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## The public is invited to an interdenominational creche exhibit Dec. 2 and 3

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**PEORIA** — A group of area Christian churches are joining forces to present an interdenominational celebration of the Nativity scene.

“We have about five or six congregations represented right now,” said Kimberly Flack, the public relations coordinator for the event and a member of the Peoria Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which is hosting the event Dec. 2 and 3. The display will be in the meetinghouse of the church, at 3700 W. Reservoir Blvd., and will be open from 10 a.m to 9 p.m. both days. The event is free and open to the public.

The display was the idea of Shelly Crespo, public affairs director for the Peoria Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She was inspired after attending a similar event in Texas.

“I was deeply moved by the variety of ways that God’s children all over the earth expressed their interpretation of the birth of Jesus Christ,” said Crespo.

“Children from all sects share core beliefs in the reality of the birth of our savior. ... Our display provides a place for individuals and families to reflect upon the sacred event as they usher in the Christmas season.”

The Community Festival of Nativities will feature hundreds of nativities from around the world along with live music, a live Nativity enactment, and children’s activities. Organizers hope the display will become an annual event hosted by a different church each year.

One of the festival's goals is to promote unity among the area's different Christian denominations. Members from a number of churches are on the festival's committee.

"For all of us to get together with the same goal to celebrate the coming of Jesus to the world is neat," said committee member Veronica Barzallo, a member of St. Vincent's Catholic Church. "I think we have to celebrate that because it unifies us."

The glorious variety of nativities express the different ways people see and celebrate the birth of Christ, said Julia Ghantous of the All Saints Greek Orthodox Church, another committee member.

"You will not see one crèche like the other. Some of them are very elaborate, some of them are very simple. Some of them depict the event through animals and with different mediums. Some will be out of paper and others out of bone china," said Ghantous.

The committee is still accepting submissions for the display. They are also looking for volunteers. Sign up at [www.InterfaithNativityPeoria.com](http://www.InterfaithNativityPeoria.com).

Flack was delighted to learn Monday that the entire collection of 23 Rolan Johnson Christmas cards and ornaments will be part of the display. The collection is on loan from the Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Conception in West Peoria. This year would have been Johnson's 100th birthday, and it is also the 125th anniversary of the Sisters of St. Francis.

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