

Christmas contrasts

Dennis Coday | Dec. 23, 2009 NCR Today

Here's a contrast to a story we posted yesterday: [Church shuns decorations to help the poor](#) [1]. This is an Associated Press story: [Some churches stage 'mega-Nativities'](#) [2]

Not content with simple, static manger displays, some churches are turning the familiar Christmas Nativity scene into elaborate "mega-Nativities" with detailed costumes and more action. ...

The Nativity productions range from about 70 actors and support workers in Mill Hall, Pa. ? population 1,375 ? to a \$40,000 extravaganza with a giant, holographic Angel Gabriel at the Seventh-day Adventist Church?s headquarters in Silver Spring, Md.

The shows, many of which are free, can seem like a Christmas pageant crossed with a Renaissance fair. ...

At Emmanuel Baptist Church in Alexandria, La., for instance, visitors are guided on a "Pilgrimage to Bethlehem" by the character Abraham of Jericho, who walks the audience through scenes of beggar children stealing fruit or Roman soldiers arresting a man who refuses to carry their packs.

I don't want to suggest that the first story of the church that didn't spend \$300 on poinsettias and stocked its food pantry instead is superior. I can understand people in the second story who called the mega-shows "ministry." After all, the recent National Catholic Youth Convention, was certainly an expensive, ministry-inspired spectacle; and I could name many more.

Still I appreciated these words:

In Pennsylvania, members of Mill Hall Church of Christ, which averages about 115 people at Sunday services, worried their early December event might be seen as frivolous during the tough economic times, director Candice Packer said.

"We prayed, 'Let this be a good outreach,' " she said.

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Links:

[1] <http://ncronline.org/news/justice/church-shuns-decorations-help-poor>

[2] http://www.herald-mail.com/?cmd=displaystory&story_id=236465&format=html