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# Satanic leader: After-school clubs send positive message

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**1 of 6** In this Oct. 24, 2016 photo, Lucien Greaves stands on the porch of the recently opened international headquarters of the Satanic Temple in Salem, Mass. The Satanic Temple is waging religious battles along a variety of... (AP Photo/Elise Amendola) [More](#) **▼**

By **PHILIP MARCELO**

*The Associated Press*

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SALEM, Mass. (AP) — The Satanic Temple is waging religious battles along a variety of fronts nationwide, and its co-founder says it’s just getting started.

The 3-year-old organization is fighting to get a nearly 9-foot, 1.5-ton statue of the goat-headed idol Baphomet placed on the Arkansas Capitol grounds as a counterpoint to a planned Ten Commandments monument.

Members have also proposed “After School Satan Clubs” in elementary schools from Oregon to Georgia where evangelical Christian “Good News Clubs” are operating.

And they’ve been pushing city councils from Alaska to Massachusetts to allow Satanists to give the opening prayer at public meetings — just as Christian, Jewish and other religious clerics have long done.

The Associated Press caught up with Temple co-founder Lucien Greaves as the organization settles into its news international headquarters in a former funeral parlor in Salem, the city north of Boston infamous for its 17th-century witch trials. The organization claims about 20 chapters and 50,000 members worldwide, including outposts in Britain, Finland, Italy and the Netherlands.

Greaves’ comments have been edited for clarity and length.

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AP: You've got some pretty serious security on this place. How's the reception in town been?

Greaves: You know, I was foreseeing a lot of pushback, and that really didn't happen, and I'm really happy about that. You should have seen the reaction when we unveiled the Baphomet monument in Detroit last year. There were death threats, protests — just a whole lot of ugliness. So the opening here was kind of low-key. We didn't really make an event of it.

AP: For those who don't know, what's the Satanic Temple all about?

Greaves: The Satanic Temple has seven tenets that describe our belief system. Personal autonomy, freedom of belief, scientific rationalism — those are really the core of the tenets. They say very little about Satan or why you would identify as a Satanist. ... The tenets are meant to be universal.

AP: So are you Satan worshippers?

Greaves: Definitely not. In fact, the idea of “worship” is antithetical to our anti-authoritarian philosophy. Devil worship implies a theistic point of view. We consider ourselves a non-theistic religious organization.

AP: Is the Satanic Temple a legally recognized religion? And does that affect your legal standing in court battles if not?

Greaves: We are incorporated as a religious organization, though we're an LLC rather than a tax-exempt religious nonprofit. If, by some circumstance, we find our religious legitimacy denied by a public agency for the fact that we've never sought IRS-recognized religious exemption, I have little doubt that the courts would rule in our favor. ... We feel that it's our sense of cultural identity, narrative and shared ethics that make us a religion.


AP: How are you different from other Satanist groups?

Greaves: We're actually active and relevant today. (Other groups) will say they stand for certain things and stand against certain things, but those words ring hollow if there isn't some commensurate activity attached to it. ... What matters to us is self-identified Satanists standing up and saying they have a place in the world so that the evangelical theocrats don't have a monopoly over what constitutes religious freedom.

AP: The Portland, Oregon, chapter of the Satanic Temple is planning an open house for an “After School Satan” club in a Portland elementary school sometime next month. What can students, teachers and parents expect?

Greaves: We're not interested in turning kids away from their Christian background. We really want this to be enriching. We're not going to proselytize or make ham-fisted religious tirades. Our curriculum does not contain items of religious opinion. It contains fun activities premised on critical thinking, reasoning skills and the scientific, rationalist view of the world.

AP: Doesn't sound very Satanic. Why call it an “After School Satan” club at

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all?

Greaves: I'd say it sends a positive message that it's called the "After School Satan" club and that it's run by people who self-identify as Satanists. It's helpful for children to see that people can hold diametrically opposed religious points of view, but still be good, productive members of society, be noncriminal and friendly.

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AP: Where's the Baphomet monument fight in Arkansas heading?

Greaves: I think they'll deny the Satanist monument and allow the Ten Commandments. But the monument will have to come down because it's clearly preferencing one religious viewpoint over another. And the taxpayers will have to foot the bill.

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AP: What else is on the horizon for the Satanic Temple?

Greaves: We're trying not to spread ourselves too thin. There's a huge demand for starting chapters. We're doing the best we can to keep up with the interest without letting it get completely unmanageable. It's a balancing act. ... Hopefully, it'll get to the point where I feel I can write a book about what we're doing and why we're doing it — the things everybody always asks about.

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