



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 12, 2012

School Drops Cross From Football Helmets After Parent Complains

It took the complaint of just one parent to induce the school district of Shorewood, a suburb of Milwaukee, to drop a new student-designed logo from the high school football team's helmets. The reason: The logo included a cross, along with a bishop's hat (similar to the design on the traditional chess piece). The district's superintendent, Martin Lexmond, no doubt feared that the religious symbols, particularly the cross, might raise the ire of the ACLU, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, or some other secular group which have used the First Amendment's supposed "separation of church and state" clause to intimidate schools and municipalities into removing all signs of religious faith from public facilities.



"It just didn't occur to anybody that there might be questions about it," Lexmond told [Fox News](#). "A parent last week raised the question, asking if this was a violation of separation of church and state." That, apparently, was enough to convince Lexmond and the school board to banish the logo. "It's clearly a Christian cross," echoed school board member Michael Mishlove to a [local Mequon newspaper](#). "I think it's inappropriate to have on a uniform or any sort of school-authorized clothing, as I think it could be viewed as an endorsement."

Because Shorewood high school is too small to field a football team on its own, it has partnered since 2000 with [Messmer Catholic High School](#) in Milwaukee. The new logo — which combined Shorewood's mascot, a greyhound, and Messmer's uniquely Christian symbols — was designed several months ago by a Shorewood student and added to the team's helmets in August, just in time for the fall high school football season.

Br. Bob Smith, president of Messmer Catholic School, expressed his frustration with the district's decision, which was apparently made without the counsel of Catholic school officials. "We're not happy about it," Smith told Milwaukee's [WTMJ](#) radio, adding that "it is hurtful for the kids. It's going to be hurtful for the kid who designed the logo.... It's going to be hurtful for the team."

Shorewood is a mostly upper-middle-class community, while Messmer high school's population includes many inner-city minority students. Smith said that the partnership has been inspirational to many people, gaining national media attention over the years. "You honestly don't see problems with racism, economic difference.... once those kids put a helmet on," he told WTMJ. "You don't know which kid goes to which school. You couldn't have scripted it better."

He added that the team has chosen to include student-led prayer as a tradition. "The kids themselves, over all these years ... have begun with a prayer, on their own, when they're in the locker room," he said. "Nobody has forced kids to do anything."

As for the logo on the helmets, Lexmond conceded that he really wasn't sure that the cross was a



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problem. “We don’t know the answer to the question of separation of church and state, but we are choosing to focus on the story of our young people — not on that question,” he told Fox News. But Tom Pope, a constitutional law professor at [Lee University](#) in Tennessee, said that the school district was well within its rights to include the cross on the football team’s logo. “It is hard to argue that the logo with a cross on it advances religion in any substantive way,” he said. While the board certainly had the authority to make the change they did, “they just don’t have to do so,” Pope told Fox. Paul Kengor of the [Center for Vision and Values](#) at Pennsylvania’s Grove City College said that the school board’s decision boiled down to “a case of classic liberal intolerance. This is the kind of nutty hysteria that has become all too common in this country, and it’s the direct result of a fundamental misunderstanding of separation of church and state.” He added that it makes sense “that this would happen here ... in a school. It’s precisely in schools that this misunderstanding is bred.” [Mequonnow.com](#), a news site for the Milwaukee area, noted that this is not the first time the Christian cross symbol has been an issue in southeastern Wisconsin. “The city of Wauwatosa [another Milwaukee suburb] was forced to remove a cross from its city seal in 1992 after being threatened with litigation by atheists,” the news site reported, “and the Elmbrook School District is currently dealing with a lawsuit for holding its high school graduations in Elmbrook Church where a large cross was visible during the ceremonies.”

Photos: Shorewood High School (left) and Messmer High School



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