

CRÉCHE HERALD

The Newsletter of Friends of the Creche



Vo. 25 No. 2

Summer, 2021



From the Editor:

Do you have some pics from our first gatherings, please share them with us. Were you in Lancaster, PA or Hyannis, MA, ? Make a scan of them and send them to me.

As we work towards our 25th anniversary ,it would be nice to see them again or show our new members where we have been and have accomplished.

I am also hoping to get a picture of a nativity from each state. Not just one made in the state, but that has some unique feature of that state incorporated into the set. Just for an example, say the Alamo used as a backdrop from a set from Texas etc..

I hope you enjoy our centerfold this issue dedicated to the beauty of wood and the carvers that create some amazing nativities from it. On the cover, we have one carved in Bellagio, Italy near Lake Como and part of the collection of Max and Joyce Douglas who are our featured meet the members in this issue. (MW)

Creche Herald is the newsletter of Friends of the Creche (a 501 c3 nonprofit corporation) Published by and for its members. Editor, Michael Whalen Rita Bocher, Editor Emeritus Comments, submissions to 19640 Driftwood Dr. Clinton Twp., MI 48038 crecheguy@att.net

Membership in Friends of the Creche Includes subscription to the Creche Herald Published four times yearly. To become a member, please send check payable to Friends of the Creche \$35.00 for USA addresses or \$40.00 in US dollars (outside the USA) to: FOTC membership/Marilynn Gillespie 7564 S. 2020 E. South Weber, UT 84405-9641 Be sure to include name, address, and telephone number and email address

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ELECTION NOTICE

The Board of Directors is seeking individuals to be elected/appointed to fill vacancies of three year terms commencing the fall of 2021. You may nominate yourself or someone else (with their permission.)

A ballot will be mailed to all members in the fall Creche Herald .

Qualifications are as follows:

-Love of the whole Nativity tradition and eager to keep it alive

-Access to email and the ability to attend one or two face to face or virtual meetings per year (one in conjunction with our annual meeting or convention.)

-Must be a paid up member since October, 2019.

Write a two hundred word or less biography about the nominee and send to: Barbara Olson 6320 Winterberry Lane Springfield, IL 62712 Or email to esfj57@yahoo.com

Nominations must be received by August 14, 2021.

Answers to quiz (pg.8)

A	13	Cork	H	2	Bristles	N	5	Rocks
B	7	Coal (dust)	I	12	Grass	O	11	Corn
C	6	Newspaper	J	1	Nails	P	14	Seed pods
D	10	Leaves	K	15	Aluminum cans	Q	19	Coffee Beans
E	9	Volcanic ash	L	3	Tagua nuts	R	4	Tapa Cloth (bark)
F	18	Mud and Dung	M	17	Bric-a-brac	S	8	Material scraps
G	16	Tin				T	20	Christmas edible



REIMAGINING YOUR NATIVITY

Duane Steadman became a nativity lover later in life. Due to the pressing concerns of daily life, he never had a chance to spend a lot of time or funds to search for that perfect nativity set. In his youth, he checked out the stores selling nativity sets and nothing really spoke to him. Then in retirement, a display in a store window definitely struck his eye and he researched the origins of the figures. To wit, their origin was Barcelona Spain, namely the Belenes Puig catalogues. Some thirty plus figures and assorted animals later, Duane has put together quite the creche display. Though he owns very few creche sets, one of olive wood from the Holy Land is much treasured. He does not consider himself a collector as such more one who appreciates the creche scene.

Mr. Steadman studied the piano and organ since youth and now still plays the organ at St Michael and All Angels Episcopal church in Studio City CA. He loves especially to play Bach and Messiaen and also to hear concerts from the nave of churches all over the world. Duane makes the point that to hear an organ concert from “down there” is so much different than from “up here” where he usually perches.

Hearing organ concerts in many and varied acoustical settings can also change the performance. He also has worked in church finance as many people who work for churches often wear many hats as many of our members know well.

Tweaking his display over the years, it was a constant search to let the beauty of the setting shine as well as the beauty and details of each figure. What seemed to be lacking was the right stage on which to set those figures. He purchased various materials such as trees, props etc. but still was not satisfied with the result (see image bottom right.) Mr. Steadman had considered having a canvas backdrop painted but to cover the place he had designated in his home to place the set, it was not really practical to do so. Having just become a member of our organization, he came across Navidad nativities in our directory and checked them

out. Some of us were able to view some of Michael and A.J. works from Navidad that were on display at our convention in Bethlehem in 2017. Duane felt that these glorious figures needed a more glorious background in which to set them and so the process began.

Two years ago he began working with Navidad to build a scaled down version with some of the same details of those they had done for larger church versions and add a three piece backdrop to his figures from Barcelona. Like everything else in life, it was done to his taste and not seeking to make some match of style to his figures. As we talked, I was reminded of the speaker at our meeting in California some years back who spoke about the huge nacimientos that some build in their homes or garages, often bringing together different styles and even sizes. There is no doubt that Duane has brought the figures and setting wonderfully together as you can see in the picture above.

Attention to detail draws his attention to both the backdrops and figures of nativity sets and up until this past year was still not completely satisfied with the overall result. Last year he added some blue backlighting and now enjoys the scene each year in his home through Candlemas day (February 2.)

Without the right setting and display, even the most beautiful and well crafted of nativity sets, may diminish the impact it has up those who gaze upon it. Maybe it is time re imagine, re do, or remodel the setting of those precious figures you have cherished for years. (MW)



PRESIDENT'S NOTES

Now we can see the proverbial “light at the end of the tunnel” and so time to resume our life where it was pre covid. As Friends of the Creche, this includes our plans for our organization, including our board elections and planning for our annual meeting/bi-annual convention.

Volunteer: Every organization succeeds only with the help from its members. Currently, there is a board of 14 elected members who meet 3 times/year to help guide us. We welcome our members to be stewards of the money that supports our publication and meetings, to handle our archives cataloging our history, to plan for our annual business meetings/bi-annual conventions, to run our website and social media. At each meeting, we discuss ways to promote the tradition of the creche, the very reason for Friends of the Creche inception in 2000.

In the past, we have met once a year in person. Last year, due to the pandemic, we have done meetings via internet-based platforms. I want to invite you to volunteer to help the FOTC. If you are interested in being on the board, please see the information in this issue from our Election chair, Barbara Olson. If not on the board, are there other ways you might be able to volunteer? Think about your talents. Are you good with writing articles, taking pictures, have a talent for posting on the internet, enjoy talking to people or have an artistic flair or a talent for organization? We would love to talk to you. Let me know.

Bi-annual convention: The committee for our bi-annual convention this year has been working tirelessly to provide us the best possible experience. You can imagine it has been a challenge to plan with the pandemic. But they have put together a wonderful program in a beautiful part of the country. Please see our Bi-annual Convention Chair, Neil Allen's article. There are a great many things you need to know to make this a great event.

I was able to travel to Portland in 2019 to see some of the sites/activities that have been planned for tours and they are wonderful. I visited the site of the bi-annual convention and had a tour of the Radisson Red – both prepared to welcome us in fall. Both are clean and easily accessible and reflect the city and culture of Portland aka the Rose City (lots of rose gardens) and Stumptown (because the city grew so quickly, they didn't have time to remove all the stumps of trees right away).

We went to visit the Grotto, one of the highlights of Portland visits: #1 on the list of Trip Advisor/forests, and #6 on the general list of top things to do in Portland. The Grotto is set on 62 acres of nature at its best. Paths wind through tall trees, beautiful flowers, and the sounds of the forest. Along the way are wonderful religious sculptures, my favorite being a tableau depicting the birth of Jesus. And there is a ter-

rific view of the city as well as Mt. Hood from the Meditation Chapel. We were able to visit in October and experience fall colors, something that isn't easily seen in my area of California. Trees were vivid golds and bronze. For those of you who live in the north, I am sure it may be a standard site – but for me from the land of evergreens and sand, it was gorgeous! A visit to the Grotto is a literal breath of fresh air.

We also took a trip to the beach. I live near a beach. But I don't live near a beach where evergreens almost kiss the sea. We experienced the wonderful air of the sea, the sound of waves crashing on the shore, the soft feel of sand between my toes. Not to mention, a visit to the INCREDIBLE Christmas Cottage. You don't have to buy a thing (but of course I did) – but there is anything and everything available that is Christmas. We also visited and met with the ladies of St. Peter the Fisherman church who will host our nativity exhibit as well as lunch. They were warm and welcoming and look forward to us coming to visit them in Lincoln City.

It was a trip from the forest to the sea with the city in between. I wish I could paint a better picture with words – but you will just have to see it!

Future Meetings/Events: The FOTC board is meeting in July to make our final assessment of our Portland bi-annual convention. We will weigh all the health guidelines and decide by August 1 if the bi-annual convention will be able to go on or not. Based on today, all things look good. But if for some reason things change, we felt August 1 would allow our members the time to deal with whatever travel plans you may need to make.

And we will host our 2nd Special Zoom event for FOTC members on August 7 at 10 AM PST. Our first special Zoom event was held in April with a presentation by Phillip Garding on cataloging our collections. It was a wonderful presentation and gave all 100 of us who were able to participate, inspiration on cataloging our nativity collections. Thank you, Phillip, for your presentation and to Neil Allen for organizing the event.

Our next event will be held after we have updated news about the Portland bi-annual convention. We want to make a presentation about what is happening there and to give our members a chance to share places and things to do in Oregon. Many will come for the convention alone, but some may make the northwest, this year's travel destination. We have all learned about great places to see and eat (I found the Tillamook Cheese factory and a wonderful quilt museum). Others have found other treasures along the way.

The Oregon Trail brought hundreds of thousands of pioneers from Missouri to Oregon in the 1800s. We are looking forward to the Friends of the Creche using the Oregon Trail to bring us to Portland – we will be “Westward Leading, still proceeding” guiding us to the perfect light, the FOTC and the Nativity in Oregon.

Sydne Yanko-Jongbloed
310/493-3380/sjongbloed@maryjoseph.org

“The Devil,” you say!

“The Devil,” you say?

The devil, in a nativity set, surely you jest.

Not as common as shepherds and magi to be sure, but the devil, Satan, the dark one, Beelzebub and all his other names has been after the Lord Jesus from the beginning. The encounter with the devil in the desert or Jesus telling Peter, “to get behind me Satan,” are a few of the direct reference to the personification or evil found in the new Testament.

To those of us that had the good fortune to attend our gathering in Santa Fe in 2019, were treated to the performance of a medieval morality /nativity play in which the devil had a major role trying to influence the shepherds to say asleep and not seek out the newly born Savior, or sending the wisemen right into Herod’s trap.

Some demon like figures have found their way into Christmas culture in general and often into nativity sets. In the alpine regions of Austria , the Krampus has become the bad Santa of sorts.

Part demon, part goat with horns, all must beware him and steer clear. There is even the Krampusnacht the evening celebration prior to St. Nicholas day.

Fr Tim Goldrick in *More than you need to know about Christmas and Creches*, says the Krampas is “a little devil, dressed in furs, he is known by his horns and long red tongue. St Nicholas often keeps him subdued with chains. Sometimes an angel guards the Krampas and keeps the children safe.”

In Guatemala, the Christmas seasons begins with burning the devil the evening before the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary on December 8. It is estimated that as many as 500,000 bonfires are lit to reduce Satan to a heap of ashes. Devil pinatas have recently been added to the festivities where beating the devil can result in sweet rewards.

In the town of San Luis Potosi, in Mexico, at the Virreinat-museum one may find a striking nativity display. Within this creche scene may again be found the devil in all his ugliness once again doing his best to influence the shepherds from seeking the Christ Child.



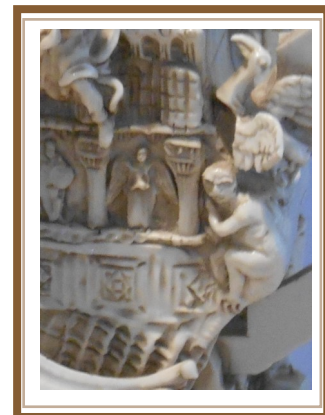
Rev. Johann Roten in his book, *God Still Comes*, on the page Angel and Devil, describes a creche scene made of cork where an angel watches over the Christ Child and a devil literally crouches in a corner nearby ,” literally between a rock and hard place. He is the earliest and permanent adversary of Christ the Redeemer. All of us are in a personal and constant odyssey between heaven and hell and Satan waits to trip us up.”

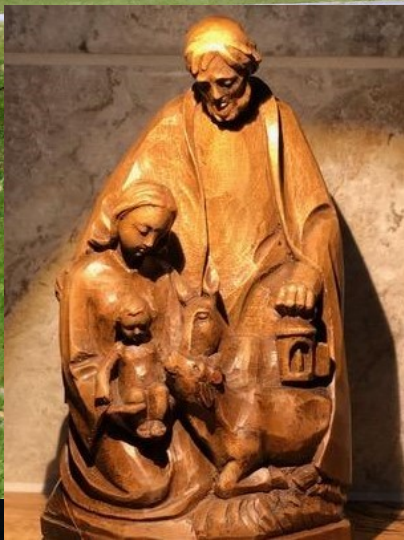
John Donnelly of southern California takes weeks building a Nacimiento in his garage each year. All life celebrates the birth of Jesus and yes, Satan is there as well. Check out the pictures posted on our blog of friendsofthecreche.org

In Oaxaca, Mexico, there is a tradition that the devil joined the wisemen in their search for Jesus in the hope of distracting them from their mission. Another legend says that Satan knew his days and rule were at end and joined them on their journey to Bethlehem.



Christobal Almanza in his blog post in *ATX Catholic* asks the question “why is the devil even included in the nativity spoiling the peacefulness of the event. “ He says, “This definitely darkens our expectations of a perfect picture of the nativity, but it does recognize the significant reality that even at the birth of the Christ Child, our fallen nature doubts God. “ He goes on to say that the devil’s presence should not scare or unsettle us but remind us that the devil has no true power . It reminds us even more of God’s power and unlimited mercy in making His Son one of us which we celebrate at Christmas and in every nativity scene. (MW)





THE BEAUTY
OF WOOD



"ONLY GOD
CAN MAKE
A TREE"

-Kilmer



THE TALENTED
ARTISTS
WHO CARVE IT



ECO FRIENDLY MATCH IT CRECHE QUIZ



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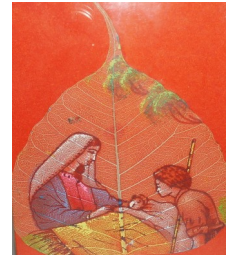
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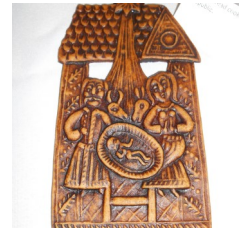
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18



19



20

- A Found in neck of wine bottles. ____
- B Bad kids might find in their stockings ____
- C Used to line bird cages. ____
- D Raked or bagged in the fall ____
- E Product of Mt .St Helens. ____
- F Earth and excrement ____
- G The scarecrow, lion and the ____ man. ____
- H Material of Harry Potter's broom. ____
- I Most people hate cutting it. ____
- J Used at the crucifixion ____

- K Convenient for soda or beer. ____
- L Seed of this fruit can be carved ____
- M Items arranged artistically ____
- N Other name for ice in drinks. ____
- O Called maize by natives. ____
- P Next generation of plants. ____
- Q Used to brew popular beverage. ____
- R Natural Hawaiian material ____
- S Material scraps ____
- T Christmas edible ____

A Curator's hindsight

With my collection of nativities getting close to 900 I wish I knew then what I know now. I started recording my collection with the number 1. Each number was written on a little sticker cut it as small as I could and placed underneath the baby Jesus figure. I didn't want to make it permanent in case I decided to record them differently. But I never changed my method until...

In 2020 I began numbering my new acquisitions beginning with 20 followed by 01; 2002, 2003... This year the numbering system will be 2101, 2102, 2103...and this way it helps me remember the year I acquired a particular nativity. I have always marked the year of acquisition in my Excel spreadsheet however when putting up displays, or loaning them out it will be helpful to know the year by just its number thus not having to look it up. I keep a small tag that identifies the country with each of my nativities. With knowledge of their materials my information is ready to create a brochure.

So lucky for me if I am so inspired, I could go back and renumber them in my spreadsheet and simply change out the sticker. Instead of replacing the stickers I will write the number directly on the piece, under Baby Jesus again! Not high on my priority list right now but something I may do in the futurewhen I run out of current COVID-19 projects.

In my spreadsheet I also mark what category the nativity fits in. For example O means it's an ornament, J is for jewelry, L is linen which includes wearables, FA is flat art or two dimensional pieces, etc. Once I have a dozen or more that make a new category I designate them as such. I also have a column to identify nativities I display with a particular theme. For instance this year I did an exhibit of nativities that had stars, another exhibit of sets that light up and others have been unusual animals, stables, angels, Magi etc.

As years pass and collectors want to share their treasures many of them become curators. A curator is defined as one who manages and keeps a collection. Most collectors want to find ways of displaying or sharing their collection. This is where curating becomes a creative challenge to find ways of exhibiting by grouping nativities, enhancing the setting of a creche, or grouping sets from a variety of countries.

Curating, in our case, is a way we share our faith in the nativity of Baby Jesus.

By Michele Devitt

Former Asst. Curator University
of Dayton Marian Library Creche Collection
Current Curator with time to focus on my creche collection!



Our meeting space at the First Christian Church in Portland Oregon without us.

A Blank canvas awaits us!

This is Friends of the Creche chance to truly live our mission. At the outset of planning to meet in Oregon it was clear that we must make many aware of what a nativity even is and of course what it symbolizes. This is a chance to put ourselves in that picture or paint FOTC on that canvas. How fitting as we emerge from this post pandemic era to let that light shine once again for all the world to see. See the box below to remember what Friends of the Creche mission is:

To learn more about the creche tradition: how it developed, and how it is expressed in our own and other cultures.

To make better known the tradition of the creche.

To serve as a source of information about creches.

To encourage artists to create creches.

To promote creche exhibits.

To establish relationships with creche associations in other lands



(One of the Allens' creches displayed)

Meet our Members:

Joyce and Max Douglas

By Marguerite Hoxie Sullivan

The start and finish of Joyce and Max Douglas' creche collecting might be considered. as being Oberammergau, the fabled German town in which the Passion Play has been performed every decade since 1634.

“When Max and I were living in Bavaria in Germany from 1966 to 1968, while he was working for Marathon Oil Company, we spent much of our spare time traveling through the continent to learn more about Europe and see the famous sights,” Joyce said. “On an early trip we explored Oberammergau and toured the Passion Play Theatre. And there, we had the opportunity to view and purchase nativity scenes done by local artists.”

A treasured creche from that trip is a wood-carved Holy Family nativity (it was actually their second – the first from Salzburg) but that, Joyce said, “was the beginning of our life-long search for unique and special nativities!”

And over the ensuing decades “search,” “unique” and “special” they have accomplished, ending up with 600 unique and special nativities.

In 1968, Max and Joyce returned to the U.S., and their creche collection began to build after their visits to museum and gallery gift shops and presents of nativities their friends gave them. “And low and behold, we had become hooked,” they said.

When they moved from the Midwest to Colorado in 1976, they had 20 nativities, but that number soon greatly increased. “Colorado opened up a whole new world to us,” Max said. “We did a lot of traveling, especially in the Southwest, in pueblos and Santa Fe.”



They met and became friends with many of the Southwest and Pueblo artists, visiting them in their homes

and galleries. One of their favorite artists -- Jill Gurrule from New Mexico -- was how they learned about Friends of the Creche. They saw her mentioned in a flyer about an upcoming FOTC 2001 convention in Lancaster, PA. (Below)



“That was our first FOTC Convention, and we haven't missed one yet,” said Joyce, who for six years served on the FOTC board, including being its secretary for part of the time.

Some creches from their Southwest collection have been included in Susan Topp Weber's *Nativities of the Southwest*, as well as displayed in FOTC Santa Fe conventions in 2005 and 2019.

In the 1990s, Max and Joyce turned again to international travel, and that led to even more creche collecting. Some of these are featured in Susan's *Nativities of the World*.



We expanded our collection to include sets that illustrated the folk art and fine art of the countries we visited. The dress, gifts and setting for the various scenes as well as the people and animals representing the cultures were fascinating,” Joyce said.

“We've made special note of the unique gifts of the Magi, the people featured in the adoration of the Christ Child, and other aspects of the nativity that represent special cultures,” she said. “For example, in the French Santon set, there is usually an old woman carrying a bunch of sticks to the baby to show that no one is too poor to bring a gift to Jesus.”

They headed to the Orient. “Asia presented us with another challenge,” Joyce said, “Because the Christian origin of the nativity story was different from local culture. Though Christmas items from the orient that were available here were very beautiful, they were not readily available in the countries we visited,” Joyce said,

So they often searched museum shops, Catholic gift shops and specialty shops and markets.

Christmas 2009 when they were in Vietnam, “we had looked for nativities but had no luck,” Max recalled. “Everyone said wait until Saigon.” Once there, their guide gave them the address of a Catholic Church. It had gift shop, where they found a lacquer creche with mother of pearl inlay in the shape of a fan. (Image to right.) Then came the task of getting it home, which entailed a long walk to a post office. And there in the corner of the building was a little souvenir shop where they found a stone Holy Family. “Again, as in many instances, the nativities found us!” Joyce added.

That certainly happened at a trading post in Framington, NM, where they asked about the work of a particular artist. The shop keeper said they had none but that Chris Wilson, a Navajo artist, could do a nice nativity for them. They left their name, but heard nothing. A year later, they stopped by again and found the nativity in a window. “I said it has to be mine,” Joyce recalled. And it was; the shop keeper had lost their address. Again, a nativity found them. (see right)

Sometimes with artists such as Michael Kanteena, whom they met at the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe, when asked what kind of nativity they wanted, they gave their standard reply of “We want only your interpretation of a nativity.” In response, they got the. Holy Family, a drummer and animals with designs of Mimbres pottery. (Below)



And lastly there was Oberammergau. At the Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, they had purchased an 18-inch high birch backdrop. “We had thought we might use it,” Max said. Then in 2019, “we were wandering around again in Oberam-

mergau and found a creche of exactly the same material: the Holy Family, a cow, a donkey with the same wood bark,” Max said. Use the birch backdrop they did. Today the 2019 Oberammergau creche is displayed in front of it.



“It seems like Oberammergau is so close to the beginning and to the end of collecting,” Joyce. said.

Their Denver-area house was the Douglas’ nativity display. Their creches were up year-round. “Our objective was always to have them on display,” she said.

In the early 2000s, Max and Joyce decided they needed a plan to house the nativities – a place where some of their creches could continually be shown. They approached their Indiana alma mater, Manchester University, affiliated with the Church of the Brethren. The university agreed to annually take 25 of the Douglasses’ creches. Two years ago, when Max and Joyce moved to a retirement community, an Erickson Community called Wind Crest outside Denver , they donated the remainder of their nativities to Manchester University, keeping just 25 to 30 for themselves.

Today they look back and describe their collection strategy as being an “appreciation of various cultures, seeing how the Holy Family is represented.” Another pleasure has been to meet other people interested in creches and engage in the give and take and friendship that often results.

As far as the question of what has been their favorite nativity, Joyce quips, “Our favorite nativity is always the next one. We really love them all. Each has spoken to us in some special way.”



Convention 2021: Portland Oregon

Portland, Oregon Convention Update: “Time Sensitive Information”

As of this writing, unfortunately, we are still dealing with the same issues here (closed business, restricted gatherings...etc....etc.). Literally everything we’re publicizing needs to have the warning label, “Time Sensitive Information”.

As we write this article in May for the June deadline of the Creche Herald, it’s almost guaranteed to be irrelevant information when you are actually reading this, so please understand we’re doing the best we can at this moment in time, and check the website or FaceBook page. Those are generally easier ways to ensure more accurate information.

After our latest Board meeting, we determined to cap the registrations at the level of risk we are under at the moment (more time sensitive information!). That number is 50 people currently (mask wearing and spaced at 6 ft per the current mask mandate reinstated by the Oregon Governor’s office). Our current registration is 34 (as of May 7). I suspect we will reach our 50 person limit by the time you are reading this. It is also likely we will be adjusting to the 100 person limit soon (by the time you read this in July. Who knows?)

To clarify these issues please continually check with Marilyn Gillespie or myself (my cell phone number is 503-707-6689- Pacific Time zone!) prior to sending your reservations. Sydne will also send email blasts as the major milestones are hit.

More Time Sensitive Information – to ensure we don’t over-extend ourselves, the Radisson Red Hotel has issued their registration portal. The hotel is located directly across the street from our Convention site (First Christian Church) in Portland. The hotel and church are both currently closed but have confirmed they will open before our convention. When you register for the convention Marilyn will send you that link. It shows the guaranteed rates and links you with Friends of the Creche group at the hotel.

We will make the official go/no-go decision on the Convention on August 1st and host an August 7, 2021 (Saturday) zoom conference @ 10 a.m. Pacific, 1 pm Eastern to address any questions you have remaining.

We believe this will allow you ample time to change airfare, hotel and rental car reservations, and also allow us to sign remaining contracts that are currently unsigned (the big one is our transportation issues at the convention – all the bus companies are currently closed).

A working schedule is available on the Website with a few unpatched holes due to the restrictions currently in place.



(Nativity Sculpture in the Grotto gardens)

A very special zoom meeting will be held on August 7, 2021 at 10 am Pacific, 1 pm Eastern, Noon central, 11 am Mountain time. We will cover all things related to the Planned Portland Convention (including the go/no go decision by the FOTC Board and their recommendations on COVID-19 restrictions). To register for the event, send an email to mail4creche@gmail.com. You will be sent a link. If you do not have computer access, Neil Allen will gladly talk to you via phone to answer your questions (503-707-6689).

