

Vatican Christmas Appeals To People Of Many Nations

By MERCER CROSS
National Geographic News Service
VATICAN CITY — By the thousands they stream into St. Peter's Square, from all parts of the world, eagerly queuing up before the home sanctuary of Roman Catholicism to join in a colorful observance of Christ's birth.

The throngs begin to assemble hours before the Mass, celebrated by Pope John Paul II, begins at midnight on Christmas Eve.

Tuxedoed ushers, volunteer "gentlemen of His Holiness," escort up to 25,000 ticket-holding visitors

to their seats in portable chairs arranged around the high altar of the basilica.

The gold in the mosaics of the ceilings and the great dome glows in rich splendor under lights turned on only for special occasions. Multicolored flowers add a festive touch to the cavernous baroque structure.

Carols In Latin

As the Pope mounts the altar, the excited crowd rises and applauds, then grows silent as the service begins. The Vatican choir sings, in Latin, the music

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Christmas in St. Peter's Square: An illuminated creche, flanked by a gaily decorated evergreen from West Germany, greets yuletide visitors to the Vatican. In the background is the Michelangelo-designed dome of the great basilica, where

thousands of worshipers from around the world attend masses on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. The decorations in the square are innovations of John Paul II, who has been Pope since 1978.

World's Smallest State Protects Heritage Of Many

Vatican City—108.7 acres in the heart of Rome—is the smallest state in the world. Even tiny Liechtenstein, the "postage-stamp principality," is 360 times larger than the Vatican.

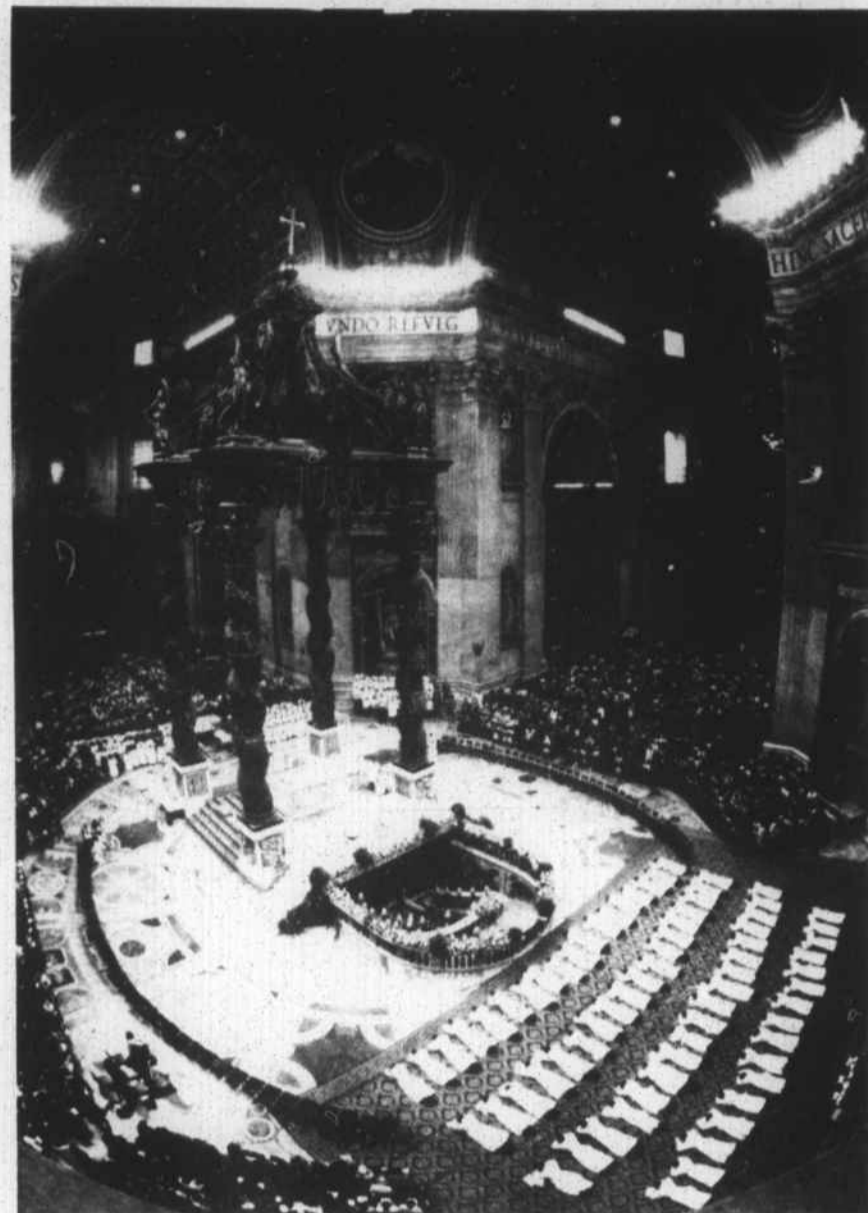
Vatican City's permanent resident population is about 300. Its work force numbers slightly fewer than 2,000, more than 90 percent of whom are ordinary residents of Rome.

Despite its diminutive size, the Vatican has all the trappings of nationhood: its own postage stamps, its own diplomatic corps, its own flag, and its own "army" — the colorful Swiss Guard.

Only about 400 people have Vatican citizenship. Two-thirds of them are either Swiss Guards or members of the Holy See's diplomatic corps serving abroad.

Those Who Sleep There

Of the 300 who sleep within the Vatican's walls, 100 are Swiss Guards. The rest include cardinals, altar boys, members of religious orders, students at two colleges on the grounds, a few families of the "men of St. Peter's" — janitors, craftsmen and other



Inside St. Peter's Basilica, candidates for priesthood from 22 countries lie prostrate in humility before the high altar as they take their vows during an ordination mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II. Today's basilica, on the site of Constantine's original church, was rebuilt in the 16th and 17th centuries.

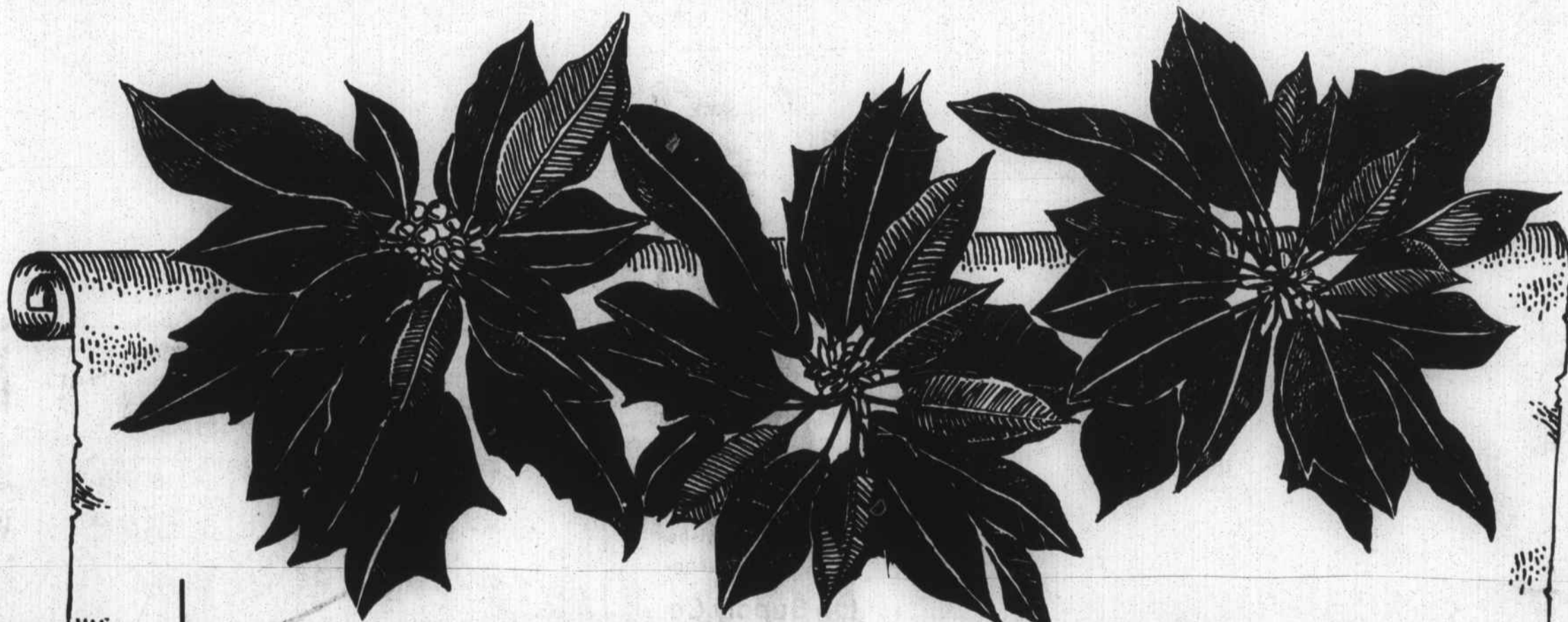
laborers — and the Pope.

John Paul II, the former Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Poland, has been leader of the world's 800 million Roman Catholics since

October 1978. He is the 264th Bishop of Rome, linked in direct succession to the first bishop, St. Peter.

But the Vatican's aura of timelessness is an illusion in many ways.

The Vatican City State dates its existence only from 1929, when the Lateran Treaty between Mussolini's Italian government and the Holy See resolved a long



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