PENDLETON

Photo contributed by Vickie Odegard Foster

Members of the Pendleton Faith Center, along with help from other area churches, present the 2014 Pendleton Living Nativity. This year's event is Sunday at Roy Raley Park in Pendleton.

Living Nativity presents Biblical story of Christmas

Izzy the Camel to appear at event

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

A production involving about 150 people shares the story of Jesus' birth as a free gift to the community

For more than two dozen years, Pendleton Faith Center Church has coordinated the Living Nativity at Roy Raley Park.

The free event is Sunday with a walk-through from 6-7 p.m. at 1205 S.W. Court Ave., Pendleton. From 7-9 p.m. visitors may choose to walk or drive through the exhibit.

"This is a gift to the community that depicts the meaning of Christmas," said Gary James, coordinator of the event.

James and Rev. Ray O'Grady said the effort includes several other churches as well as local businesses.

"There's a unity of people and organizations that bring this together to shine the light on the season," O'Grady said.

The presentation features 13 scenes with props, animals and about 100 actors, who take turns in shifts. In addition, there are reader boards with scriptures from the Bible to describe the scene being portrayed. Auxiliary lighting illuminates each scene and Christmas music is amplified in the park.

James is excited to have Izzy the Camel for this year's production. Izzy, a dromedary camel who resides in Waitsburg is highly sought after during the holiday season. In addition, this past fall, the camel appeared in episode 5 of the second season of Syfy's series "Z Nation," according to the *Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*.

It warms O'Grady's heart when he sees parents reading the information to their children, which presents a story of joy and hope. He said it helps spread the real meaning of Christmas — from the manger to the Nativity — to the community.

"It's a message of love and light in a very cold season," O'Grady said. "And it's very needed for many folks."

For more information, visit www.facebook.com/pendletonlivingnativity or call 541-276-9569.

BRIEFLY

Nazarene church serves communion

HERMISTON — The Hermiston Church of the Nazarene will host a Christmas Eve candlelight and communion service.

The public is invited to bring their family to the celebration Thursday from 6-7 p.m. at 1520 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston.

For more information, call 541-567-3677.

M-F church hosts Christmas Eve worship

MILTON-FREEWATER — A Christmas Eve service, which features worship, music and fellowship is being held in Milton-Freewater.

The public is invited to attend Thursday at 6 p.m. at the First Christian Church, 518 S. Main St., Milton-Freewater.

For more information, call 541-938-3854 .

Christian Center sets candlelight service

HERMISTON — A special service featuring holiday music and the reading of the Christmas story is planned at the Hermiston Christian Center.

The church invites people to bring their families and enjoy the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service Thursday from 6-7 p.m. at 1825 W. Highland Ave., Hermiston.

For more information, call 541-567-3480.

Friday's faith page features local, national and international faith-related news. Send information about local faith-related news and events, including concerts, special speakers and activities to community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

Pope enters 80th year amid criticism

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis entered his 80th year on Thursday amid hopes among his critics that it will be his last — at least as pope.

While Francis remains enormously popular among most rank-and-file Catholics, a small but vocal group of conservatives who have never much cared for his radical agenda have grown increasingly strident in criticizing the pope now that there is little doubt left about his priorities.

They have taken aim at the just-concluded synod on family issues, where the divisive issue of Communion for the civilly remarried took center stage. They have raised alarm at Francis' call for a more decentralized church and his loosening of the Vatican's marriage annulment process. They have winced at his environmental alarmism, wondered what's in store for Catholic orthodoxy in this Holy Year of Mercy and blasted as sacrilege the recent screening of nature shots on St. Peter's Basilica.

The Remnant, a small, traditionalist U.S. newspaper, last week penned an open letter begging Francis to change course or resign, arguing that his papacy was "causing grave harm to the church." Organizers say a few thousand people have signed onto the petition.

"You have given many indications of an alarming hostility to the church's traditional teaching, discipline and customs, and the faithful who try to defend them, while being preoccupied with social and political questions beyond the competence of the Roman Pontiff," the newspaper said. "This appalling situation has no parallel in church history."

To put it more simply: "Many people in the Vatican want Francis dead," said Francesca Chaouqui, the woman at the heart of a leaks scandal currently convulsing Francis' Vatican.

In an interview last weekend with Italy's *La Stampa* newspaper, Chaouqui said Francis' in-house reforms and nominations have emboldened his enemies, many of whom were in the Vatican when Francis was archbishop of Buenos Aires and had a less-than-pleasant relationship with Rome.

Some of these cardinals and bishops are openly resisting his reforms while others inside and out of the Vatican are simply waiting out his pontificate under the argument that popes come and go but the Curia remains.

L'Osservatore Romano/pool photo via AP

Pope Francis blows a candle on a birthday cake he was presented by a group of youths of the Catholic Action he received during a private audience at the Vatican Thursday.

"Pope Francis is no longer trusted by many conservative Catholics and the number who don't trust him has grown enormously since the synod," conservative columnist Damian Thompson wrote in Britain's *Spectator* last month. He said he doesn't see the dust settling until the next conclave.

The Argentine Jesuit, who has rarely backed down from a fight, seems unfazed and quite possibly emboldened by the criticism. And there is no indication that it poses any real threat to his broad popularity since the concern has been confined in the public sphere at least to mostly Anglo-Saxon and Italian pundits writing in predictably conservative publications, claiming to speak for a growing number of otherwise anonymous Catholic laity and clergy.

Canon lawyer Edward Condon, a strong supporter of Francis who doesn't count himself among his conservative critics, said the pope's casual and free way of speaking has nevertheless led to confusion among the faithful about where he stands on certain key issues. Writing recently in Britain's *Catholic Herald*, Condon suggested that was the result of papal interpreters who truncate his remarks and spin them to suit their own agendas, aided by a pope who is uninterested in following his own media coverage and advisers uninterested in advising him how it's all playing out.

What transpired on the Vatican walls last week has for many been the last straw. On Dec. 8, a major Catholic feast day honoring the Virgin Mary and the official start of Francis' Holy Year of Mercy, the Vatican projected National Geographic and other images of animals and nature on the facade of St. Peter's Basilica. The spectacular sound and light show, sponsored among others by the World Bank, aimed to both highlight Francis' environmental appeal and coincide with the final stretch of climate negotiations in Paris.

Criticism among conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic was swift and severe. "The sense that St. Peter's Basilica has been profaned is strong," Italian Catholic author Antonio Socci wrote on his Facebook page. "The holy place par excellence, the heart of Christianity transformed on a maxi-screen for the show of the 'New World Power Ideology' — and the Nativity crib was left in darkness."