

February 7, 2025

Correspondence sent electronically to Shelby School Board and Superintendent

Cc: State Representative Marilyn John, State Senator Mark Romanchuk, State Board Member Kristie Reighard

## **Re: Clergy notification regarding school-sanctioned practice of Eastern Religion**

Dear Shelby City School Board,

Thank you for your dedicated service to the community. As stakeholders, we are thankful Shelby City Schools will be abiding by Ohio's new "Protect All Students Act" (S.B. 104) regarding biologically-based facilities involving restrooms, locker rooms, changing rooms, and shower rooms. This new law is not only in line with chromosomal reality and the will of the governed, this State Law also reflects Biblical Truth.

Recently it has come to our attention on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Shelby Pre-K thru 2nd grade elementary students participated in a 'Club Day.' Activities included: walking, gardening, cooking, painting, and... yoga. In a picture posted on ClassDojo by the school principal, the photo depicts the teacher and students in an elementary classroom viewing a video in class and participating with a facilitator. The video has a caption: "*And bringing our hands together at our hearts and saying our secret yoga code word which is 'Namaste.'*" Students' shoes are off and hands are displayed over their hearts; both acts associated with religious devotion. It is our understanding parents were not notified prior to the activity.

Based on Biblical teaching, Eastern Religion yoga is idolatry. After the discovery in 2020 of several public schools promoting and practicing Eastern Religion during school hours, leading clergymen from 105 area congregations joined forces and sent a correspondence to 39 local school districts calling for an end to yoga indoctrination. Several districts discontinued this practice.

**As fifteen (15) lead clergymen in the Shelby area, we are requesting a formal response in writing stating the practice of Eastern Religion/Yoga will be permanently discontinued inside the school district. This is in contrast to Superintendent Tim Tarvin, who never responded to the 2020 clergy correspondence nor subsequent requests to meet with him.**

Shelby has a lengthy history of promoting Eastern Religion on campus during school hours:

1. November 2016 Shelby Auburn Elementary held an assembly during school hours where a yoga instructor gave religious instruction to children.
2. November 2018 Shelby Auburn Elementary allowed middle school student under teacher supervision to give religious instruction to kindergarteners during class bowing to the sun god 'Surya' and using devotional praying hands poses.
3. November 2018 Shelby Dowds Elementary allowed religious instruction to be given to seventy-five third graders during gym class performing yoga poses. Monthly religious instruction ensues.

The so-called secret code word "Namaste" has a specific religious connotation used in Hinduism and means "I bow to the divine in you." This classroom activity is proselytizing and introducing young children to a form of spirituality. Because of its religious nature, some faith traditions around the world have banned the use of yoga in their nations

When top Hindu scholars say yoga is fundamentally a religious practice, someone from outside the Hindu faith cannot redefine yoga and say yoga is not a religious practice. Mentioned one hundred times in the Hindu scriptures, yoga is a means with connecting with the Hindu deity. Counting the rosary may help with learning to count, but the rosary is still a religious practice. In the same way, doing yoga stretches may help with muscle flexibility, but yoga, by definition, is still a religious practice.

Based on the U.S. Supreme Court's interpretation of the First Amendment, public schools cannot favor or discourage religious expression. Religious instruction must not occur in public school classrooms, must operate without taxpayer support, and students must have parental consent.

While Bible-based programs for released time religious instruction in Shelby are required to follow this law, on your watch, Eastern Religion has not been required to do so. Based on recent known episodes, Shelby City Schools is sanctioning Eastern Religion during school hours which is a flagrant violation of sacred public trust. What other activities are occurring in the classroom outside the public eye? Because of this pattern of injustice, we may have no other choice but to file a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights about religious discrimination inside the district.

Sincerely,

**Pastor Kevin Evans, New Liberty Lifesong Ministries**  
**Pastor Art Kennard, Shelby Maranatha Christian**  
**Bishop Anthony Cooper, Shelby Life Church**  
**Pastor Hank Webb, Belmont 96 Church**  
**Pastor Rick Lewis, Shelby Connect Church**  
**Pastor Brian Phillips, New Beginnings Free Will Baptist**  
**Pastor George Lewis, Shelby Temple of GOD**  
**Pastor James Marshall, Ganges Community Church**  
**Pastor Steve Baldrige, Rome Community Church**  
**Pastor John Campos, Bowman Street Church of GOD**  
**Pastor Matt Pond, Hillstone Free Will Baptist**  
**Pastor Bruce Philippi, Journey Life Center**  
**Pastor Joe Curry, Taylortown Community Church**  
**Pastor Paul Mathewson, Maranatha Bible Church**  
**Pastor Jonathan Stansell, Shelby Calvary Baptist**

References:

1 "Ohio author Chris Stanley came to read his books and do yoga with students," Shelby City Schools Twitter account, @shelbywhippets on November 4, 2016

2 "Yoga Studd Studio is at Auburn Elementary School," November 19, 2018, post at <https://www.facebook.com/yogastuddstudio/>

3 "Yoga Studd Studio is at Dowds Elementary School," November 26, 2018 post at <https://www.facebook.com/yogastuddstudio/>

The November 2024 classroom yoga picture and 2020 clergy correspondence/media coverage surrounding the letter have also been attached