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**HEADLINE:** LUTHERAN LEADER GETS JOB BACK AFTER 18-MONTH SUSPENSION

**BYLINE:** Patricia Rice Post-Dispatch Religion Writer

**BODY:**

Now, many Lutheran ministers may feel more confident praying with non-Lutherans in civic events.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod's 2001 rules about clergy praying with nonmembers have been tested and studied since September 2001.

A Lutheran leader accused of breaking the rules by praying with "heathens" at Yankee Stadium 12 days after Sept. 11, 2001, got his bishop-level job back Tuesday after an 18-month suspension.

"We pray for other people, we pray among other people, and we do pray with other people," said the denomination's President Gerald B. Kieschnick of Kirkwood on Tuesday. "If someone is not Christian, we are not praying with them in the sense that their expression of faith, the deity which they understand as the true God, is ours. We Lutherans are praying to the triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

When people experience tragedy or trauma, from terrorism to tornadoes, there is a real need to pray and console them with prayer, he said.

"We are going to be with them in our church, on the battlefield or, even in a baseball stadium," he said.

Eighteen months ago, the Kirkwood-based denomination's second vice president Wallace Schulz suspended its New York leader, the Atlantic District President David Benke, after 18 of its 8,500 pastors and three of its 6,150 congregations charged Benke had broken church rules by praying with "heathens."

Before going to the stadium, Benke twice asked and twice received Kieschnick's approval to offer a Christian prayer at the event, which was organized by New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Benke appealed his suspension. A church review panel investigated. A month ago it concluded that Schulz's decision to suspend Benke was not substantiated. Schulz had 30 days to appeal.

**NOTES:**

Reporter Patricia Rice;; E-mail: [price@post-dispatch.com](mailto:price@post-dispatch.com); Phone: 314-340-8221

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