



“Whatever you do unto the **least among my brothers and sisters**, you do as unto me.” —MATTHEW 25:40

501 Front St., Norfolk, VA 23510 • Info@petalambbs.org • PETALAMBS.org

December 8, 2022

The Reverend Jerry Vess
Seaside Chapel

Dear Pastor Vess:

I'm writing on behalf of LAMBS, the Christian outreach division of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—PETA entities have more than 9 million members and supporters globally—in response to the news that two calves escaped from your “Journey to Bethlehem” event last weekend. Luckily, despite fleeing on busy streets and wading into the Cape Fear River, they survived. Please, to prevent future tragedies, will you stop using live animals in your events? Your sets and church members provide a perfectly lovely attraction on their own.

Using animals in live Nativities contradicts what the holiday represents: peace on Earth and goodwill to *all* sentient beings. Often, these animals endure all kinds of weather and are forced to stand or sit on pavement for hours. They're also at risk of being grabbed or worse by crowds of strangers. Many terrified animals have tried to flee, including a camel named Ernie, who escaped from a Nativity display in Maryland and was struck by a car and killed. A sheep being used in a manger scene in West Virginia was sexually assaulted when a man broke into the animal's pen after hours. And in Virginia, three animals died after they were attacked by dogs while being used in a church display.

Christian teachings are all about kindness—yet animals used in live Nativity scenes aren't treated with compassion. They're often stressed from transport and from being in a strange environment, and they're typically denied everything that's natural and important to them. All animals experience joy, fear, sadness, pain, and grief and have complex social and emotional lives—but most animals exploited for these displays are hauled from venue to venue inside cramped trailers in all weather conditions. When they aren't on the road, they may be chained or confined to small holding pens.

Using animals this way is also a threat to public health: For example, people can be infected by *E. coli*, salmonella, or ringworm. And many theologians, including Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, maintain that, according to the Bible, not a single animal was at the first Nativity, so preventing animals from appearing in these events would also be more historically accurate. We hope you'll set a meaningful example by never using live animals in your events again. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

With compassion for *all*,

Candice M. Kelsey
Faith Outreach & Engagement Campaign Coordinator