

Republican Perspective

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by John Littig

The Thought Police

Student suspended for silent prayer

San Francisco---A San Francisco high school student has been suspended from school for silently praying in class. Sara Devoto, 15, a sophomore at O'Hair High School, was discovered praying while taking a test in her algebra class.

Sara's teacher, Sofia Pagan, discovered the violation of school district policy regarding separation of church and state. Asked how she realized that Sara was praying, Pagan said "Her lips were moving. Plus this wasn't the first time, and she admitted it. I have never known Sara to lie."

When asked whether Sara's silent prayer caused a disturbance in the class, Pagan replied "No, but that's not the point. It's against school policy and against the U.S. Constitution. I have to report all such violations to the principal's office."

O'Hair principal Matthias Teufel said the school is diligently carrying out district policy and upholding the First Amendment's wall of separation between church and state. Teufel said his administration has made encouraging progress in suppressing unconstitutional prayer at O'Hair. "We've put a stop to pre-game prayer by the school's athletic teams and also that kneeling in the end zone thing---to 'thank God' after a touchdown. We've also stopped the informal student prayer groups which had been meeting before classes almost daily on school property."

Teufel said the school staff is on the lookout for students praying silently. “We look for signs such as their lips moving or their hands clasped. If we confront them, these Christian kids normally don’t lie to us, so we catch them pretty easily.”

Teufel admitted that silent prayer without any overt sign is the most difficult to stop. He said “Mental prayer without any outward sign is a tough thing to detect, but we’re working on that.”

When asked how this effort differs from an Orwellian ‘thought police,’ Teufel said “Well, the First Amendment guarantees freedom of speech, the press, and assembly---but it doesn’t say anything about freedom of thought. And it clearly establishes the wall between church and state. So I think we’re on firm ground, here.”

Sara’s parents, Joe and Maria Devoto, are trying to help Sara with her lessons while she serves her three-day suspension. But they may try to move her to a school where prayer is allowed. Joe said “Sara feels a connection with the Lord, and we don’t want to ask her to stop praying. We don’t want her to lose that connection.” And he added “Perhaps a parochial school would be better for Sara.”

The News will continue to follow this story and to report on O’Hair’s ongoing fight to eliminate all religious activity in school and to safeguard the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state.