

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL RESTORES NATIVITY SCENE

On December 18, the Catholic League issued a news release regarding the decision of Simmons Elementary School Principal Karen Davis to remove a nativity scene from the school. After threatening a lawsuit, the crèche was put back the same day. Here's what happened.

Parents had put the nativity scene in the suburban Philadelphia school, but Davis had it removed because she said it was promoting Christianity. However, she allowed a Jewish religious symbol to remain in the school, namely the menorah. This inspired Dr. William A. Donohue to contact Dr. William A. Lessa, Superintendent of Schools for the Hatboro-Horsham School District. Donohue said that unless Lessa reversed Davis' decision, there would be a lawsuit. The charge: religious discrimination.

After meeting with lawyers and outraged parents, Dr. Lessa ordered the nativity scene to be restored that evening. "To even begin to imply that the acknowledgment of a nativity is inappropriate doesn't sound right to me," he said. He said he would revisit the whole question of religious symbols in the school after the holidays.

Upon hearing the good news, the Catholic League issued the following statement to the media:

"Dr. Lessa did the right thing by putting back the nativity scene. He could have chosen to take out the menorah and thereby relieve the Catholic League's objection that Simmons Elementary was guilty of religious discrimination. But instead he chose to put a Christian religious symbol alongside a Jewish religious symbol. In short, he prefers, as do we, to practice government neutrality by being tolerant.

“What Dr. Lessa did is in sharp contrast to what left-wing religious bigots do: they prefer to show their neutrality by banning all religious symbols from the schools. And in doing so they do what comes natural to them—they practice intolerance.

“The Catholic League takes no great joy in threatening lawsuits at Christmastime. But what we like less is to tolerate cultural pogroms every December.”

We thought this matter was over until Donohue received a faxed letter from Lessa on December 23 that was dated December 19. In it, Lessa said Donohue had misrepresented what he said, adding that “your potential lawsuit had no bearing on the Hatboro-Horsham School District’s final decision.”

Donohue answered him immediately. He wanted to know how he misrepresented what the school official said. Then Donohue unloaded: “And if you think you can avoid a lawsuit next year by discriminating against Christians, just try it.” There has been no reply from Dr. Lessa.