

This *Laptop* is coming out two days early because I'm going to visit my brother Dan in Raleigh and don't want to have to write it while away. There are just the two of us in my family, and I'm proud of my kid brother, who is much smarter than I. He's the Department Head of Electrical & Computer Engineering at NC State in Raleigh, and lives just a couple of miles from the farm where our Dad grew up, in Garner. You'll forgive, I hope, my shameless placing of Dan's web profile at the bottom of this page ☺.

Dan recently introduced me to something about which I'd never heard, and if you haven't heard about it, either, you're in for a treat. Dan put me on to something called a "TED Talk," and I've been thoroughly hooked.

TED Talks focus on "Ideas Worth Spreading," and they've been underway for nearly thirty years. "TED" is an acronym for "Technology, Entertainment, Design," and these 18-minute talks are given by some of the smartest and most creative people on the planet about some of the most interesting subjects imaginable. You can find them online for free at www.ted.com/talks. TED also has local expressions, known as TEDx, and there are a number of TEDx events coming up right here in the Baltimore area. Check it out and let me know what you think!



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Dr. Daniel Stancil | Department Head, Electrical and Computer Engineering

Biography

From 1981 to 1986 Dr. Stancil was Assistant Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at North Carolina State University. He joined the faculty at Carnegie Mellon University in 1986 as an Associate Professor, and served as Professor from 1990 to 2009. He joined the faculty at North Carolina State in 2009 as Head of the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department. His research interests are generally in the areas of applied electromagnetism, solid state physics, and communications. Specific interests include vehicle-to-vehicle communications, wireless signal distribution in buildings, novel radar systems, antenna design, cognitive radio, and optical nanostructures.

Dr. Stancil received a Sigma Xi Research Award from North Carolina State University in 1985, and was a leader in the development of the CMU ECE Department's Virtual Laboratory which was a finalist for a 1996 Smithsonian Computerworld Award. He was a co-recipient of the Science Award for Excellence in 1998 from the Pittsburgh Carnegie Science Center for the development and commercialization of electro-optics technology. Also in 1998, electro-optic scanning technology that he co-developed was recognized with an IR 100 Award and a Photonics Circle of Excellence Award. Dr. Stancil is a Fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, and a past-president of the IEEE Magnetics Society.



Well, okay, enough already. I also want to follow up on this morning's message, "Thinking Clearly about Government." Another publication to which I encourage you to subscribe is *Report from the Capital*, the newsletter from the **Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty**, just down the road in the District.



What follows is an article from the current issue, written by Brent Walker, the Baptist Joint Committee's Executive Director. It's entitled, "**Public Schools are not Religion-Free Zones**":

"For the past 50 years, much of our church-state jurisprudence has been informed by how we treat religion in the public schools. Simply put, our effort always has been to say 'yes' to voluntary expressions of religion by students; but, at the same time, say 'no' to official, school-sponsored religious exercises. Although we continue sometimes to struggle to find the appropriate balance, we have made dramatic improvements.

"The start of a new school year provides an opportunity to review the many ways religion can properly be exercised, studied and otherwise included on public school campuses in ways that naturally arise in our very religious — and religiously diverse — country, while keeping school officials out of the business of promoting a particular religion or even religion in general.

"Here are reminders of a few ways this can be done:

- "Students may pray — alone or in a group, silently or even out loud — as long as it is voluntary, non-disruptive and respectful of the rights of other students not to participate. This would include vocal 'See You at the Pole' prayer events before classes start and silent prayers after math tests begin.
- "Students may form and lead religious clubs in secondary schools if other non-curriculum related groups are allowed. Outside adults may not lead or regularly attend club meetings, and teachers may be present only to monitor the meetings.
- "Students may display and communicate religious messages — on their clothing and orally — in the same way other messages are allowed. Generally, they may wear religious garb, such as yarmulkes and head scarves, as well.
- "Students may distribute religious material and literature, under the same rules as other material may be distributed. This right is subject to reasonable time, place and manner restrictions, such as requiring material to be placed on a table rather than being handed out.
- "Students may speak to and even try to persuade other students on religious topics, including inviting them to participate in religious services and events. But, such speech and invitations cannot be allowed to turn into religious harassment. A 'no thanks' must end the conversation.
- "Students are allowed to include religious themes and ideas in their schoolwork and homework assignments, as long as those religious references are germane to the assignment.
- "Students may be taught about religion where the topic naturally arises in the curriculum. The teaching should be academic, not devotional, and have an expressed educational goal in mind. In other words, schools may expose students to religious views but may not impose any particular view.

- “A religious holiday may serve as an occasion to teach about that particular religion, but it is not to be celebrated as a religious event. Along the same lines, religious music may be played or sung and sacred artwork observed and appreciated as long as there is an educational goal in mind.
- “Students may (and sometimes must) be excused from lessons that are objectionable based on religious convictions if the school does not have a sufficiently compelling interest in requiring all students to attend and participate.
- “Teachers and other school personnel may meet with one another for Bible study, prayer and other religious discussions, as long as such gatherings are voluntary and outside the classroom (in the teachers’ lounge, for example) during lunch breaks or other free time.

“These are just a few of the many ways in which it is abundantly clear that God has **not** been kicked out of the public schools. But let’s not abuse our freedom. We always need to be mindful of the importance of modeling good behavior and responsible citizenship. This includes not insisting upon governmental help, like using a school-controlled microphone to pray or to proselytize. It also means allowing students to participate in school-sponsored activities without being subjected to other students’ religion, even when it is arguably personal student speech. As is the case in many other contexts, what we have the right to do is not always the right thing to do.”

You can visit the Baptist Joint Committee website at www.BJConline.org for more information on religion in the public schools. Click on “public schools” on the left side of the home page. You can also download the following resources (control + click on these links to download):

[Religious liberty in public schools handout](#)
[A parent’s guide to religion in the public schools](#)
[A teacher’s guide to religion in the public schools](#)
[Public schools and religious communities](#)

I’ll see you Wednesday evening when Ben Davis will lead us in “Letter to Columbia,” part one.

Dave