

Miracle on 34th Street? Macy's set to reintroduce 'Merry Christmas' to its stores.



Illustration courtesy of
Alliance Defense Fund



By Robert Knight

Macy's is likely to return to Santa's "nice" list this Christmas, but Sears may have taken its place in the "naughty" column.

After writing to Federated Department Stores (which owns Macy's, Bloomingdale's and others) in December 2003, the California-based Committee to Save Merry Christmas began a boycott in May 2004 over the company's policy of banning the phrase "Merry Christmas" in favor of the generic "happy holidays" in everything from advertising to store displays.

Fast forward to September 2005: Federated Stores spokesman Jim Sluzewski told Concerned Women for America that this Christmas, Macy's would include the word "Christmas" in the store's ad jingle, in print ads, on the front of greeting cards, on store decor, and will

chuck "happy holidays" for more specific greetings.

"We'll be encouraging our associates to say 'Merry Christmas,' 'Happy Hanukkah,' 'Happy Kwanzaa' or 'Feliz Navidad' where appropriate," Sluzewski said.

Manuel Zamorano, founder of the Committee to Save Merry Christmas, was delighted. "We're very pleased to know that they're willing to consider the importance of the holiday to millions of Americans and are willing to put 'Merry Christmas' back in their store, and we thank them," he told CWA. "Now we're turning our attention to Sears."

Zamorano wrote to Sears President & CEO Allen Lacy on July 19, 2005, and again on August 23, asking him to restore "Merry Christmas" in advertising and in-store signs and warned of a "national boycott against Sears for as many years as

necessary.”

As of September, the committee had not received an answer. CWA's phone calls to Sears headquarters near Chicago resulted in a pass-around to five different people, ending in being put on hold indefinitely.

“These guys [at Sears] don't take it seriously,” Zamorano said. “But this is an issue that hits home to a lot of people.”

Meanwhile, Christians are winning some legal battles against the ACLU, which continues to use legal threats to try to shut down school Christmas programs, dismantle nativity scenes and generally work to replace Christmas with a completely secular “holiday.”

In Benton, Louisiana, a judge dismissed most of a case in April, brought by the ACLU in 2004, that had charged an elementary school with having “religious” songs in its Christmas concert and allowing a Christian club to meet during recess. In the final settlement, the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), which represented the schools, made sure that the ACLU did not receive any legal fees from the school district.

“CWA is hopeful that Macy's will follow through and fill the Christmas stocking with good cheer, not the lump of 'holiday' coal that we had come to expect these past few years. If they do, other stores will see that there's no boogeyman hiding behind the phrase 'Merry Christmas', and they should then follow suit and begin using it again.”

**— Wendy Wright,
Executive Vice President**

“Ninety percent of Americans celebrate Christmas, but it's increasingly absent from the public square,” said Anita Silmsler, ADF spokeswoman, who notes that the ACLU tried to have even instrumental Christmas music banned at a school in Maplewood, New Jersey, because it might lead to “religious thoughts.”

ADF, which last year distributed pins that said “Merry Christmas: Believe It, Say It,” is distributing pins that say: “Merry Christmas: It's Okay to Say It.”

“If the ACLU and its allies have their way,” said ADF President Alan Sears, “future generations won't have warm memories of Christmas. Instead, their recollections will be of cold, impersonal, secular ‘winter breaks.’”

For now, Federated Stores has taken an important step in the right direction. It's almost the 2005 version of the Christmas movie classic *Miracle on 34th Street*. ■

Robert Knight is director of CWA's Culture & Family Institute and writes periodically on the campaign to bring Merry Christmas back into public use.