

## DECLARATION OF ASHLEE SHIELDS

I, ASHLEE SHIELDS, state and declare as follows:

1. I am thirteen years old and a seventh grade student at Plainview School. I have one younger brother and one younger sister. Both of them are students at Plainview School too.

2. Plainview School is very small. There are four other students in the seventh grade besides me. They are all girls. One of these girls just joined our class a few weeks ago.

3. I do not belong to any church and I do not have any religious beliefs. I think that a person's beliefs about religion are personal and should be kept private. I am very uncomfortable whenever I am at an event where prayers or religious talks are given or religious songs are sung. I always feel left out or like I don't belong when this happens. I never know what to do. I don't want to stay and have to listen, but I get very embarrassed and self-conscious if I leave the room because then I call attention to myself and feel even more left out.

4. A lot of activities in our area are connected with the churches. My best friends all go to the same church and do most of their socializing at church groups or activities sponsored by their church. I'm not involved in any of these activities. Most of the time I don't go to community events either because I know there will always be prayers and religious music included.

5. I have been elected by the eighth grade to be an usher at this year's graduation and continuation ceremony for seniors and eighth graders. Only two seventh grade students are chosen each year to be ushers. I am proud and happy to be chosen as an usher. I have never been to a graduation and I think it would be exciting and interesting to go, especially because I know all of the seniors and eighth graders.

6. I am nervous about going to graduation because there has been a lot of discussion at school about whether there will be a prayer at the ceremony. If that happens, I will be uncomfortable and won't know what to do. I don't think I should have to just try to ignore the prayer and I don't want to have to leave the room because it makes me the center of attention and makes me feel left out.

7. Sometimes religion gets involved in other school activities too. All seventh and eighth grade students are required to take a choir class. Earlier this year, the seventh and eighth grade choir classes gave a concert. Our music teacher, Mrs. Fink, chose all of the songs we were going to sing. Two of them were religious and talked about being

saved or remembered by God. Mrs. Fink told me that I didn't need to practice or perform these songs. She said I could stand quietly or go out in the hall while the choir was practicing. I was embarrassed to have to leave the room during part of class.

8. When we performed the concert, I left the stage when each of these songs was being sung. I was very upset about having to do that, and I wondered what people thought of me for leaving, but I also didn't want to just stand on stage and listen to the songs.

9. I don't think I should have to choose between listening to prayers or not being able to participate in school activities.

The above declaration is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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Ashlee Shields

\_\_\_\_\_, 2002.  
Date