

The Pittsburgh Crèche is a larger-than-life nativity scene and the world's only authorized replica of the Vatican's Christmas crèche on display in St. Peter's Square in Rome.

- The crèche opens for public viewing on Friday, Nov. 21, 2008 and will remain on display through Epiphany, Jan. 6- 7, 2009. During this period, over a quarter of a million visitors are expected to enjoy the nativity scene.
- A number of local musical groups and choruses as well as national singers have performed annually at the crèche. One year, Italian bagpipers, in the tradition of ancient shepherds, came from the village of Scapoli in Italy's Molise region to perform.
- The word "crèche" comes from the French meaning "manger" or "crib" and commonly refers to the scene of Christ's birth. The Christmas crèche, with its traditional depiction of the birth of Jesus with angels, three kings, shepherds and animals, is more popular than ever.
- The first definition of a crèche written in 1619 said that a crèche is "to bring to life the events of the birth of Christ so that all who view the scene may personally share the wonder of those who originally saw it."

This is the tenth year the crèche will be displayed. The site of the display, US Steel Plaza at 600 Grant Street in downtown Pittsburgh, is privately owned and has been donated to support the project.

- In past years there had been controversy about where to place a crèche in Pittsburgh, given the 1989 Supreme Court ruling to ban the display from the Allegheny County Court House.
- Former Pittsburgh Bishop Donald Wuerl asked USX Chairman Thomas Usher, with whom he had a long-standing relationship, for help. After consulting with the US Steel Tower building manager, and its major tenants, Usher intervened so the plaza outside his corporate headquarters could be used.

The stable, constructed from the plans of Vatican architect Umberto Mezzana, is 64 feet wide, 42 feet high, 36 feet deep, and weighs approximately 66,000 pounds.

- Louis D. Astorino, chairman of the Pittsburgh architectural firm L.D. Astorino Companies, has been a driving force behind the nativity project from the beginning. It was during a business trip to Rome that Astorino first saw the Vatican crèche. Moved by its beauty, he envisioned a similar display in his hometown of Pittsburgh. After receiving approval from Vatican officials, Astorino secured the actual plans for the crèche, and commissioned its sculptor to recreate the figures for Pittsburgh.
- The crèche was constructed at the Civic Light Opera Construction Center, and is reassembled in sections at the US Steel Plaza location. A crane is used to erect the panels, which weigh 800 to 1000 pounds each. The plywood and steel structure is brought to life by JE Scenic Technologies, creators of stage sets for Civic Light Opera, Broadway and other regional productions.

Most of the figures are the work of Roman artist and sculptor Pietro Simonelli. The figures are of wood frame construction, with hands, feet and faces modeled from clay; covered with papier-mâché and weatherproofed.

- Simonelli is a noted sculptor, making masks for many Italian and European lyrical opera houses, articles and animals for science and variety programs on Italian television, and sculpture and portraits for private clients in papier-mâché, bronze, resin and terra cotta.
- The crèche scene contains the figures of the infant Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the Three Kings, three shepherds, a woman and child and assorted animals. In 2000, unique to Pittsburgh, a life-sized angel made by Simonelli was suspended over the crib, and more animals were added including a full sized camel. Two more angels were added in 2007, bringing the total figures to 20.
- In 2001, a woman and child, with the woman holding a basket of fruit, were added. In 2002, local Pittsburgh artists from JE Scenic Technologies created a kneeling shepherd for the crèche. The new figure from JE Scenic Technologies in 2003 was a full sized reclining cow. Two more shepherds were added later.
- Summary of figures: Jesus, Mary and Joseph; three angels; three wise men; three shepherds; woman and child; servant girl; camel, donkey, ox, cow, ram, goat.
- Clothing for the figures has been designed, sewn and maintained by local communities of religious women, in keeping with the tradition of the Vatican.

The Pittsburgh Crèche is sponsored by Pittsburgh's ecumenical Christian Leaders Fellowship. The goal is to preserve the true meaning of Christmas, and to inspire those who see it to reach out to people in need. The theme of the project is "Share the Love."

- The Christian Leaders Fellowship represents 10 bishops and denominational executives in the greater Pittsburgh area.
- The denominations included are Roman and Byzantine Catholics; Presbyterians; Episcopalians; Baptists; Lutherans; Greek Orthodox; United Methodist; The Salvation Army and United Church of Christ.

Construction of the Crèche has been a community effort, with more than 30 organizations and businesses donating materials and labor or funding.

- Several labor unions supported the effort allowing workers to contribute their time and talent to the construction of the crèche.

For further information on the crèche project, contact Father Ronald Lengwin, at (412) 456-3021. Lengwin serves as the staff member for the Christian Leaders Fellowship, 111 Boulevard of the Allies, Pittsburgh, PA 15222.

### Schedule of Musical Performances at the Pittsburgh Crèche

<b>Choir</b>	<b>Performance Date</b>	<b>Performance Time</b>
St. Mary of the Assumption Children's Choir and Band	11/21/2008	11:30AM-Noon
Covenant Church of Pittsburgh Choir	11/21/2008	6:30PM-8:30PM
St. Maurice School Choir	12/6/2008	1:00PM-1:30PM
St. Thomas More School Choir	12/12/2008	2:00PM-2:30PM
Sacred Heart Elementary School 7th & 8th Grade Chorus	12/12/2008	7:00PM-7:30PM
St. Mark Music Ministries - Adult Choir and St. Mark Handbell Choir	12/12/2008	7:30PM-8:30PM
Holy Spirit School Children's Choir	12/15/2008	1:00PM-1:30PM
Cardinal Wright Regional School Children's Choir	12/16/2008	1:00PM-1:30PM
Oakland Catholic Chamber Singers	12/18/2008	1:00PM-1:30PM
St. Bernard School Band & Children's Choir	12/18/2008	1:30PM-2:00PM