

CRECHE CONTROVERSIES CONTINUE

In many parts of the country, this past Christmas was marked by conflict over its public celebration. The Catholic League was engaged in battles over the public display of crèches, winning some and losing some.

In Lorain, Ohio, the ACLU threatened to sue city officials for erecting a crèche in Veterans Park; the ACLU director who led the charge is a pastor in a Lutheran church. The ACLU did more than threaten—its sued—officials in Florissant, Missouri for putting a crèche outside the Civic Center. The city of Syracuse, New York, was successful in securing a court order to display a crèche in Clinton Square, but in Jersey City, New Jersey, the city lost in its bid to place a crèche in front of City Hall. Glen Cove, Long Island erected, over much criticism, a crèche in the Village Square; the Catholic League and the Knights of Columbus were active in the cause.

In a memo to public school officials, New York City Schools Chancellor, Rudy Crew, stated that it was acceptable to display such secular symbols as “Christmas trees, Menorahs, and the Star and Crescent.” Upon learning of this development, league president William Donohue phoned the attorney who wrote the memo and asked her to cite the court ruling that determined the secular nature of a menorah. This led to confrontation.

To buttress her argument, the attorney cited the 1989 *County of Allegheny v. ACLU* decision. Donohue informed her that this ruling explicitly makes his case, namely that the court ruled in *Allegheny* that a menorah is a religious symbol. After quarreling, she pledged to research the case further. She later admitted that “there is much merit” to what Donohue said. He will be meeting with her early in the year to discuss a new policy for 1998.

On a positive note, the Catholic League erected a crèche in Central Park (this was the third year it did so) and displayed, for the first time, a crèche in Philadelphia. The crèche in Philadelphia was an especially gratifying experience as it was situated on federal property, across from the Liberty Bell. Cardinal Bevilacqua blessed it on December 18; unfortunately, as we went to press we learned that it was desecrated after the new year. The league asked that it be investigated as a possible bias crime. Plans are to erect another one next year.