

THE CHRISTMAS CROSS

By Dr. E. Nelson James

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THE STORY

The town of St. Joe is up in arms because a federal court has ordered that their 35-foot Christmas cross on the radio tower of the fire station not be lighted this year. Until now the cross has been lighted every year for 15 years.

Mayor Frieda Morris has called a town meeting in the council chambers to discuss the case. She has asked the city attorney, Ann Lund, and the ACLU lawyer, Mae Weichert, to share the platform with her to explain the rulings of the court.

In the audience are Joy Weyant, who has 3,500 signatures on a petition in favor of lighting the cross; Bernadine Boss, a businesswoman; Esther Olivet, a born-again Christian; and Roseanne Marley, a freethinker who brought suit against the city for displaying the cross.

Amid name calling and jeers for the ACLU lawyer and Roseanne Marley the law is explained.

Realizing they can do nothing legally this year, Bernadine Boss, Joy Weyant, and Esther Olivet decide to get around the law by making the cross a star and displaying crosses on Boss's building across from fire station and crosses in private homes all over town.

Into the meeting comes Ampara Morales, an illegal refugee from Guatemala. The women, who were so intent on circumventing the law in the case of the cross, are not willing to help this poor refugee woman because of legalities. Ironically it is Mae Weichert and Roseanne Marley, upholders of the law in the case of the Christmas cross, who defy the law and help Ampara to find sanctuary.

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CAST

(Any of the parts with the exception of Ampara may be played by men if desired.)

FRIEDA MORRIS: Mayor caught in the middle of the controversy. Intelligent middle-aged woman, a leader, but has problems coping with this situation.

ANN LUND: City attorney for St. Joe, has lost the case for the lighting of the Christmas cross in federal court. Must now try to appease the angry citizenry. Conservative in politics, in religion and all aspects of life.

MAE WEICHERT: Attorney for the ACLU; has successfully fought against the lighting of the cross and is therefore hated by many of the townspeople. Used to being reviled for championing unpopular causes. Cool and polite in her remarks; a liberal in her views of the law and life.

JOE WEYANT: Leader of the concerned citizens, has collected signatures protesting the federal court order against lighting the Christmas cross. Her objections are based on tradition. Was instrumental in getting Mayor Morris to call the meeting.

BERNADINE BOSS: Owner of the largest business in town. Does not like the dark cross because it ruins the Christmas decoration scheme for the town. Is clever in suggesting ways to get around the federal court order.

ESTHER OLIVET: A born-again Christian, enraged over the court order. Thinks with her feelings, which often run away with her. Believes that all good Americans are Christians.

ROSEANNE MARLEY: An atheist. Objected to the Christmas cross being lighted and got the ACLU to take the case. Hard shelled and able to withstand the name calling and the death threats that have come to her as a result of her unpopular stand.

AMPARA MORALES: A young refugee from Guatemala, she comes to St. Joe to seek sanctuary. She is obviously pregnant.

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TIME: December 5, 1985.

SETTING: The City Council chambers of St. Joe. The stage represents the dais with a lectern, a microphone, and three chairs. The house, set up theatre style, represents the area for spectators

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(AT RISE: The three chairs are unoccupied on the dais. "Silent Night" blares over the Muzak system. The spectators gather, including JOY WEYANT, BERNADINE BOSS, ESTHER OLIVET, and ROSEANNE MARLEY. As the Muzak blares on, MAYOR FREIDA MORRIS, ANN LUND, and MAE WEICHERT enter from SR. Mayor Morris goes to the lectern and tries to talk above the MUZAK and finds it impossible. Ann Lund and Mae Weichert sit on chairs to the right and left of the middle chair, the Mayor's chair.)

MAYOR: *(Pounding on the lectern with HER gavel.)* This meeting will please come to order. *(The Muzak drowns HER out. Shouting into the microphone.)* Ann, Ann. Please see if you can get the blame thing turned off.

(While ANN LUND goes off into the wings at SR, JOY WEYANT stands up in her place in the front row of the auditorium and turns and faces the audience.)

JOY: How appropriate! The Federal Court takes our Christmas cross and now Mayor Morris is taking away "Silent Night." What a Christmas!

(The Muzak cuts off.)

MAYOR: *(Laughing.)* Touche, Joy. I don't know what we can do about the court order about not lighting our Christmas cross. But one thing I promise you. We'll turn "Silent Night" back on as soon as our discussion is over.

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JOY: All right, Mayor. Let's get started. What we need is fewer words and more action. Time is running out. It's December 5th. Christmas will be here and gone and our cross will be unlighted.

BERNADINE: Right on. Let's get on with it.

ESTHER: Yes! Yes!

MAYOR: (*Pounding HER gavel.*) All right. All right. I call this meeting to order. This meeting is called at the request of Mrs. Weyant, who has collected 3,500 signatures in the town protesting the recent federal court order that our cross on the fire station cannot be lighted this year.

JOY: How could that judge do it? We've had that big cross lighted on our fire station for 15 years, and nobody seemed to care. Now just because of some atheist - (*Glaring at ROSEANNE.*)

ROSEANNE: Mayor Morris, I object. I am not an atheist. I have my own private religion. I follow the dictates of my conscience.

JOY: (*Almost ignoring HER.*) Anyway this Ms. Marley calls in the ACLU from the city, (*Glaring at MAE.*) the judge orders us to turn off the cross. It makes no sense. I can't understand it. All I can say is that this whatchamacallit and her commie lawyer better get out of town or else.

(*Murmurs from the crowd.*)

ESTHER: Yes, they ought to go. They're killing my Jesus all over again.

MAE: Mayor Morris, I object. I am not a communist, and the American Civil Liberties Union is not a communist organization. We protect anyone whose civil liberties are being denied, whether that person is from the extreme right or extreme left or in between.

MAYOR: (*Pounding HER gavel.*) Ladies, ladies, let's quiet down. We'll never get anywhere this way. Mrs. Weyant, I must caution you. No more name calling. Now, let's proceed in a more orderly manner.

End of Freeview

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