

Despite Legal Threat, Nativity Scene Stays in Arkansas Park, For Now

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A nativity scene that has been part of a decades-old tradition in a local Eureka Springs, Arkansas park will remain on display during this Christmas season. But whether or not it will be allowed to continue in the future remains to be seen.

The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reports the nativity scene was sponsored every year in Basin Park by the Eureka Springs Chapter of the Beta Sigma Phi sorority since 1950.

The display was put up in the park every year until 2019. The sorority donated the nativity scene to the Great Passion Play in 2021 and asked if the display could return to the park this year, according to the outlet.

"We said, sure, whatever you guys want," Randal Christy, the play's executive director, said. "We're just trying to help them."

But then Christy told KDNA-TV he got a call from Mayor Robert "Butch" Berry asking him to remove the display.

"We decided we're not taking it down. We refused to take it down," Christy said.

In a Facebook post, Christy explained why he refused to remove the nativity scene from the park.

"Eureka Springs Mayor and City Attorney are demanding that we (The Great Passion Play) REMOVE the Nativity Scene from the city's Basin Park. We are refusing to do so. We ask for your prayers as we take a stand," Christy wrote. "Christmas is the

National Holiday in recognition of the birth of Jesus Christ! The Nativity Scene has been erected since 1950—72 years—at Christmas time. The Passion Play puts it up for Beta Sigma Phi as a public service to the community... as a regular part of our Christmas decorations. As Executive Director of The Great Passion Play, America's #1 attended outdoor drama... I REFUSE TO TAKE THIS DOWN!!”

Mayor Berry told The Gazette he didn't demand the organization take down the display. He just requested that they remove it. A city resident had threatened to file a lawsuit saying the nativity scene violated his constitutional right to freedom of religion.

“That's all you've got to do nowadays to get city governments to cave in,” Christy told the outlet. “You just have to threaten a lawsuit. They're going to scramble and avoid their court costs even though they've got an attorney on file. If it's all about Jesus, it's not even worth a few hundred dollars of court costs. That's how I feel.”

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