On May 4 — by presidential proclamation the National Day of Prayer — American Atheists will begin **The Problem with Prayer Project.** To document the negative effects of school-sponsored religion, **The Problem with Prayer Project** will gather the personal, true narratives of Atheists and nonbelievers affected by school prayer. All testimonies should be received by June 17, the thirty-second anniversary of *Murray vs. Curlett,* the Supreme Court decision which removed Bible reading and prayer recitation from the public schools.

These first-person histories will be assembled into a unique and moving documentation of **The Problem with Prayer.** Presented with resulting compilation, Congress and state legislatures will be able to hear the individual voices of Atheists and nonbelievers on this important and divisive topic.

The Need for the Project

School prayer advocates have long portrayed objections to school prayer as coming from a disgruntled few — or even from only "the woman who took prayer out of school," Madalyn O'Hair, founder of American Atheists.

The Problem with Prayer Project means to prove them wrong by collecting and disseminating the actual statements of Atheist students, parents, teachers, and school administrators who object to prayers, moments of silence, religious exercises, and religious instruction in public schools. It is more than just a mere "disgruntled few." Citizens from all walks of life see the problem with prayer.

School prayer advocates claim that mandatory prayers and religious exercises cause no harm to students forced to mouth what they do not believe.

The Problem with Prayer Project will assemble the accounts of Atheists who had to suffer through government-sanctioned religion in schools. These testimonies will show the insulting and demeaning nature of forced religious observances.

The Results of the Project

The compiled essays and testimonies received by **The Problem with Prayer Project** will be printed in bound volumes. The actual manuscripts submitted will be reproduced in these volumes in order to preserve the unique tone of each.

The compilations will then be presented to members of the U.S. Congress after they return from their July 4 recess. Later in 1995, copies will be sent to members of state legislatures considering school prayer or moment of silence laws.

Submission Guidelines

Topics

Essays and testimonials on the following themes are eligible for submission:

- Your experiences as a student in a public school in which there were or are prayers, moments of silence, religious exercises or instruction, or other promotions of religion.
- Your experiences as an Atheist parent whose child is or was in a public school in which there is or was prayer or another First Amendment violation.
- Your experiences as an Atheist teacher, employee, or administrator in a public school in which there is or was prayer or another state/church separation violation.
- Your explanation of why school prayer or other religious ceremonies infringe on your civil rights as an Atheist.

Only nonfiction will be accepted. Your essay should accurately depict your experiences, reactions, and opinions.

Eligibility

All Atheists are invited to participate in **The Problem with Prayer Project.** You need not be a member of American Atheists for your submission to be considered. Submissions from minors will be accepted. To be included, you must be a U.S. citizen or resident.

Submissions from the following persons are particularly encouraged:

- Current public school students
- Former public school students
- Parents of children who attended or are attending public school
- Public school teachers, employees, or administrators

What Not to Submit

The following types of material will not be used in **The Problem with Prayer** project:

- Fiction and poetry
- Hearsay. Your account must be from your own experience, not from that of friends or relatives.
- Accounts of religion in private schools. **The Problem with Prayer Project** deals only with religious intrusions into the public school system.
- Accounts of religious activities in colleges, junior colleges, or universities. Material will be used which deals with religion only in grades K–12.

Form

Manuscripts should be typed or neatly printed in ink on white paper no larger than 8½ by 11 inches. **Maximum length is 750 words.** Manuscripts must be in English.

If selected for inclusion, your manuscript will be reproduced as is, so it is important that it be legible and neat.