



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 20, 2019

Wisconsin Pastor Under Fire for Sharing Faith During Graduation Speech

A pastor in Appleton, Wisconsin, is being attacked over references to his Christian faith during a speech he made at a high-school graduation. Pastor Alvin Dupree, who is also an Appleton school board member, was invited to address 2019 graduates of Appleton High School-North at their commencement ceremony June 13.



During his 10-minute speech, Dupree encouraged the graduates that “whatever your source of strength is, you lean on it. Never let anyone make you hide it.”

He then noted that his personal strength “is my faith and my relationship with Jesus Christ.” As some of the grads cheered, the pastor added that it sounded like “I’ve got some believers in this room. If you are here and you believe that, go ahead and clap your hands. Never succumb to the pressure of being politically correct. Be you, wherever you go. Be you.”

While Dupree’s comments were meant to encourage and inspire all present, a handful of the graduating students took offense and sent a letter to the school board, complaining that Dupree’s comments amounted to a violation of the First Amendment’s establishment clause supposedly prohibiting religious speech in the public square.

The students insisted that Dupree’s comments were offensive to those who did not share his faith, and even made some of them “uncomfortable.” They also charged that Dupree’s speech undermined the school district’s efforts to provide an atmosphere that is diverse and inclusive of other cultures and worldviews.

Predictably, the opportunistic Freedom From Religion Foundation insinuated itself into the conflict, claiming in a [letter to the school board](#) that it had received complaints about Dupree’s speech “from a whole host of people — students, parents and staff members. Everybody involved in this situation seems to be agreeing that this is inappropriate. We have scores, frankly, of people in Appleton who are upset about this.”

As reported by the Appleton *Post-Crescent* newspaper, in its letter the atheist-leaning group complained that it had contacted the school district in the past about Dupree’s record of “abusing his position as a board member to promote his personal religion.” The group charged the school board with “failure to take appropriate action” against Dupree, and threatened to take legal action if the board failed to meet its demands.

Among those demands were the group’s insistence that Dupree not be allowed to speak at future Appleton district functions, and that the school district approve all commencement speeches in advance and cut off any speaker who deviates from an approved speech.

Dupree, a Marine Corps veteran who was deployed to Afghanistan in 2010, said that his efforts to be



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true to his faith in God in the public square has been more difficult than the conflicts and dangers he faced in Afghanistan. “This is totally one of the most roughest wars that I have been in,” he told a local news source. “However, it is not about me. It’s about the kids, it’s about the community, it’s about the ability of our country to stand firm on the ability of all to be able to exercise their freedom of speech.”

In the interview Dupree said that he had never intended to push his own faith during his speech, but to encourage students to embrace their own faith, whatever that might be. “No matter what our faith is, there should be no trying to make us be silent about it,” he said. “Whether you’re Muslim, Jew, gentile or no faith at all, it’s very, very important for us to debate it, to be free.”

Dupree added that he is prepared to legally fight any attempts by the school board or anyone else to silence or censure him over his First Amendment free speech guarantees. “I am 100 percent firm that I will continue to speak about my faith as an individual without trying to impose it upon anyone, nor will I allow anyone to try to force me to be silent.”

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