

Christians, Humanists Continue Showdowns Over Public Crosses in Calif. Town

A California resort town, already reeling from a legal fight over the placement of memorial crosses at a minor league baseball stadium, is now engaged in another round of bitter acrimony over the display of crosses on public land.

On Thursday, AnnMarie and Chad Devaney reluctantly removed a roadside memorial cross in Lake Elsinore, Calif., near the site where their 19-year-old son Anthony was struck and killed by a car in May 2012.

Not long after, another family appeared at the scene to erect six smaller wooden crosses at the same site. Each bore a handwritten message, including "What if this was your child?", "To each his own," and "Get a life."

"They said they have to take that one down," local resident Doug Johnson told the *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, after coordinating the display with his wife, Emily. "But they didn't say anything about putting another one up."

The original five-foot cross had been there for more than a year when a local resident contacted the American Humanist Association, a national organization that advocates for the rights of nonbelievers, to complain. The AHA asked city officials to remove the cross because its location on public land violated the separation of church and state.

"Unquestionably, the city's selective enforcement of its signage ordinance and its displays of the Christian cross on government property violates the state and federal Constitutions and must therefore be removed immediately," the letter stated.

The city removed the cross in early December, but replaced it after the Devaneys complained, the letter states. The cross was allowed to stay through the Christmas holidays but the family was told to remove it by Jan. 6. Two months later, the family complied.

This is the second kerfuffle in as many months over religious imagery on public land in Lake Elsinore, a city of about 53,000 people southeast of Los Angeles. Last month, a federal judge ruled the city could not place a proposed veterans memorial bearing crosses and Stars of David on the grounds of its minor league baseball stadium.

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