**WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT IS THE STORY BEHIND THE CASE?**

Under Pennsylvania law, public schools were required to read from the bible at the opening of each school day. The school district sought to enjoin enforcement of the statute. The district court ruled that the statute violated the First Amendment, even after the statute had been amended to permit a student to excuse himself.

The Court consolidated this case with one involving Maryland atheists who challenged a city rule that provided for opening exercises in the public schools that consisted primarily of reading a chapter from the bible and the Lord's Prayer. The state's highest court held the exercise did not violate the First Amendment. The religious character of the exercise was admitted by the state.

**NAME OF CASE**

School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp

**YEAR OF CASE**

**1963**

**INVOLVED (ex. people, states, amendments, laws)**

Edward Lewis Schempp, School District of Abington Township, First Amendment, Fourteenth Amendment, Establishment of Religion Clause

**HOW DID THE SUPREME COURT RULE IN THE CASE?**

Public schools cannot sponsor Bible readings and recitations of the Lord’s Prayer under the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause.

In an opinion authored by Justice Clark, the majority concluded that, in both cases, the laws required religious exercises and such exercises directly violated the First Amendment. The Court affirmed the Pennsylvania decision, and reversed and remanded the Maryland decision because the mandatory reading from the bible before school each day was found to be unconstitutional.

Justice Stewart dissented, expressing the view that on the records it could not be said that the Establishment Clause had necessarily been violated. He would remand both cases for further hearings

Bible readings and recitations of prayers violate the First Amendment

**WHAT IS THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE IN THIS CASE?**

Did the Pennsylvania law requiring public school students to participate in classroom religious exercises violate the religious freedom of students as protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments?