

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

July 5, 2016

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL

dltn_beatty@tccsa.net

Scott Beatty
Superintendent
Dalton Local Schools
177 North Mill Street
P.O. Box 514
Dalton, OH 44618

Re: Unconstitutional Religious Speech and Prayer at Graduation

Dear Mr. Beatty:

Our national organization, which works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, contacted you on June 16, 2015 to object to multiple unconstitutional prayers at the Dalton Local High School Graduation. Your response to our letter, dated July 6, 2015, indicated that you would not include an invocation or benediction at the 2016 graduation ceremony. Unfortunately, a concerned parent has informed us that more unconstitutional religious activity has occurred at the 2016 graduation ceremony.

It is our understanding that Mark Hirst, former member of the school board and local pastor, spoke at the graduation ceremony. As you may recall, last year he was scheduled to give the invocation for the graduation ceremony (and you gave the closing benediction). This year he was invited to give the ceremony's "message." His "message" included phrases such as, "Our soul calls us to this great truth, that we are an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe," and "I want you, Class of 2016, to be everything that God has created you to be . . ."

Our complainant also reports that several of the valedictory addresses contained religious messages. This complaint will not address the students' prayers, although we have concerns they were delivered only because of the District's history of including prayers in the graduation ceremony. It is certainly not surprising that the students chose to deliver prayers as part of their speeches, for they have been educated by a school system that has itself chosen to flout constitutional requirements. The school system's historical disregard for constitutional norms has predictably bred a culture of noncompliance by any speaker at graduation.

Enclosed are copies of the graduation program and a news article that discusses the ceremony's speeches.

As you were informed last year, the Supreme Court has continually struck down prayers at school-sponsored events, including public school graduations. *See Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992) (declaring unconstitutional clergy-delivered prayers at a public school graduation). School officials may not invite a student, teacher, faculty member, or clergy to give any type of prayer, invocation, or benediction at a public high school graduation. *See Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 (2000) (holding that a school's policy allowing student-delivered prayers at high school football games violates the Establishment Clause).

Given his history as the pastor who delivered the prayers at a previous graduation, the District should have realized that Mr. Hirst was apt to view the speaking engagement as an invitation to bring up religion and proselytize to a captive audience. By inviting Mr. Hirst to give a "message" to graduates and their families at a school-sponsored event, it certainly seems the opportunity was a way for the District to include religious proselytizing in the ceremony as it has traditionally.

The District has a duty to remain neutral towards religion, and to ensure that all school functions, especially one as important as graduation, are secular and honor the rights of conscience of all students. We request that Mark Hirst is not used as a speaker at Dalton Local High School graduations in the future. Please inform us in writing of the steps the District is taking to ensure that religious rituals are not part of graduation ceremonies or any other school-sponsored events. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Rebecca S. Markert
Staff Attorney

RSM:anz

Enclosure

The Daily Record ^(/)

[\(/search\)](#)

Wooster, OH

[Log Out \(/logout\)](#) [Settings \(/registration\)](#)

Dalton High School: Graduates turn tassels Valedictorian ends year with a 'selfie'

By LINDA HALL Staff Writer Published: May 29, 2016 4:00 AM

1 of 6 Photos | [Mike Schenk photo/www.buydrphotos.com](#) Dalton High School senior Austin Horst receives his diploma from board member Curt Denning on Saturday afternoon at the school.

DALTON -- Dalton High School graduate Lauren West, one of three valedictorians, left her classmates with a "selfie," taking a cell phone snapshot of herself from the podium with them behind her, and also said a prayer for their future.

Using the "selfie" illustration and noting how self-portraits change over time, West employed the acronym "SELF" to give the Class of 2016 some advice at Saturday afternoon's graduation ceremony about becoming "different versions of ourselves."

With the "s" and the "e," she urged self-encouragement to "tell yourself you can do it" in whatever endeavor is being attempted. "That positive energy will take you far," West said.

In loving yourself, she said, referring to the "I," reassurance in oneself grows, as does self-worth. Finally, moving to the "f," she said, family includes "the people you can trust for anything," those who help shape them into the people they will become.

"Making yourself better," she said, "is the key to success in life."

[See also - *Vital statistics, Holmes, Wayne counties* (</local%20news/2016/05/08/vital-statistics-holmes-wayne-counties/?recommended=1>)]

SPONSORED CONTENT

A Fly Hook Helped Her Reconnect With Her Dad

By YETI Coolers

"You can't base life on your accomplishments because they'll always let you down," guest speaker Mark Hirst cautioned. "At the end of the day, life is about what you're becoming.

"I want you to be everything that God created you to be" Hirst said. "The world needs you at your very best, becoming everything you were created to be," fully engaged in "heart, mind, strength and soul."

Like Hirst, valedictorian Zachary Fritts pointed out lessons beyond one's accomplishments, for example, "to be able to encourage others and leave them with a smile in their hearts. Let us strive to make the sun rise twice in one day."

"Let's live with a higher purpose," with each one discovering what that is, Fritts said. "I'm special because I'm created in the image of God. This is my foundation. May you find yours."

[See also - *Wayne County School Career Center inducts 24 into NHS* (</local%20news/2016/05/08/wayne-county-school-career-center-inducts-24-into-nhs/?recommended=1>)]

Not yet knowing "what you want to be when you grow up," valedictorian Madeline Zaleski said, it may be "overwhelming and frightening," but it is "OK."

[Article continues below]

Eventually, each will find his or her own path, Zaleski assured classmates, highlighting three of them who are setting out on a defined route.

Emily Joyce has chosen a career in chemical engineering, Zaleski said, while Justin McKenna is headed for the National Guard, the military police and studies in criminal justice. Raegan Doty has chosen to focus on missions.

"No matter which options we take, it will be okay," Zaleski said.

Principal Nathan Stutz highlighted the class's accomplishments in academics, sports and the arts.

[See also - *On campus:* (/local%20news/2016/04/22/on-campus/?recommended=1)]

"(Dalton High School) has become a part of who we are, and that's something I wouldn't want to change," said salutatorian Eric Alger.

Reporter Linda Hall can be reached at 330-264-1125, Ext. 2230, or lhall@the-daily-record.com. She is [@lindahallTDR](https://twitter.com/lindahallTDR) on Twitter.

Rate this article



bytaboola&taboola_utm_content=thumbnails-a:Below Article Thumbnails:)
ytaboola&taboola_utm_content=thumbnails-a:Below Article Thumbnails:)
ytaboola&taboola_utm_content=thumbnails-a:Below Article Thumbnails:)
You May Like

(http://www.comparecards.com/ads/pay-0-interest-until-2018?grp=pay-0-18&utm_source=taboola&utm_campaign=cnx_wmn_clths&utm_content=http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.taboolasyndication.com%2Flibtrc%2Fstatic%2Fthur

Pay 0% interest until 2018 with these Credit Cards
CompareCards.com

(http://www.comparecards.com/ads/pay-0-interest-until-2018?grp=pay-0-18&utm_source=taboola&utm_campaign=cnx_wmn_clths&utm_content=http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.taboolasyndication.com%2Flibtrc%2Fstatic%2Fthur)
(<https://www.lowermybills.com/lending/home-refinance/index.loan?sourceid=lmb-43255-77976&moid=65624&pkey1=thedailyrecord&pkey2=http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.taboolasyndication.com%2Flibtrc%2Fstatic%2Fthumbnails%2F3360893>
In-A-Lifetime+Mortgage+Relief+Program)

If You Owe Less Than \$300k, Use Obama's Once-In-A-Lifetime Mortgage Relief Program
LowerMyBills

(<https://www.lowermybills.com/lending/home-refinance/index.loan?sourceid=lmb-43255-77976&moid=65624&pkey1=thedailyrecord&pkey2=http%3A%2F%2Fcdn.taboolasyndication.com%2Flibtrc%2Fstatic%2Fthumbnails%2F3360893>
In-A-Lifetime+Mortgage+Relief+Program)

(http://beverlyhills-md.com/cmd.php?ad=759556&utm_source=taboola&utm_medium=referral)

How To: Fix Crepey Skin [Watch]
Crepe Correction Skincare

Administration and Faculty

Mr. James Saxer, Superintendent
Mr. Nathan Stutz, Principal

Mrs. Jodi Augspurger
Mrs. Heather Carr
Mr. Dean Clark
Mr. Michael Doty
Mrs. Robin Evans-DelCiappo
Mr. Luke Grau
Mrs. Amy Greer
Mr. John Gregory
Mr. Benjamin Holt
Mr. Scott Huth
Mr. Paul Jackson

Mr. Randall Kaserman
Miss Allison Kracker
Mr. Zachary McFarren
Mr. Jason Miller
Mr. Andy Ryder
Mrs. Lauren Shaffer
Mr. Marvin Shipley
Miss Stefanie Stovanus
Miss Tessa Thistlethwaite
Mr. Bradley Welch

Board of Education

Mr. Philip Schlabach, President
Mr. Curt Denning, Vice President
Ms. Sheryl Shaw Stewart, Treasurer

Mr. Jerry Amstutz
Mrs. Lisa Gwin
Mr. Bryan Hutson

Class Officers

Co-President: Caleb Manley
Co-President: Madeline Zaleski
Secretary: Meredith Beatty

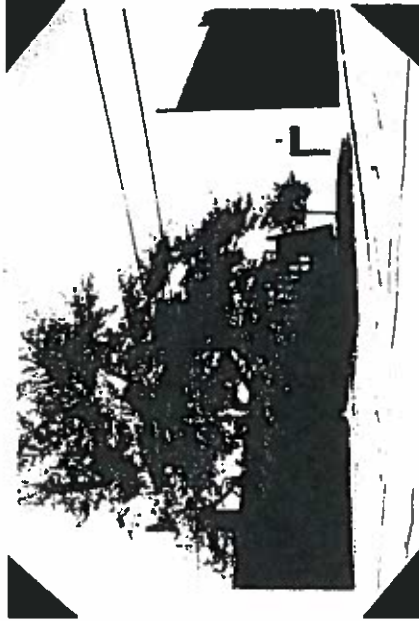
Class Advisor: Mr. Michael Doty

Escorts

Brooklyn August
Brooke Beun

Graduating Class of Two Thousand Sixteen

*One Hundred Twenty-Ninth
Commencement Exercise*



Dalton Local High School

Dalton, Ohio

*Saturday
May 28, 2016
Two-Thirty O'clock P.M.*

Program

Graduating Class of 2016

Selected Numbers..... **Concert Band**
Mr. Randall Kaserman, Director

Processional*..... **Concert Band

Welcome..... **Mr. Nathan Stutz**

Presentation of the Class of 1966 **Mr. Nathan Stutz**

Students' Speeches:

Salutatorian: "Reflection" **Eric Alger**

Valedictorian: "Humility, Love, and Purpose" **Zachary Fritts**

Valedictorian: "SEL Fie" **Lauren West**

Valedictorian: "It's Okay" **Maddeline Zaleski**

Choral Selection by Senior Choir Members

"Home" **Senior Choir Members**
Accompanied by Andrew Arner on guitar

Message "The World Needs You!" **Mr. Mark Hirst**

Recognition of the Class of 2016 **Mr. Nathan Stutz**

Presentation of the Class of 2016 **Mr. Luke Grau**

Awarding of WCSCC Portfolios **Mr. Jeffrey Schleich**

Awarding of Diplomas **Mr. Luke Grau**
and Board Members

Changing of the Tassels **Senior Class Officers**

Closing **Mr. Nathan Stutz**

Recessional* **Concert Band

Alma Mater* **Class of 2016

**Audience, please stand*

Recognition Guide to Following Page

- ▣ Recipients of Ohio Honors Diploma
- + Dalton Local High School National Honor Society Members
- ◊ Wayne County Schools Career National Honor Society
- ▲ Wayne County Schools Career Center Students
 - # Top 10 Scholars
 - ◻ International Baccalaureate Program
 - National Merit Scholar

Colored cords being worn by the students represent National Honor Society

- ▣# + Eric Nelson Alger
- Andrew Jay Arner
- ▲ Maizy Layne Barnett
- Meredith Leigh Beatty
- Sydney Ellen Berg
- ▣ Krista Ashley Burlington
- ▲ Kara Elizabeth Carter
- Nyree Lynn Chupp
- Raegan Elizabeth Doty
- + Molly Mingli Douglas
- Kathryn Irene Downs
- + Madison Leigh Englerth
- William Cole Fattiss
- ◊ ▲ Abram Harley Bosley Forrer
- ▣# + Bethany Nicole Fritts
- ▣# + Gregory Wade Fritts
- ▣# + Zachary Scott Fritts
- Kristen Elizabeth Geiser
- ▣# + Elizabeth Anne Gerber
- ▲ Jeffrey Harold Gerber
- ▣# + Emilee Denise Gregory
- Ehan James Helems
- Sydney Nicole Hershberger
- Hannah Rose Holden
- + Austin Jay Horst
- Nathan Andrew Horst
- Bryce Christian Husted
- + Kaitlyn Brooke Johnson
- ▣# + Emily Catherine Joyce
- Garett James Kanya
- Megan Elise King
- Jordyn Marie Lucas
- ▣# + Caleb Andrew Manley
- + Morgan Marie Manley
- ▣ Kaitlin Mae Martin
- ▣# + Justin Keith McKenna
- ▲ Jared Burnes Merriman
- Brady Matthew Miller
- ▲ Nehemiah Dale Miller
- ▣# + Leah Marie Mosgrove
- Jacoby Bransen Nussbaum
- ▣ Danle Christopher Peterman
- ▣# + Magdalene Ruth Ressler
- John Taylor Reynolds
- ▣# + Cheyenne Marie Rufenfer
- Brittany Noel Ryals
- Eric John Saurer
- ▣# + Jared Michael Schlabach
- Hannah Elizabeth Scott
- Hunter Mason Scruggs
- ▲ Hannah Marie Shilling
- Luke Austin Smith
- Cody Alexander Steiner
- ▲ Carly Jay Aladress Takak
- ▲ Samantha Joann Taylor
- ▣# + Gretchen Ann Wald
- Markus Allen Warren
- ▣# + Anthony Paul Weaver
- Hanna Jayne Weaver
- # + Marissa Cathryn Wernitz
- Jonathan Douglas Wertz
- ▣# + Lauren Lynn West
- ▲ Zachary Scott Westfall
- ▲ Daniel Robert Wheeler
- Michaela Ann White
- Sean Ray Widmer
- ▣ Allison Jade Yutzy
- ▣# + Madeline Jane Zaleski