

**JOINT STATEMENT OF
NEBRASKA FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES,
MISSION NEBRASKA, AND THE TODD BECKER
FOUNDATION IN RESPONSE
TO ACLU NEBRASKA**

Recently, the Nebraska Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union issued an ultimatum to Nebraska's school superintendents. The letter contained misstatements and personally attacked Keith Becker of the Todd Becker Foundation, and Coach Ron Brown who works in conjunction with Mission Nebraska and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. The ACLU threatened the school districts with a lawsuit if they allowed individuals to mention a "religious message" when speaking with students about making good life choices.

The ACLU, a supposed guardian of civil liberties, has misstated the facts and the law. Rather than protect, the ACLU is seeking to suppress the civil liberties of students, teachers, and administrators, as well as improperly censor the message of assembly speakers.

FCA, Mission Nebraska, and the Todd Becker Foundation, remain committed to helping young people across Nebraska develop strong values that will help them stand up to the intense pressures of drugs, underage drinking, premarital sex, and similar risky behavior.

The ACLU implies that if an assembly speaker delivers a religious message or refers to the importance of faith in developing values, the First Amendment has been violated. That is simply not the case.

U.S. Department of Education guidelines on Religious Expression in Public Schools, adopted in 1995, make it clear that schools may teach values:

Though schools must be neutral with respect to religion, they may play an active role with respect to teaching civic values and virtue, and the moral code that holds us together as a community. The fact that some of these values are held also by religions does not make it unlawful to teach them in school.

(<http://www2.ed.gov/Speeches/08-1995/religion.html>).

The personal statements of an assembly speaker do not constitute the official position of the school, i.e., the state establishment of religion. Even if the speaker's motivation is faith-based, Nebraska schools are free to invite them to present their message. Just as a school district is not deemed by law to have "endorsed" every viewpoint presented in a school play or school newspaper, it is not deemed to have endorsed the religion or religious statements of a guest speaker if an objective observer would conclude that the statements are personal to the speaker and not the official position or policy of the school district.

Because of the ACLU's letter some schools are asking assembly speakers to sign a statement agreeing not to quote the Bible. This is a severe and unnecessary overreaction. The non-proselytizing use of a Bible passage by an assembly speaker is no more improper than if he or she were to quote another ancient text.

The Bible is not "off-limits" in the public school. To the contrary, in *Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 (1980), the Supreme Court stated that, "The Bible may constitutionally be used in an appropriate study of history, civilization, ethics, comparative religion, or the like." Schools must be neutral toward religion. To single out the Bible as some sort of improper source upon which to base values, demonstrates hostility, not neutrality, toward religion.

We refuse to stand idly by and let ACLU Nebraska intimidate school officials by misstating the law. Today we are sending to Nebraska's public school superintendents U.S. Department of Education guidelines on religious expression and prayer in the public schools. It is important that students, parents, teachers, school boards and administrators be fully informed as to the religious civil liberties that ACLU Nebraska seeks to repress.

FCA, Mission Nebraska, and The Todd Becker Foundation, working within the boundaries set forth by the United States Constitution, remain committed to helping Nebraska students develop the values they will need for a lifetime.