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By AFA Journal  
November 17, 2005

(AgapePress) - West Virginia activist Bruce Barilla is an eager advocate for displaying Nativity scenes in the public square. He says the practice is protected by law when the display meets certain guidelines.

The Center for Law and Policy (CLP), the legal arm of the American Family Association, agrees with Barilla's view and has, in past Christmas seasons, helped local government officials comply with the law. (See related article)

A CLP memo in 2004 said, "In order to satisfy the courts, a publicly-sponsored display should include secular items in addition to religious scenes, and arrange the display such that the religious scene does not become the focal point. Additionally, the religious items and the secular items should both be visible at the same time."

However, a privately-sponsored display, even on public property, is much simpler. The private group may include any religious theme and need not add secular items. Such a privately-sponsored display would still have to comply with city regulations allowing use of public property for private display.

In a privately-sponsored exhibit, secular symbols are not necessary within the context of the Nativity display. A small, clearly visible sign with a disclaimer can also help ward off complaints or questions regarding the display. The sign should be worded along these lines: "This display is privately sponsored by . The City of neither endorses nor opposes the display."

Barilla's group (America's Christian Heritage Week) and the Center for Law & Policy both indicate they are willing to offer assistance regarding specific situations.

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