

1981 CLERGY STATEMENT ON GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED CRECHE DISPLAYS

We, clergy of several religious traditions, wish to express a pastoral concern growing out of the controversy surrounding the government display of nativity scenes in R.I. communities. Our concerns are several, noted below.

While festivities, lights and generations of good will in this season have roots in both religion and secular tradition, the creche is a specifically religious symbol. Our country, while deeply influenced by a Judeo-Christian heritage, is not itself Judeo-Christian but is pluralistic, consisting of many rich religious traditions and recognizing the value of all. Government in our country, wisely recognizing the diversity of these traditions, was set up to steer clear of embracing any while protecting the religious freedom of all.

We as pastors have a responsibility to educate our people in the history of religious strife and the futility of imposing religious beliefs on the human conscience. The specifically religious observance of this holiday belongs in our homes, and in our churches and synagogues. Although there are public recognitions of this glad season, they should be confined to those symbols and traditions which are not identified with any one group.

We call upon our public officials not to exploit the strong sentiments associated with religious festivals and divide majority from minority. Rather, we hope they will rise to a statespersonlike position and avoid the insensitivity of foisting upon others any specific religious traditions. In this way, the true joy of this season can be appreciated by, and made meaningful to, the widest diversity of people.

Signed,

Rev. Bruce Kennedy	Rev. Charles A. Baldwin
Rev. William C. Trench	Rev. David Ames
Rev. Richard D. Bausman	Rev. Charles Coverdale
Rev. Thomas Ramsbey	Rev. Kent Moorehead
Rev. Thomas Ahlburn	Rev. Joseph Dickson
Rev. H. August Kuehl	Rev. Donald Rasmussen
Rt. Rev. George Hunt III	Rev. Robert Goodwin
Rev. Janet Aquaveilla	Rev. Raymond H. Bradley, Jr.
Rev. Richard A. Bowser	Rev. Wesley Stinson
Rev. Gordon Ellis	Rev. Dr. David Kilpatrick
Rev. C. Harry Atkinson	Rev. Alan C. Newton
Rev. David F. Shire	Rev. Andrew A. Barasda, Jr.
Rev. Byron O. Waterman	Rev. James Guinan
Rev. Cornelis Bakker	Rev. Helen Louise Bowser
Rev. Beverly Edwards	Rev. Henry Randall
Rev. Paul Aquaveilla	