Supreme Court decision
re: Classroom Prayer

July 10, 1962

Dear:

I appreciate your views on the Supreme Court decision in the New York school-prayer case. The first interpretations of this decision now appear to have been in error and a careful, calm examination places the decision in an entirely different light.

The Court did not "drive God out of the schools" as has been alleged, nor did it "outlaw prayer", as contended by others. In this case the Court merely held that because the prayer in question was an "official prayer .... composed by government officials as part of a government program to further religious beliefs" it was, therefore, a violation of the Constitution. It seems quite clear that school children can recite any prayer they desire but not one which was composed by state officials and made part of a government program.

It is rather regrettable that meanings have been read into the opinions which were not there and so brought about a great deal of confusion.

These views I write as a church member, a church goer and one who devoutly believes in prayer.

Sincerely,

Everett McKinley Dirksen