

Regarding HB 1145

January 13th, 2025

I am an ordained Elder in The United Methodist Church and Senior Pastor serving a church in Jamestown, ND. I have been a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for over 30 years in the Dakotas Conference.

I write in opposition to HB 1145 posting the Ten Commandments in every public school classroom from Kindergarten to College.

HB 1145 might be well intentioned by its sponsors in an effort to somehow influence and improve the morals and behavior of students, but it is a misguided and counterproductive one. One cannot legislate morality nor faith.

Why do I take this position since I am serving Jesus Christ as a pastor in a local church?

Because I am also a citizen of the United States, and acknowledge that I live in a pluralistic society where the US Constitution forbids the establishment of a State sponsored religion.

When the State at any level puts a finger on the scales favoring one religious tradition over another, then it has stepped across the line drawn by the Constitution.

The values held in common by various religious communities such as protection of the weak from exploitation by the strong, to name one, can be promoted by the secular State as they are fundamental to the harmony and justice of all living under the Constitution.

But posting fundamental doctrines such as the Biblical Ten Commandments (in antiquated language dating to 1611 in England!) is the State of North Dakota putting its thumb on the scales in favor of one particular expression of the Christian faith, to offense of other Christians, not to mention Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists and other citizens living here.

“Do unto others as you would have done unto you,” Jesus is quoted in the gospels, but that approach to relationship between people is embraced by many faiths.

How would members of the judiciary committee feel if tenets of Buddhism or Islam were mandated to be posted in State controlled public spaces?

Does the State of North Dakota really want to spread division and ill will among its citizens by posting the Ten Commandments in every public school?

And for those who point to their faith in Jesus Christ, he doesn't quote any of the Ten Commandments as being supreme, but rather lifts up loving God wholehearted and loving one's neighbor as oneself.

If the Christians in North Dakota legislature take seriously their faith in Christ, then they should oppose this bill out of love for their neighbors – which the Gospel of Luke makes clear includes those who have differing beliefs from our own.

So I say “NO!” to the posting of the Ten Commandments in schools and State institutions of education. It might be well intentioned, but it is wrong headed.

Thank you for receiving this written testimony and honoring its words.

Rev. Martin Toepke-Floyd

Jamestown, North Dakota