

## IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

# God, save us from the bullies

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The controversy surrounding prayer at public high school graduations draws attention to the problem in general of Christian prayers being offered at government and other tax supported events. It has always been an issue with me - because I think the place for prayer is everywhere, in our hearts and minds, church and at home. If we want to stand on the street corner and praise God to the skies, we have every right, but inserting formal prayer into our government meeting agendas flies in the face of one of the very

reasons men and women came to these shores in the first place — to escape religious persecution perpetuated by the State.

In addition, offering Christian prayers at public school and government events shows a total lack of respect for people of other religions, who pay the same taxes as we to support the schools and our levels of government.

Frankly, if students at my high school in the 1950's had stood around the school yard, clinging to each other and praying, we

would have thought they were nuts. I wonder how many of these protesting students attend church or pray with their families at home? I suspect some of them see the television cameras and suddenly become devout.

We've asked the schools to feed our children, babysit, counsel them for their emotional problems, and basically take the place of parents and home so teachers hardly have time to teach. Now we think the schools should provide religious direction as well. I think it's awful. And I think it shows a lack of religious involvement and direction at home.

The almanacs I can find indicate that about a third of the world's population is Christian. Immigrants from Korea, India, the Philippines, China, Iraq, Pakistan, Taiwan, Viet Nam, where the majority of citizens are not Christian, are daily becoming Illinois residents and reflect their own cultures and religious backgrounds. We don't have to agree with their religious beliefs, but in this country we are responsible for preserving their freedom to worship as they please.

We have formally promoted discrimination on religious grounds in our public school and government venues long enough. Want prayer and religious instruction in school? That's what parochial schools are for. Yearning for a State religion? Better move to another country. Religious bullies can't have it both ways — preserving our Constitution while fighting one of its basic concepts — the separation of church and State.

*Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg, who can be reached at (309) 342-1337 or [cporter@galesburg.net](mailto:cporter@galesburg.net).*