

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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January 27, 2011

SENT VIA MAIL AND FAX  
(313-961-9439)

Dr. Curtis Ivery  
Chancellor  
Wayne County Community College District  
801 W. Fort St.  
Detroit, MI 48226

Re: Wayne County Community College Ministerial Leadership Academy Studies  
Certificate

Dear Dr. Ivery:

A local citizen recently informed our organization, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), that Wayne County Community College District (WCCCD) is inappropriately offering a ministerial leadership certificate. FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization that works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between church and state. FFRF represents 16,000 members across the country including more than 450 members in Michigan.

It is our understanding that WCCCD offers a ministerial leadership academy studies certificate through its School of Continuing Education. According to information found on WCCCD's website, the certificate program includes "preparation for seminary [and] enhancement of existing ministerial work, among other topics." The document describing the program lists four classes that have a variety of inappropriate purposes for a publicly funded school. For instance, *Introduction to Christian Education* teaches students "to become a strong Christian witness," while *Personal Relationship and the Word* "helps students develop stronger Bible based relationships with God." The class descriptions also identify preaching as a "Gospel proclamation" and "a decree of the Holy Spirit." One class focuses on developing an effective church ministry by helping students "formulate and develop a clear concept of the biblical nature and purpose of the church in the world today and how they relate to the world mission of Christianity." Based on the information available, the purpose of the certificate program appears to be to indoctrinate Christianity and to teach others to indoctrinate Christianity. It is also our understanding that WCCCD is a public, two-year college that receives over 60% of its revenue from state appropriations and property taxes.

It is inappropriate for a public community college to offer a course that is religiously devotional in nature. While it may be acceptable for public colleges to teach about religion from a scholarly perspective, the Establishment Clause prohibits teaching students at a public community college “to develop stronger relationships with God” and how to become “a strong Christian.” See John J. McGonagle, *Teaching About Religion in the Public College and University: A Legal and Educational Analysis*, 20 *American Law Review* 74, 75-77 (1970). The inclusion of such a program in any public curriculum forces taxpayers to support a Christian ministry and gives the impression that the school endorses Christianity. Compounding the violation, these classes are taught at the Oak Grove A.M.E. Church, which further establishes the connection between these courses and Christianity. This entanglement between religion and public education is unseemly and inappropriate.

Government funded training of individuals for religious professions is a violation of the Establishment Clause. Supreme Court Justice Blackmun stated, “It is not enough that the government restrain from compelling religious practices, it must not engage in them either...” *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577, 604 (1992)(Blackmun, J., concurring). In *Locke v. Davy*, the Supreme Court said, “Training someone to lead a congregation is an essentially religious endeavor. Indeed, majoring in devotional theology is akin to a religious calling as well as an academic pursuit.” 540 U.S. 712, 721 (2004) (citing *Calvary Bible Presbyterian Church v. Board of Regents*, 72 Wash. 2d 912, 919, 436 P. 2d 189, 193 (1967) (en banc)). By offering courses that teach students how to prepare for a career in Christian ministry, the public community college engages in a religious activity.

Furthermore, the Establishment Clause requires that government employees refrain from endorsing religion or religious activity while acting within their government role. It is unconstitutional for faculty at WCCCD, who are public employees, to participate in teaching students how to worship or how to preach.

This behavior is government endorsement of religion. Endorsement occurs when religious activity is “expression [made] by the government itself or else government action alleged to discriminate in favor of private religious expression or activity.” *Capitol Square Advisory Board v. Pinette*, 515 U.S. 753, 764 (1995) (citing *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, ; *Board of Ed. of Kiryas Joel Village School Dist. v. Grumet*, 512 U. S. 687, 708-710 (1994)). When public community colleges offer courses that use the bible to prepare students for a career in the ministry, the government itself expresses an establishment of religion and shows favoritism for the Christian religion.

Finally, using taxpayer funds to indoctrinate Christianity raises grave concerns under the Michigan Constitution. The state constitution ensures that “[n]o person shall be compelled . . . to pay tithes, taxes or other rates for the support of any minister of the gospel or teacher of religion. No money shall be appropriated or drawn from the treasury for the benefit of any religious sect or society, theological or religious seminary; nor shall property belonging to the state be appropriated for any such purpose.” Art. I, Sec. 4.

We respectfully request that you remove the classes in the Ministerial Leadership Academy Studies Certificate program from your curriculum and remove any certificate programs that teach proselytizing from your certificate program offerings. Please notify us in writing about the steps you are taking to end this entanglement so that we may notify our complainant. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Patrick C. Elliott  
Staff Attorney