



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on December 12, 2014

University Bans Christmas Decor, Then Reverses

The University of Maine is answering for a bizarre mandate that came down from a school administrator that stated that all “religious-themed” decorations could not be placed in common areas on campus, including candy canes. Students on campus created an uproar, forcing the school to retract its ban.



School officials stated that the e-mail was sent out by a school supervisor following a conversation with a student who voiced concern over Christmas decorations in a dining hall and that what transpired was a mere misunderstanding.

Daniel Stirrup, the school’s executive director of Auxiliary Services, sent out an e-mail on Monday after one student, on a campus of over 9,000 students, complained about Christmas decorations. In the e-mail, Stirrup virtually banned all “decoration[s] that could be perceived as religious.”

“This includes xmas trees, wreaths, xmas presents, candy canes, etc.,” he wrote, using an abbreviation for the holiday that some Christians find offensive. “What is allowed are winter themes, plain trees without presents underneath, decorative lights, but not on trees, snow flakes, etc. If you are unsure, best to not use or ask me for clarification.”

Reaction from students was swift, with 600 people starting a Facebook group entitled, “Bring Cheer Back to UMaine.”

On the Facebook page, students posted insightful questions regarding the school’s policy. One student asked, “How can we celebrate diversity if we can’t even see it?”

Another student launched a survey to involved students in campaigning for the right to promote holiday displays for a range of religions on campus. “I’m hoping to gather some people to pass out candy canes, and other small things that promote a diverse range of religions on campus. Perhaps, we could have some signs as well promoting the holiday cheer for ALL religions. Posted below is a survey to help that happen.”

According to Dean of Students Robert Dana, despite the e-mail, the school did not mean to issue an all-out ban on Christmas décor. “We are not the Grinches of Maine,” said Dana. “It was a big misunderstanding. The e-mail was in response to an issue a student had raised. His intent was to be inclusive.”

“We want to be absolutely clear that at the University of Maine, we welcome every faith tradition, and we welcome displays of those faith traditions,” said Dana. “The university is a place where, indeed, there is a great deal of diversity and that’s what we want and expect.”

Dana did defend Stirrup’s e-mail, asserting that its “very conservative stance” resulted from “an abundance of caution.” Dana made it clear that Stirrup would not be disciplined. Regarding Stirrup’s e-



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mail, however, Dana said, “It doesn’t feel good, it doesn’t look good, and it doesn’t reflect us. We welcome displays of religious symbols in public spaces and residence hall rooms. We don’t advocate one religion over another.”

The school addressed members of the media outside its Memorial Union on the controversy. The Union was carefully decorated with holiday wreaths. “I can confidently tell you that there are thousands of people at UMaine today saying ‘Merry Christmas’ to thousands of other people,” Dana said.



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