

January 11,

2009

Dear Superintendent and School Board Members:

Recently, I was contact by your vocal director, one of our Iowa Choral Director Association, Inc. members. They communicated to me the matter regarding the usage of sacred music in their concerts and the family that is pushing the issue at your School.

I have attached two policies regard the use of scared music from the American Choral Directors Association and Waukee Community Schools. Through these policies, one can see the importance of the inclusion of 'all-music' in the public music education of our students. The origins of music come from a long-standing history of scared music, which is the basis for all music we use today. It is also the standard in which all music is held though the elements they contain. The use of sacred music is standard in all vocal music programs in the state of Iowa. We have felt protected by the US Supreme Court ruling by Chief Justice Warren Berger, (I will paraphrase) ... schools may perform all the sacred music they wish as long as it is done in a historical an educational context and not promote one belief system over another.

Ensuring that standard materials are in the hands of our students is essential. Leaving out such

literature would be a 'dumbing-down' of the curriculum. I would like to use the example of our public school history classes. We do not ask our history teachers to leave chapters out of their curriculum to avoid talking about actual history. They teach the facts and accounts of what happened at that point in history. A music teacher will also use the same historical framework to teach music. A comprehensive music education will encompass a wide variety of music genres throughout the year. Music teachers teach about the structure of the music from that era or genre of music. The intent is not to push the methodology on the students, but merely how, why, and when the sacred music was used. History teachers simply teach the how, why, and when's of their topic as well. They will enter into conversations about very tragic events and what methodologies that brought those events about. However, they are not teaching the methodology, merely the facts.

I have also attached the "Required Music List" from the Iowa High School Music Association. This is the list that all high school vocal music programs must abide by when participating in the spring Large Group Vocal Music Festival. Each school is required to perform one song of three from this list based on the school classification size. You will notice that nearly 90% of the music list has a sacred connotation.

Another attachment is the complete listing of the titles that the Iowa All-State Chorus has sung since its start in 1948. You will find that many of these titles are of a sacred nature as well. Thousands of students from around the state have participated in this festival of all nationalities and creeds. This shows that the elements of these songs are being taught as Standard Iowa Choral Music and not the methodology.

There is a direct correlation of music with a sacred text and "good" music. "Good" music is determined by the in-depth elements it possesses as well as how many 'teachable moments' within the body of music. As a school district, one would hope that all curricular areas have taken time to choose materials (text books, work books, software, music, etc) that would be considered "good" to provide a best public education possible. The standard level that each area has to provide for a quality education is very important. Music has a very in-depth set of National Standards as provided by the MENC organization. This is in place to guide all curriculums across the country in one common direction. To achieve these standards, one must use the best and essential literature out there. Quite often, the best materials to attain the standards are contained in sacred songs.

When planning the school year, teachers use a variety of music for concerts and festival presentations. Placing a certain ratio on a concert is impossible. There cannot be one standard published for this guideline as each area of Iowa, the local school districts, and local teacher must make that determination to best accommodate each situation. A "Pop's Concert" is going to contain a very high percentage of secular music where as the Christmas Concert and Spring Festival music will contain a high percentage of sacred music based on the type of concert and policies set by the Iowa High School Music Association. It is my belief that any ratio sent by the Department of Education needs to be substantiated in documentation form from The Code of Iowa from DE Legal Department and not hear-say from a phone call. Carol Greta of the DE would be the resource to contact. Carol.greta@iowa.gov

Please know how important the elements and structure of what we teach our Iowa children through music are and not the methodology. We use the best materials to achieve the best product.

Sincerely,

Matt E. Huth

President- Iowa Choral Directors Association, Inc