

## ***STUDENT RELIGIOUS SPEECH AT GRADUATION CEREMONIES***

### **IF:**

- **Students are selected through religiously-neutral criteria**

Examples include valedictorian or salutatorian, if determined by grade point average; elected class officers; content-neutral student selection.

- **Control of the message is left to the student's discretion**

Content must not be controlled or predetermined by school administrators or policy.

### **THEN:**

- **Students can include religious content in their graduation speeches**

Students are free to talk about their faith, beliefs, or values—potentially including prayer.

- **Schools can make a disclaimer about the speech belonging to the student**

To avoid the perception that the speech belongs to the school, school officials may make neutral disclaimers.

### **BUT:**

- **Schools cannot completely censor religious viewpoints**

Schools cannot remove or restrict a student's religious speech or treat a student's religious speech differently than non-religious speech.

- **The law of religious speech at graduation ceremonies is still evolving**

Some courts view the law in a way that imposes strict requirements—including prohibition—on religious speech at graduation ceremonies.

## THINGS TO NOTE:

- **Schools often get this wrong**

Some schools still attempt to censor religious speech and simply need guidance on the proper First Amendment standards.

- **We see real-world examples**

Students have been told to remove faith-based content or avoid prayer entirely—those actions have been challenged and found unconstitutional. One example is our [Moriah Bridges case](#).

- **Every situation depends on the details**

Courts look closely at how speakers are selected and how much control schools have over the speech.

- **The law is evolving**

Legal standards around religious expression in schools continue to develop. First Liberty's [victory for Coach Kennedy](#) is a step in the right direction for religious expression in schools.

## NEED HELP?

If you have specific questions about your school's policy or believe your rights may have been violated, please contact First Liberty Institute at [FirstLiberty.org/Request-Legal-Help](https://www.firstliberty.org/Request-Legal-Help).



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