



..... 6th Annual

INTERNATIONAL CRÈCHE
EXHIBIT AND PILGRIMAGE

© COME LET US
ADORE HIM
CRÈCHES FROM AFRICA



International Crèche Collection on loan from the Marian Library,
International Marian Research Institute, Dayton, Ohio

NOVEMBER 27, 2019 –
JANUARY 12, 2020



**THE CRÈCHES WILL BE DISPLAYED
NOVEMBER 27, 2019 – JANUARY 12, 2020
IN THESE LOCATIONS:**

Jenkins Nanovic Halls

Eck Visitors Center

Coleman-Morse Center

Main Building

Geddes Hall

Hesburgh Library

Snite Museum of Art

Please visit mcgrath.nd.edu/creche for a list of building hours.



**CRÈCHE PILGRIMAGE
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2019 - 2:00PM**

Join us as we journey through campus to view crèches from Africa. We will begin at Jenkins Nanovic Halls, then walk to the Eck Visitors Center, Coleman-Morse Center, and conclude at the Main Building, where we will have a blessing of the baby Jesus figures—remember to bring yours from home! Families are welcome, and children are encouraged to dress as a figure from the Nativity story: animals, shepherds, angels, magi, or the Holy Family. A reception and raffle will follow the pilgrimage.



INTRODUCTION

In this year's crèche exhibit, we witness the stunning diversity of the Christian message as these crèches from throughout Africa reflect the rich traditions of a variety of countries and cultures. From the simply carved wooden crèche to the most elaborately painted and decorated, each offers a different meditation on the Christmas story while sharing a deep reverence for the mystery of the Incarnation, seeking to en flesh in wood and ceramic and cloth the moment when "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Christ joins our human family, and some crèches image how he would be welcomed with songs and gifts and great rejoicing. He joins our poverty and our work, and many crèches denote a fondness for the shepherds, who embody the rich agricultural heritage of many African countries. All of these Nativity scenes, however, remind us that the central figure is a tiny Child.

As each figure pauses in a posture of adoration, they invite us to marvel at the humility of a God who would not only join our ordinary, mundane lives but redeem them by his coming. We pause in adoration with Mary and Joseph, the kings, the shepherds, and all the animals. We come with our families, and like the shepherds, we

leave our work unfinished to focus totally on the wonderful moment in front of us, contemplating the mystery of Christ's acceptance of every part of human life—from the joy of new birth in the warmth of family to the agony of death in the pain of the Cross. In this mystery, we find the courage to bring every part of our lives before the Christ-Child. For even the most brightly decorated crèche never allows us to forget that Jesus came in humility, in poverty, without a home; and he opens his tiny arms wide to welcome our own humiliation, poverty, and homelessness.

So come, let us adore him. Let us bring our whole lives to the God who wholly entered into humanity, and in so doing, made humanity holy. As we pause in reverent attention before each beautiful crèche, let us bring to this moment of wonder and adoration not only the joy and hope of Advent and Christmas, but the very brokenness that Christ came into the world to bear and to heal. And as we, like the shepherds, return to whatever work fills our days, bring the stillness and peace of this adoration back into our lives, letting the peace of Christ—the peace of Christmas—control our hearts and minds (see Colossians 3:15).

JENKINS NANOVIC HALLS

A SHEPHERD'S FEAST



J.B. Sengayire (Rwanda)

This scene of profound silence depicts the shepherds' discovery of the Holy Family. Unlike Mary and Joseph, who close their eyes in a moment of peaceful worship, the shepherds eagerly look around the miraculous scene. Their energy in holding their staffs suggests that, though they are momentarily still, they are ready to rise and return to their lives, sharing this joyful news. We, too, are called to go forth from the crèche into our lives. May the peace of Christ teach us to return "glorifying and praising God" (Luke 2:20).

TRAVELER'S PALM



Betsileo artisan (Madagascar)

The simplicity and symmetry of this crèche emphasize the central artistic element: the palm tree which offers shade and comfort to the Holy Family. In imagining the long journey from Bethlehem to Egypt, this artist depicts a moment of rest underneath a tree. Its hospitable branches literally overshadow the Child Jesus, who seems to almost merge into the tree. It also suggests another tree—the Cross—which Christ will embrace to open to humanity the road back to God.

JENKINS NANOVIC HALLS

PONDERING HEARTS



Artist unknown (Swaziland)

The wooden figures in this crèche reflect the artist's beautiful attention to detail, from their unique expressions to their warm, repeated colors and patterns. Gathered around the manger, the similar postures and patterns remind us of the common humanity we share. Yet each figure is given a unique decoration, reminding us that our human similarity does not overcome our unique place in the world. Indeed, each figure ponders the cradle with closed eyes, reminding us that no matter how vibrant the outer coloring, the most important invitation is to welcome Jesus into our hearts.

LOVE AND NO FACE



Amani ya Juu artisans (Uganda)

This crèche, crafted out of banana leaf and wood, offers a profound meditation on our own place in the Nativity scene. Detailed and delicate, each figure appears finished except for the faces, which remain unfinished—a blank canvas. As the Gospel of John reminds us, "All things came to be through him" (John 1:3): just as these first adorers found their identity through the Christ-Child, so too does the artist invite us to see ourselves in them. Let us pray that our own faces reflect the love of Christ this Christmas season.

ECK VISITORS CENTER

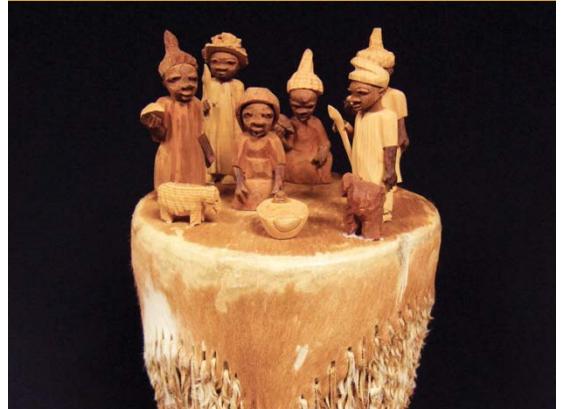
A MATTER OF SURVIVAL



Zafimaniry artisan (Madagascar)

"Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains..." The familiar hymn reminds us how the heavens joined the earth in adoration when Christ was born. This crèche places an angel high above the other simple wooden figures to keep prayerful watch, visually connecting heaven and earth, just as Christ's Incarnation joins earth to heaven. The raised figure also foreshadows the Cross—the Tree of Life that will reconcile earth to heaven. May our hearts be raised to heaven in contemplating the humility of our God.

AFRICAN DRUM NATIVITY



Artist and country unknown

The rather simple wooden figures of this crèche are transformed into something spectacular by their arrangement on the top of a drum, an important musical and cultural element of African life. Drums, not only a musical instrument, also symbolize the shared rhythms of life, from the first heartbeats to the steadiness of growing up, to the solidity of the human relationships which anchor our sometimes-turbulent lives. This crèche reminds us that Christ enters every part of human life, transforming our lives into something spectacular.

ECK VISITORS CENTER

PAINTED HOUSES



Ndebele women artisans (South Africa)

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament proclaims the works of his hands" (Psalm 19:1). The jubilant colors of this crèche immediately pull us into the intricate beauty of creation. The animals of the savanna, elaborately decorated to worship the Baby, offer the praise of all creation. The contrasting simplicity of Mary and Jesus' clothing reminds us to offer all our adornments as gifts of love to the humble Infant.

A DWELLING FOR GOD



Alphonse Yenji (Cameroon)

This ceramic crèche carries beautiful details in the figures arranged to welcome the Child, but it is the unfinished hut that houses the Holy Family which draws the eye. Despite the rich gifts in the hands of the visiting magi, it is the poverty of Christ's birth—and life—that makes the visitors gather outside. Will we approach the Christ-Child? Will we make room within our own hearts for our poor and humble Savior?

ECK VISITORS CENTER

CORN HUSK NATIVITY



Artist unknown (Zimbabwe)

The delicate simplicity of the corn husks that make up this crèche emphasize the wide, surprised eyes in each of the figures, as they contemplate the miracle of the tiny Child. These wide eyes also show the incredible weight of the moment: just as “shepherds quake at the sight,” so each of these figures shows holy fear in the presence of God-with-us, Emmanuel. Instead of bearing gifts, the three wise men approach the manger empty-handed, emphasizing that Jesus is the true Gift who gives himself to the world.

COLEMAN-MORSE CENTER

THE TENT



Artist unknown (Kenya)

One of most fitting Christmas Gospel passages is the genealogy of Jesus, which often seems more like a history lesson than a Gospel (see Matthew 1:1–17). Yet that family was the living, colorful reality into which Christ was born, and this crèche captures that bright human reality. The tent, though only a temporary dwelling, is open to all who come and welcomes them with love. The cheerful faces of the crowd gathering around Jesus recall the chaos of large family reunions, complete with some quarreling animals. Through this all, the Babe sleeps peacefully, content in the crowded human family he has chosen.

IN PRAISE OF SHEPHERDING



Kigali Carving School (Rwanda)

The rich tradition of shepherding in Rwanda makes it obvious that the shepherds are essential figures in this scene. Though the magi will no doubt leave richer gifts, the shepherds adopt their same posture of reverence and in so doing become their equals in worship. Indeed, the shepherds carry nothing except a staff and their homes on their backs; their interruption of their nomadic life for a moment of adoration is thus even more powerful.

COLEMAN-MORSE CENTER

MORABARABA



Joseph Marufu (Zimbabwe)

In this crèche, Mary cradles the newborn Jesus, holding her Son above the middle square of the Morabaraba board. One of Mary's many titles is "Star of the Sea," symbolizing her role as a guide and light for all Christians. Her elevated role as Mother of God, however, never overpowers her own humility, which leaves her kneeling and meditating on the tiny Infant she holds. May we, like Mary, hold all of God's works in our hearts as we ponder the mystery of Christ's birth.

STANDING BEFORE THE CHILD



Thomas Kacheza (Malawi)

Intricate detail marks this beautiful crèche, hand-carved from a single piece of Muwanga wood. This unity of construction in turn creates a unity among all the figures: the humble shepherd bringing a chicken stands alongside the elaborate and richly decorated magi bringing a costly present. Each figure, crafted from the same material, brings gifts to the same Child, and each thus enters into the mystery of God's love made manifest in the newborn Messiah.

MAIN BUILDING

BROKEN AND HEALED



Ausa (Egypt)

Several of the figures in this crèche were broken and repaired, yet the scene overall still captures the peace of the holy night when Christ was born. The sheen of the ceramic figures seems to reflect the moonlight and bathe the scene in a soft glow. Christ, the “light of the world,” entered the broken darkness of sinful humanity to heal us and illuminate us with the gentle light of love (John 8:12). Although his light is clothed in the obscurity of poverty, it never ceases to call us to kneel in silent adoration.

A MUSICAL WELCOME

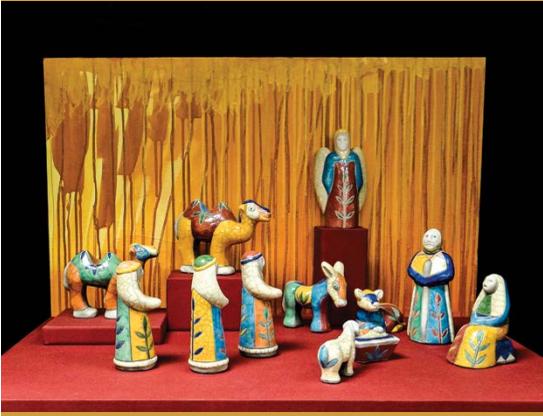


Roger J. Bawi (Togo)

This warm and crowded crèche immediately pulls us into the joyful bustle of welcoming a newborn into a community. The band of musicians prepares to play above the visitors who kneel with gifts of homely, domestic animals like the chicken and goat, while the nearly-invisible Jesus sleeps on his Mother’s lap amid the noise. In *The Everlasting Man*, G.K. Chesterton noted that it was impossible to imagine the Child without his Mother, and this crèche testifies to the vibrant human community Christ entered into in his Incarnation.

MAIN BUILDING

OUR LIFE AND LIGHT



Ndebele women artisans (South Africa)

The flowers winding through these ceramic figures and the bright colors of this crèche represent vibrant and unconquerable life. The animals surrounding the crèche display an endearing curiosity as they tenderly stretch their faces closer to the sleeping Child, while the stylized postures of the human figures suggest a peaceful contemplation. The indefatigable life of this crèche reminds us that Christ's birth is the mark of hope: "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54).

THE LAND OF RHYTHM



John Tse (Ghana)

"Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright." In their postures of restrained, humble adoration, the figures arranged beside the Infant in this crèche communicate the silent majesty of the moment. The "rhythm" of the title is found not in motions of dance or song, but in the calm and silent grace of their quiet reverence. The figures are all made of the same polished wood, lending unity to their worship of the Child who shares fully in our human condition in all things but sin.

MAIN BUILDING

LAW OF THE JUNGLE?



Joana Lekia Nelson (Ghana)

The thick jungle foliage surrounding the Nativity scene connects this moment to the Garden of Eden, when God created humanity out of love. Jesus, as the New Adam (see 1 Corinthians 15:45), comes to bring us back to that state of union with God, so that like the luscious jungle foliage, we may grow in exuberant praise of our gracious Creator. "Everything growing on earth, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever" (Daniel 3:76).

STANDING PROUD, YET HUMBLER



Artist unknown (Kenya)

Imagine the tumultuous life of Mary and Joseph before this moment: visited by angels, travelling to Bethlehem, welcoming the Messiah without a home, visited by magi—it must have been overwhelming. Yet this crèche highlights a gentle moment between new parents and their newborn—the reason for the chaos of their life—and demonstrates the awe-filled pride they must have felt in Jesus. Joseph's sweet, proud smile reveals the simple joy of this Holy Family. In our own families, may we share the joy of Christ's birth!

GEDDES HALL

TO THE FARTHEST ENDS



Kahola Studios (Côte d'Ivoire)

This crèche instantly invites us into the joy of the Nativity, as the bright, airy colors emphasize the radiant joy on each face. The gifts piled high on outstretched hands or heads remind us that we approach Christ not only to receive, but to offer him our own gifts. His own outstretched arms—foreshadowing the Cross—stand ready to both accept our gifts and bestow himself as the true Gift upon us.

TATTOOS



Prescraft Art Studios (Cameroon)

In Luke's Gospel, we learn that Joseph takes Mary to Bethlehem "because he was of the house and family of David" (Luke 2:4). This crèche, which emphasizes the tribal affiliations of all the figures gathered together, highlights this familial element of the Nativity. The name "Tattoos" reminds us of the deeply physical bonds between specific families. Yet Christ did not come only for the House of David, but to be a Brother to all humanity—to make us all adopted sons and daughters of God.

GEDDES HALL

AFRICAN SYMPHONY



Mohammed Amin (Ghana)

Despite the musicians in the background, joyfully welcoming Jesus with their instruments, this crèche exudes a peaceful calm. In the foreground, Joseph watches tenderly over Mary as she shares a bed with her infant Son, and the animals surround her with the same quiet reverence as they drowsily crowd close to the Prince of Peace. In the dramatic music of the world, Christ enters as a still, small voice. May we have the courage and patience to listen for him.

WITH MANDOLIN AND TAMBOURINE



ELHAMY Coptic Christian Art Studio (Egypt)

This crèche emphasizes the simplicity of the Nativity, as the artist manages to convey great devotion despite minimal decoration on the wooden figures. Each one is made of the simplest shapes, with the exception of the angels, whose elaborate halos and instruments add the only intricacy to the scene. As we "come before [the Lord] with a song of praise" (Psalm 95:2), let us embrace a spirit of noble and simple joy, asking for the simplicity of heart necessary to enter more deeply into these profound mysteries of God's love.

HESBURGH LIBRARY

THE GOOD SHEPHERD



Makonde artisan (Tanzania)

This crèche offers a beautiful meditation on Christ's role as the Good Shepherd (see John 10:11). Simply cut, this wooden scene carries a stillness and harmony, as each figure enters into holy reverence with a peaceful and solemn face. This reverence takes on a solemn tone as one sees the shepherd figure, who reminds us that Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, is also the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

ONE PEOPLE



Artist unknown (Nigeria)

The bustle of activity in this Nativity scene suggests the momentous significance of Christ's birth. All the earth comes to "sing a new song to the Lord" (Psalm 98:1) as the figures dance on their way to bring gifts to the newborn King. The river, the source of life, carries everyone to find the humble Child. The roughness of the carved wood only emphasizes the spontaneous joy of a creation that hastens to bring him praise. May we share their eager joy in our own journey to Christ.

HESBURGH LIBRARY

THE ANIMALS OF THE NATIVITY



Oscar Seke (Zambia)

Animals are often key figures in Nativity displays, and this beautiful crèche from Zambia incorporates three animals native to Africa. Instead of traditional sheep or camels, the giraffe, rhinoceros, and elephant testify to the culture of the artist. These animals, seemingly drawn to their incarnate Creator by their own desire, mirror the reverent, reflective postures of the humans gathered around the Baby Jesus as the culmination of their separate journeys to seek him, inspiring in the viewer the same reverent wonder that the King of the universe has been born a servant to all creatures.

THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF PATTERNS



Oluadetola Craft Center, Ibadan (Nigeria)

The humble wooden figures in this crèche gather around a simple manger. The brightly decorated hut behind them immediately attracts the viewer's eye, in contrast to the lack of identifying features on the figures gathered outside. As the title suggests, this crèche relies on the cultural language of patterns and colors: orange for vitality, blue for love, and yellow for happiness. Just as this Nigerian artist wove colors and figures together, so too does Christ weave our lives into the pattern of his love.

HESBURGH LIBRARY

THE GREATEST STORY



Makonde artisan (Tanzania)

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Each figure in this scene approaches the Child with arms full. Yet their bowed heads and thoughtful expressions suggest that what they bring might be not only gifts, but also the burdens and difficulties of earthly life. As we approach Christ this Christmas, let us take not only our joyful gifts, but our questions and our brokenness, entrusting all to him.

SNITE MUSEUM OF ART

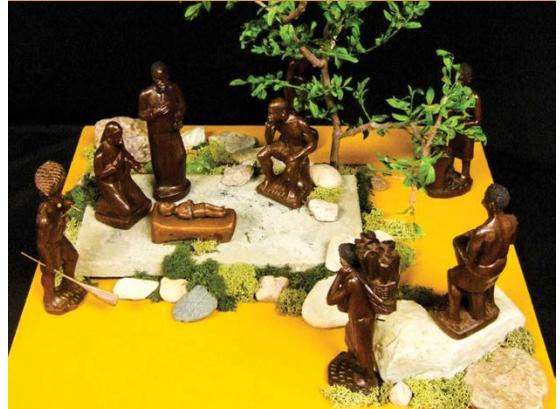
FEAST OF THE UPRIGHT PEOPLE



G. Tassou (Burkina Faso)

The stunning brass of this crèche complements the ornate decorations of the magi and the noble bearing of Mary and Joseph, and the raised platform highlights the majestic kingship of Christ. In many ways, it is a highly sophisticated work of art, which seems to leave the lowly shepherd out of the feast. Yet Christ came in humility, not for the rich and powerful, but to raise up the lowly, who will feast with him (see Luke 1:46–55).

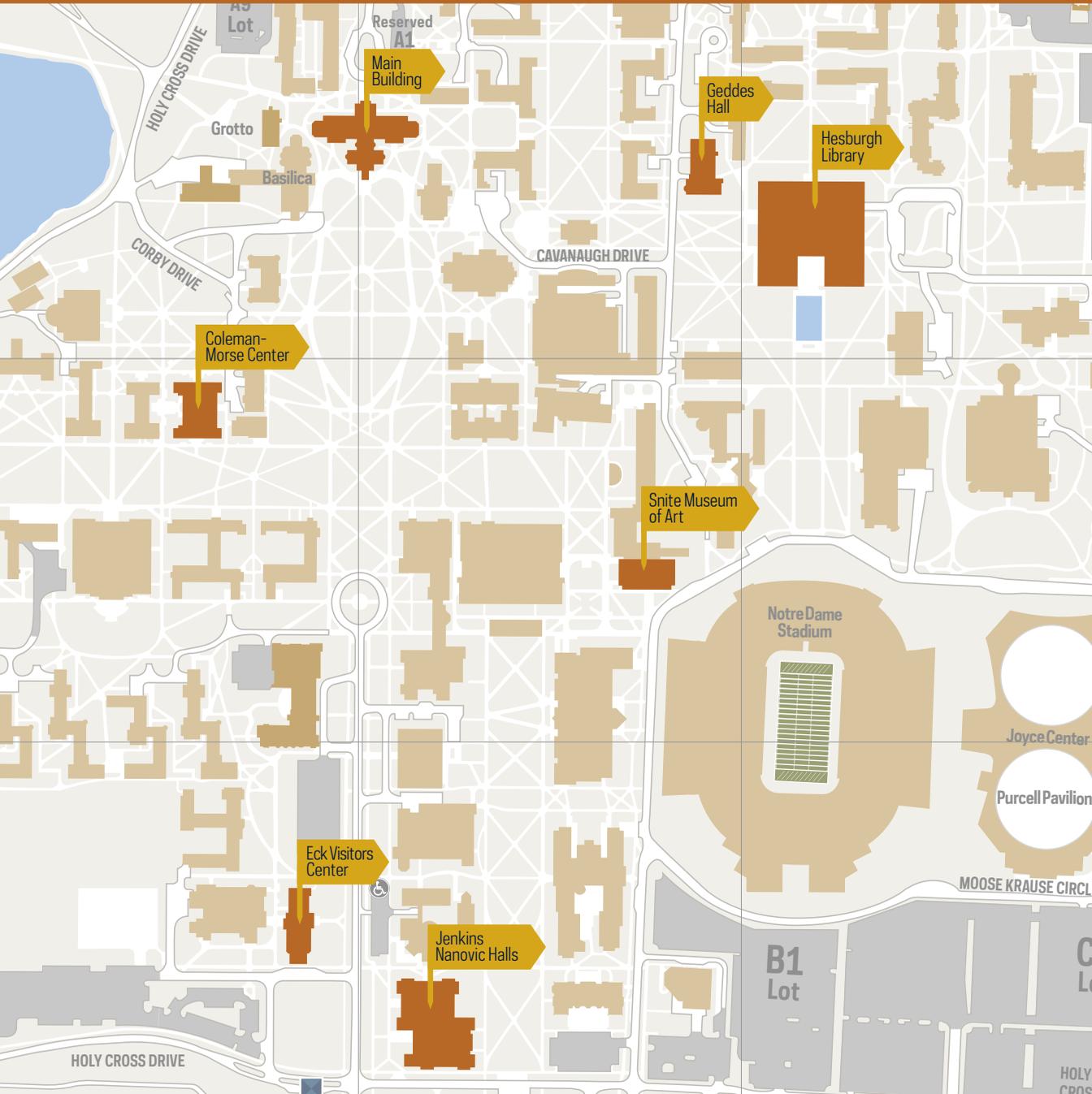
THE CHALLENGE OF INCULTURATION



Ano Mbuta (Democratic Republic of Congo)

Just as the artist poured hours of love into this piece of art, so do the human figures in the scene carry the tools for their own work. Yet all those different jobs, so necessary for life, are suspended for a moment of praise, which strengthens those in the scene to return to their lives nourished by the Christ-Child. Though after the Fall, man and woman must now survive by the sweat of their brow (see Genesis 3:19), Jesus redeems even earthly work in his Incarnation. Thus, we stand before the One who transfigures labor from meaningless drudgery into an offering that can be made in praise of God.

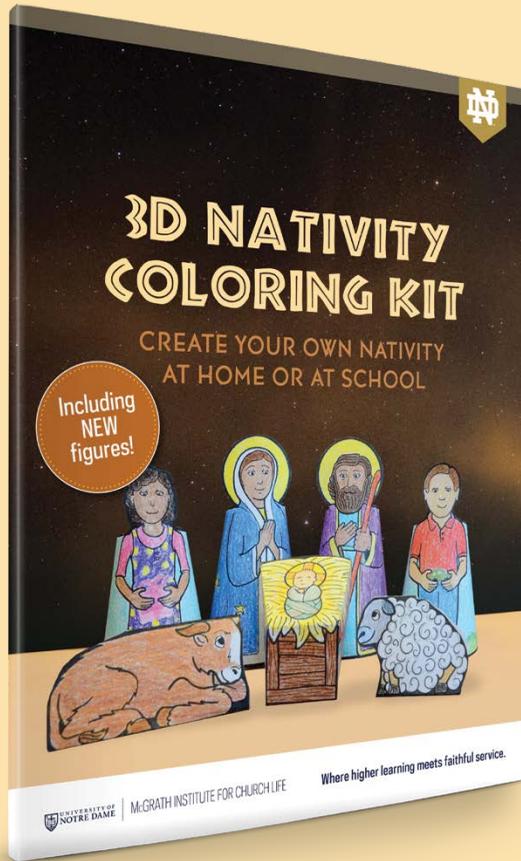
CRÈCHE LOCATION MAP





CRÈCHE LOCATIONS BY COUNTRY

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Cameroon, Page 15.....	Geddes Hall
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Nigeria, Page 18.....	Hesburgh Library
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Uganda, Page 6.....	Jenkins Nanovic Halls
Zambia, Page 18.....	Hesburgh Library
Zimbabwe, Page 9.....	Eck Visitors Center
Zimbabwe, Page 11.....	Coleman-Morse Center



CREATE YOUR OWN CRÈCHE!

We invite you to download our free 3D Nativity Coloring Kit which allows you to print, color, and assemble your own crèche.

Visit MCGRATH.ND.EDU/NATIVITY to print your own paper crèche scene!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Introductory and descriptive texts by Theresa Rice,
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