

San Francisco chapel is setting for national TV Christmas special

SAN FRANCISCO - A one-hour television Christmas special set at the Porziuncola Chapel Shrine at the National Shrine of St. Francis of Assisi in San Francisco was taped Dec. 9 and 10 and was to be distributed to ABC affiliates nationally for broadcast at their discretion Christmas Eve, Dec. 24.

Monsignor Harry Schlitt hosts the program. Vicar for administration and moderator of the curia for the Archdiocese of San Francisco, Monsignor Schlitt is a well-known broadcast media veteran.

The hourlong program was produced by the Indiana-based New Group Media for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office of Digital Media with a grant from the USCCB's Catholic Communication Campaign.

The noncommercial program, directed by Chris Salvador of New Group Media, features a Billy Budd Films claymation re-enactment of Jesus' birth narrated by Christopher Plummer, Christmas carols sung at the shrine, and a video segment on the Trappist Monastery of Mepkin Abbey in South Carolina, which houses 350 creches from around the world.

The chapel, which has been declared an archdiocesan shrine in its own right, is a rock-for-rock, stone-for-stone, fresco-for-fresco replica of St. Francis of Assisi's tiny Porziuncola church near Assisi, Italy.

Built on a scale of 78 percent of the original to accommodate available space, the structure features duplications of a 14th-century fresco, of original doors and windows, and of other details of its Italian forerunner.

The original Porziuncola was restored in the 13th century by St. Francis and his followers, and today draws thousands of pilgrims annually. It is contained in a nave of the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli near Assisi.

A featured aspect of the Porziuncola in San Francisco is the encased display of a

stone used more than eight centuries ago in the repair of the original Porziuncola, perhaps by St. Francis himself.