

Christian in a non-Christian World
Pastor John Hicks
First United Methodist Church

Last year, our church purchased gift cards for our graduating high school seniors, customized with a picture of our church on the card. They made nice connectional gifts to our graduates from their church family.

Imagine my surprise this year when I submitted a picture of our church sign for the cards and it was rejected as unsuitable because: “We can’t accept religious symbols.” Imagine further surprise when I discovered I could have a Star of David or a menorah put on my card. When I asked the representative about such things, she replied that those were not considered religious symbols. I wonder if our Jewish brothers and sisters know.

I must confess a myriad of emotions. I struggled with feelings of discrimination, feelings of anger and righteousness, and thoughts of vigilante justice and retaliation. What was I to do? I envisioned boycotts and card cutting. I fired off letters of concern and protest to company administrators.

Upon further reflection, I didn’t know whether I should have more concern over that fact that our card picture was turned down because our church sign was seen as a religious symbol or that the picture of our church wasn’t seen as a religious symbol when it was approved last year.

Because we are in the world, we have temptation to get caught up in being of the world and adopting worldly ways. There is an old saying that a ship in the sea is no problem, but when you get the sea into the ship you are in trouble. A Christian living in the world is one thing, but when the world gets into the Christian that is a different matter altogether.

God has not set us to live our lives in isolation or privacy. By divine appointment we are members of a home, of a community, and of a nation. To live as God intended us to live we must fulfill our obligations in each of these areas. As Christians, we always have to stay on top of this part of our walk with the Lord.

Some shut their doors to the darkness around them. Others do formal protest marches or boycotts. God has called me to stand as a Christian in a non-Christian world. I light the night for Christ on Halloween, proclaim the reason for the season at Christmas, and have resurrection parties at Easter.

With these cards, I was lead to creatively witness in the situation. I copied a picture drawn for my by a friend featuring “Godly” hands clasped in prayer around a baby. I included a reference to Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord. “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future.”

Following God’s direction, the final result was more spiritual and more meaningful than any picture of our church sign.