums, were urged to “do something that would make Mother Earth smile.”

But that was not the only occult activity going on in the school district. As part of a school “international” enrichment” theme week, a fourth-grade teacher read a story from India, “How Ganesha Got His Elephant Head.” “Lord Ganesha’ is a Hindu God.

After reading the story, the teacher had the students construct a paper image of Ganesha and announced that they would be making clay images as well. Children were also told to make “worry dolls” to put under their pillows at night that would “take all our worries away.” Christian parents objected to both their children creating false idols as well as engaging in New Age superstition.

The parents tried to settle their complaint against the school district out of court. But the school district refused. Finally, with ADF’s financial help, the parents filed suit in federal court to stop the promotion of anti-Christian religion. In fact, this same school district had forbidden all public expression of the Christian faith.

A federal judge agreed with the parents. While the court made it clear that the teacher did not violate the Constitution in reading religion-based stories, the teacher did cross the line when the students were asked to create images honoring a Hindu God. This is important, because it means that Bible stories can still be read in public schools as well.

## **THE CASE OF THE FAMILY LIFE CLASS**

The state of Connecticut has a statute that allows parents and students to “opt-out” of “family life education” which includes a section on human sexuality. When a father heard about what was to be taught, he decided to exercise his right under the statute and have his son opt-out of the class.

The school refused to recognize the father’s parental right (under the law) and refused to have the young boy excused from class. Rather than having his son attend a class that violated the family’s sincerely-held moral beliefs, they chose to have him not attend. The school flunked the boy, who was a straight “A” student.

ADF allied attorney Vincent McCarthy came to the aid of the family. He said: “Apparently, the education establishment here is looking for a showdown. Interestingly, we have received quite a bit of media support from the normally liberal sources, which demonstrates how far the schools have veered from the norm.”

Eventually, the school relented, and gave the young boy credit for the class and removed the failing grade from his record. They also agreed to honor the Connecticut statute in all further cases.

## **THE CASE OF THE PRAYING TEACHER**

Lance Sorenson had been teaching school in Washington State for twenty-eight years. As a Christian, he was concerned about the eternal destiny of his students and decided to start a private prayer group and Bible Study with other Christian teachers that met in a classroom before school hours (non-contract time). School administrators knew of the meeting and had no objection.

Then one day, just before they were to start, the teachers were told by a school official that they had to cease – the superintendent has decided that the Bible Study and prayer group is forbidden. The teachers moved to a local church.

Then Mr. Sorenson read a policy governing religious meetings on school property and realized that the guidelines applied to students, not employees. The district then came back and told the teachers that they could meet at the school, but would have to pay rent! The district said that the Bible Study and prayer meeting violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment – which was not true.

ADF funded a lawsuit on behalf of Mr. Sorenson and the teachers against the school district and the teachers secured their right to meet before school at school facilities at no charge!