



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on July 20, 2011

“Unclean” Girls Segregated In Toronto School Prayer Service

A photograph in the *Toronto Star* shows a Muslim prayer service in a Canadian middle school, in which Sharia law is being imposed. Muslim girls who are “unclean” may not join the prayer service. “Clean girls” sit in rows behind the boys, who occupy the front rows. “Unclean” is the word Muslims use for girls who are menstruating. Sharia law states they must be separated from the “clean” students.



The story focused on whether such Friday prayer services, which run between November and March for 30 minutes during class time after lunch, are permissible under Canadian law.

Amazing Photograph

Two bloggers took note of the photograph’s message in its caption: “At Valley Park Middle School, Muslim students participate in the Friday prayer service. Menstruating girls, at the very back, do not take part.” Kathy Shaidle, who writes the [Five Feet of Fury](#) blog, [observed thusly](#):

Yep, that’s part of the caption of the *Toronto Star* photo.

Yes, the country is Canada and the year is 2011.

Meanwhile over 150 Canadian soldiers died in Afghanistan to (ostensibly) fight for the rights and dignity of young Muslim women like these.

Added columnist Mark Steyn, who [points to](#) Shaidle at his website: “Just so. Not some exotic photojournalism essay from an upcountry village in Krappistan. But a typical Friday at a middle school in the largest city in Canada.”

Prayers or Not?

The story in the *Toronto Star* [mainly discussed](#) whether Canadian law permits prayers in public school. Question is, may Muslims pray in schools? No one seem to know. Toronto’s school system administrators seem undecided which interest group to accommodate: atheists, who say the law must ignore religion, or Muslims, who say “diversity” demands that schools permit prayer. So Canada has a conundrum.

[According to](#) the *Star*, school officials and lawyers disagree:

“As a public school board, we have a responsibility and an obligation to accommodate faith needs,” education director Chris Spence said Friday.

But one prominent constitutional lawyer said Charter cases have found just the opposite — that religion has no place in public schools. ...



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“Charter cases have said ... you cannot accommodate the desire for prayers or religious instruction in a public school,” said constitutional lawyer Ed Morgan, of the University of Toronto.

Something after school, or on weekends, would be fine, he added.

But Muslims must pray at a certain time on Fridays so “we have the duty to accommodate,” said board superintendent Jim Spyropoulos.

[Ontario’s Education Act](#), [the paper notes](#), “states that ‘a board shall not permit any person to conduct religious exercises or to provide instruction that includes indoctrination in a particular religion or religious belief in a school.’ An exemption is allowed if conducted outside of school hours.”

As for whether schools must accommodate Christians, another trustee [readily answered](#) that Christians have enough: “We have people asking what accommodation we provide for Christian students, but the system is set up to accommodate Christian students,” trustee [Gerri Gershon](#) told the paper. “Christmas and Easter are already holidays. Whatever we can do to accommodate the needs of students of other religions, we should do.”

“Unclean” Girls

[The paper mentioned](#) “unclean” girls being segregated so as not to contaminate their classmates. It raised the question with a trustee of the Toronto School board. “The prayer services have also raised the issue of gender rights,” the *Star* reported.

One Toronto trustee is concerned about girls being forced to sit at the back of the room, adding the board’s gender equity policy “should be respected.”

Trustee [Michael Coteau](#) doesn’t oppose the services but believes the board needs a transparent, consistent policy about what’s allowed given the “mixed messages” of the Education Act, the Charter and human rights code.

A feminist at *The National Post* [is enraged](#) about the scene she says is from the “Middle Ages,” and emphasizes the importance of the photograph. [Writes Tasha Kheiriddin](#):

It is quite instructive, however, to be made aware of just how offensive some of those beliefs are. I therefore thank the *Toronto Star* for publishing the photograph of the prayer service at Valley Park Middle School. The picture tells more than a thousand words. It is a wake up call.



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