

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

July 5, 2017

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL

Angela Davis
County Attorney
Cherokee County
1130 Bluffs Parkway
Canton, GA 30114

Re: Unconstitutionality of County-Sponsored trip to “Ark Park”

Dear Ms. Davis:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation regarding a constitutional violation by the Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 29,000 members across the country, including more than 450 members in Georgia. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

A concerned county citizen informed us that the agency is organizing a trip to the Ark Encounter and Creation Museum for senior community members from October 2-5, 2017. The trip is advertised in the county’s CRPA magazine. An image is enclosed.

The Ark Encounter is a Christian ministry run by the creationist Ken Ham, who also built the notorious Creation Museum. Ham has been clear about the proselytizing nature of this park from the beginning. In his June 27, 2016 letter entitled, “Our Real Motive for Building Ark Encounter,”¹ he lays out a clear, evangelistic goal:

We are eagerly approaching what I believe will be a historic moment in Christendom. It’s the opening of one of the greatest Christian outreaches of our era: the life-size Noah’s Ark in Northern Kentucky. . . . The [creation] museum and Ark direct people to the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ham quotes bible verses to further illuminate his motive before finally stating it plainly: “our motive is to do the King’s business until He comes. And that means preaching the gospel and defending the faith, so that we can reach as many souls as we can . . . millions of souls will hear the most important message of all . . . a message of hope from the holy, righteous Judge who, despite our sin, wants us to spend eternity with Him!”

While organizing and encouraging senior citizen recreation is a laudable goal, advertising and organizing a trip to a Christian ministry constitutes government endorsement of religion and

¹ <http://bit.ly/298EDJO>

alienates those Cherokee County residents who are not Christian and who are non-religious. This message is insulting and degrading to residents who choose not to participate in religious activities, especially the 23% of the American population that is nonreligious². It is a fundamental principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence that the government cannot in any way promote, advance, or otherwise endorse religion. Advertising and organizing such an event sends the message that residents are expected to support such religious events. “The defining principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence is that ‘First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.’” *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005) (quoting *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968)).

The Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency must refrain from organizing religious events or events that benefit religious organizations. Of course, citizens are free to organize such a trip on their own. We ask that you respond in writing about the steps taken to remedy this constitutional violation. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Cavell
Staff Attorney

LC:bc

[Enclosure]

^{2 2} *America's Changing Religious Landscape*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (May 12, 2015), available at www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

**Active Adult Seniors/Silver Roamers
Williamstown, Kentucky
October 2-5, 2017**

**Double Room \$550/Single Room \$750
Register July 3 and pay \$150 non-refundable deposit
All payments due September 1**

**Tours and Attractions:
The Ark Encounter
Creation Museum**

**Meals Included:
All breakfast, one lunch, and three dinners**

**For More Information and Itinerary
Contact: Frankie Sanders fsanders@cherokeega.com**

