

Historic Nativity Scene to Open in Florida Capitol Building

Florida's Capitol building in Tallahassee will become home to a Christmas Nativity scene beginning on Tuesday. The privately funded display of religion in Florida's public square has been hosted by the Florida Nativity Scene Committee and facilitated by the Thomas More Society, a Chicago-based nonprofit public interest law firm.

"This is historic," says Pam Olsen, Florida Nativity Scene Committee chairperson. "It is the first time to have the Nativity scene at the heart of our state government."

The Christmas creche display will stand in the center of the Capitol rotunda and will depict the newborn Christ child lying in a manger. The official unveiling of the Nativity tableau will feature a celebration marking Christmas.

The opening celebration will be held from noon to 1 p.m. EST, with Christmas carols, the sharing of the Christmas story from Luke 2, and prayer for our troops and "for this generation and the following generations to have religious freedom in this nation," Olsen explains.

The Nativity exhibit will remain throughout the Christmas season, ending on Dec. 27. Then the holy family figures of Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus will be joined by figures representing the biblical Wise Men on the rotunda's opposite side.

The secondary display—sponsored by Reclaim Christmas for Christ, founded by Sandra Lee Snowden—will remain at the Capitol, along with the original nativity, through Jan. 6. The dual exhibits will conclude with a public Jan. 6 commemoration

of the Epiphany at noon.

The Epiphany, widely practiced in Hispanic and Latino cultures as Three Kings Day, marks the visit by the “wise men from the East” to bring the Christ child gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The goals of the Florida Nativity Scene Committee and Reclaim Christmas for Christ are to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to proclaim and demonstrate to the public and the media that such private expressions of religious belief in the public squares of the nation are not merely tolerated but fully deserving of robust legal protection.

The Tallahassee Nativity initiative was inspired by last year’s dispute over a Christian holiday display in the Chicago suburb of Arlington Heights. Eventually resolved with intervention by the Thomas More Society, the conflict has prompted America Nativity Scene, founded by Jim Finnegan, to help place privately funded manger scenes in public squares nationwide.