DIVISION OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION
BALDWIN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BAY MINETTE, ALABAMA

MEMORANDUM

TO: High School Principals
FROM: Mr. Terry G. Knight, Division Superintendent
DATE: May 4, 2001
RE: Prayer at Baccalaureate and High School Graduation

Several of you have called relative to prayer at baccalaureate service and graduation exercise. As you may be aware, school sponsored prayer is unconstitutional. Therefore, the school is prohibited from sponsoring religious activities during baccalaureate and graduation exercises. I will attempt to answer your specific questions in the following paragraphs.

May prayer be offered at a Baccalaureate Service? No, prayer may not be offered at a school sponsored service. But prayer may be offered at a voluntarily attended private baccalaureate service conducted off campus, perhaps at a church. However, school officials may not be involved in the planning or the conducting of this service.

May prayer be offered at a Graduation Exercise? No, the Supreme Court has made clear that prayer organized or sponsored by a public school violates the First Amendment. Their ruling includes prayer in the classroom, over the public-address system, or even at graduation exercises. Note that in the Jones vs. The Clear Creek Independent School District case, the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal of the lower courts; they ruled in favor of the school system because the prayer offered was student initiated and student led. However, school officials may not collaborate with students in regard to prayer being student initiated and led.

I hope that this information will assist you with your Baccalaureate Service and Graduation Ceremonies. Please call me if I may be of further assistance.

Pc: Dr. Thomas
Mr. Randy Davis