

Keeping God in Her Classroom

Gateways' *Fear to Freedom Teacher Scholarship* recipient tells her story



Melanie is a North Dakota public elementary school teacher.

Because of partners like you, who sponsor educators in Gateways' *Fear to Freedom Teacher Scholarship*, they are learning to stand strong. Here is one scholarship recipient's story.

Melanie teaches in an elementary school in North Dakota. Last school year, in preparation for a Thanksgiving school assembly, each classroom was given a large feather on which students were to write something for which they were thankful. This would be presented at the assembly.

Melanie's students voted overwhelmingly to write "God" on the feather. They were thankful for God.

When the school's principal heard about it, she told Melanie she couldn't display that at the assembly. "We cannot mix religion and school," the principal said.

Then, Melodie heard about the *Fear to Freedom Teacher Scholarship*. The scholarship allows eligible educators to receive online training explaining how to address the Bible and Christianity in their classrooms. It also provides them with printed materials they can use.

Empowering herself and her colleagues

"After I received the *Fear to Freedom Teacher Scholarship* and completed the program, I've gained confidence. I now have practical resources to clear up the confusion of my colleagues," said Melanie.

Last January, in conjunction with Religious Freedom Day, she distributed to the teaching staff Gateways' *Free to Speak* pamphlets explaining the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines on student religious liberties. She also gave Gateways' Holiday Cards to her colleagues so they, too, could freely teach about the religious aspects of the holidays.

"This year I confidently read from the Bible to teach my class the meaning of Christmas and Easter," Melanie explained. "Now, when other teachers come to me with their

questions regarding what is allowed in the classroom, I can answer them."

"For example, a colleague recently asked if a student could read a book about God to the class (to fulfill an assignment about her favorite book). Because of what I learned in Gateways' *Fear to Freedom Teacher Scholarship* program, I was able to assure her that her student could read the book to the class."

"Before going through the program," she said, "I thought I could only display a nativity in my room at Christmas but not comment on it. However, this past Christmas I used the nativity as a teaching aid and read the Christmas story from the Bible to explain the background of the holiday."

Besides learning how to teach about the Bible and Christianity, Melanie learned to make her classroom more faith-

friendly for students. "My newfound freedom created such a welcoming environment for religious expression," she remarked.

"One of my students even brought her Bible to class and memorized scripture during free time (which sparked conversation among her classmates). Her mom thanked me for creating a positive environment for her daughter to express her faith."

Changed the Principal's Thinking

Melanie distributed some of Gateways resources to parents, colleagues, and her boss. The response changed the principal's mind.

"Recently my principal came to me and said

'Now I know that your students should have been allowed to mention God in their schoolwork.'"

We want to reach more teachers like Melanie who can use what they learn this fall. "I've recommended the *Fear to Freedom Teacher Scholarship* program to several of my colleagues," said Melanie. "And I will continue to do so. Thank you for providing it to me!" ■

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Help a Teacher Move from Fear to Freedom



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