



Iowa High School Music Association

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RELIGIOUS MUSIC IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Position Statement on Religious Music in Public Schools

It is the position of the Iowa High School Music Association that the study of religious music is a vital and appropriate part of the total music experience in both performing and listening. The omission of sacred music from the repertoire or study of music would present an incorrect and incomplete concept of the comprehensive nature of the art form.

Rationale

Any work of art studied or performed should be selected for its inherent beauty of structure and form. Its purpose in study should be learning for the sake of developing artistic understanding and responsiveness. Often artworks are related to a specific religious/cultural tradition. The study of such works of art can enhance one's understanding and appreciation of a cultural product which a particular tradition has fostered.

Constitutional Issues

The First Amendment does not forbid all mention of religion in the public schools; it prohibits the advancement or inhibition of religion by the state. A second clause in the First Amendment prohibits infringement of religious beliefs. The public schools are not required to delete from the curriculum all materials that may offend any religious sensitivity.

In order to ensure that any music class or program is conforming to the constitutional standards of religious neutrality in public schools, the following questions, as raised in 1971 by Chief Justice Warren E. Burger in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, are relevant to the constitutional standards of religious neutrality necessary in the public schools.

1. What is the purpose of the activity? Is the purpose secular in nature; for instance, studying music of a particular composer's style or historical period?
2. What is the primary effect of the activity? Is it the celebration of religion? Does the activity either enhance or inhibit religion? Does it invite confusion of thought or family objections?
3. Does the activity involve excessive *entanglement* with a religion or religious group, or between the school and religious organizations? Financial support can, in certain cases be considered an entanglement.

These are difficult questions with evolving interpretations. Schools should always consult their own legal counsel when trying to determine how each question applies to their own local circumstance and if the music educator's use of sacred music can stand the test of these questions.

Guidelines for Music Educators

Care should be taken in the observance of music associated with any religious/cultural tradition that it not be construed as a religious service or religious celebration. Whenever possible, a multiplicity of cultural traditions should be included in musical programming.

Typical educational standards should include a range and balanced offering of music from various religions/cultural traditions. Music from a sacred tradition shall be created, studied, and performed as an educational experience that relates to improve goals and objectives, and shall not be designed to foster a religious belief.

1. The schools approach to religion is *academic*, not *devotional*.
2. The school may strive for student *awareness* of religions, but should not press for student *acceptance* of any one religion.
3. The school may sponsor *study* about religion, but may not sponsor the *practice* of religion.
4. The school may *expose* students to a diversity of religious views, but may not *impose* any particular view.
5. The school may *educate* about all religions, but may not *promote* or *denigrate* any religion.
6. The school may *inform* the student about various beliefs, but should not seek to *conform* him or her to any particular belief.

Considerations

1. Select music and venue on the basis of its musical and educational value rather than its religious context.
2. Show sensitivity to the traditions of different people and their culture.
3. Avoid the excessive use of sacred music, religious symbols or scenery, and performance in devotional settings.
4. Neither promote nor inhibit religious views.
5. Observe all local and school policies regarding religious holidays.
6. Develop a community awareness of various religious beliefs.
7. Show a diversity of programming over a period of one year, if not longer.
8. Document all performances by printing and saving copies of concert programs.