

July 29, 1979

*Dear Hester,*

I am writing you today to enlist your support for the 18-foot bronze statue of Christ that Dr. Sherman Coleman is offering to make to commemorate our city's name and location on Corpus Christi Bay.

As you know, Sherman Coleman is a very fine local sculptor and his work is widely recognized throughout Texas and other states. His most recent commissions include: 1. A fountain to be placed in front of the Corpus Christi Museum. 2. An eight foot bronze statue for the Church of the Good Shepherd. 3. A limited edition of longhorn bronzes, commissioned by the prestigious Longhorn Club of the University of Texas. 4. A bronze sculpture to be presented as the trophy to the winner of the "All American Futurity" quarterhorse race, the world's richest horse race, to be seen on national T.V. 5. A bronze elephant, commissioned by governor Clements to commemorate the historical event of his election as the first Republican governor of Texas in over one hundred years. Walt Wiggings, a well known writer, publisher, and art collector is working on a biography of Sherman Coleman, the artist.

It would be most unfortunate if the present City Council were to deny the lease of a very small piece of land on Sunfish Island, already approved on two readings by the previous council, to the Corpus Christi Cultural Council, the sponsoring, non-profit organization which I head. The City Council has finally agreed to vote on the lease ordinance next Wednesday, August 8. Ordinances are usually scheduled at the end of the council's business.

Since this matter has been going on for almost two years, you might like to have some background on it. An increase of one cent in the hotel-motel tax had been requested by the Municipal Arts Commission to the City Council for the purpose of funding art in public places. After the tax increase was voted down, I contacted Sherman to try to interest him in making a monumental size sculpture. He agreed to donate his time and talent to create an eighteen foot bronze statue of Christ--the subject chosen because of the name of the city, Corpus Christi. The cost of casting, erecting, and maintaining the statue to be funded by non-tax money. I presented the offer to the council and it was received and approved enthusiastically; they then referred it to the Municipal Arts Commission. When I presented it to the commission, representatives of some Jewish organizations objected on religious grounds. Quite frankly, perhaps naively, religion had not been even considered or discussed at all by us before then. Later on, at a public meeting, the former City Council was formally asked by representatives of three Jewish organizations to obtain the Texas Attorney General's opinion on the lease's constitutionality because of the separation of church and state, they indicated that they would abide by his ruling. The lease was ruled within the framework of the constitution

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by Attorney General John Hill. His ruling would allow the City of Corpus Christi to enter into a lease agreement with the Corpus Christi Cultural Council.

The intent of Sherman Coleman's offer has always been purely artistic, he is an experienced and highly qualified artist. Fortunately he has not been dissuaded by the ensuing controversy from giving up completely on this project. The opposition, mainly a one-man campaign by Harold Alberts, a local attorney, does not reflect the sentiments of all the members of the Jewish faith in our city; in fact there are many who don't object. This has been an issue in Corpus Christi for over fifty years; it will continue to be an issue until it is resolved one way or another. The Texas Attorney General has already ruled on it. The City Council, as an administrative entity, is not really qualified to decide on constitutional issues. If they vote for granting the lease, even though there might be a lawsuit, they would be closer to a final solution than if they vote against it. A negative vote would result in a referendum to hold an election on this question, a lengthier and far more divisive course, which will only serve to postpone a final solution. There would not be any certainty that they would be avoiding the same lawsuit that Harold Alberts has threatened against the City, for more than likely he would still carry out his threat.

I have tried to condense everything as much as possible, but I am afraid that I have ended up with a longer letter than I had wished, I apologize for this. If you care to support this project, you might consider contacting the City Council or writing a letter to them expressing your support. Attending the council meeting when they vote on this issue on Wednesday August 8, would also be helpful. In case that they vote against it and you care to help with the petition you can contact me at my home, my telephone number is 991-7494--my address is: 6008 Ocean Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas 78412. Thank you very much for anything that you might do in support of this undertaking. Sherman Coleman's sculpture would be a magnificent addition to our skyline!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mercedes Eugenio". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Mercedes Eugenio