

Christmas Village Committee

Co-Chairs: Elizabeth Cook, Caroline Manogue, Kate Chojnacki

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Main Event: The Redeemer Christmas Village

Purpose: To raise money for Community Connections and to come together as a community

When: November 2023

Where: Parish House and Parish House Courtyard

How many attended: Over 300 people over the course of the two day event

The Christmas Village was a successful fundraising and community building event, bringing together members of the parish as well as the neighborhood in a celebratory fashion while raising money for Community Connections. We reimagined Friday evening, eliminating the food trucks and offering an inside buffet dining experience. This did decrease foot traffic in the actual Christmas Village (vendor area) so we need to think about how to best encourage people to go outside and shop before and/or after dinner in 2024. The weather cooperated in 2021, 2022 and 2023; the indoor dining was part of our weather risk mitigation for 2023.

We plan to repeat the event in 2024, but unfortunately without Elisabeth Cooke as a co-chair. The idea of offering a Christmas village at Redeemer in 2021 was very much Elisabeth's, and we are grateful for her vision and leadership the past three years. Lucky for us, she will continue to help in 2024 (and beyond) but will step back from the very heavy lift of co-chairing the event. Thank you, Elisabeth!

Planning Events:

The Christmas Shoppe (formerly known as Christmas Crafting)

Purpose: To offer Christmas items for sale in the Village

When: Crafting generally took place once a week September through November

Where: Parish House Room 007 and at parishioners' homes

How many attended: 5 or so

Due to the dwindling number of crafters, we rebranded the "Craft Tent" as the "Christmas Shoppe" in 2023, offering not only homemade Christmas-themed items but also new items purchased at the NY Gift Show. This change alleviated the pressure felt by many of the crafters and seemed to be welcomed by the Village shoppers. Parishioners still crafted but not as much as past years. Brainstorming for 2024 is underway and all are welcome to join our small merry band of crafters!

Christmas Baking

Purpose: To bake tasty treats to sell in the Village

When: Throughout October and November

Where: Parish House Kitchen and at parishioners' homes

How many attended: 15

Bakers of all ages helped bake delicious treats from gingerbread and biscotti to quiche, spicy nuts and soups to sell in the Village. An unimaginable amount of love, dedication, butter, flour, eggs and

chocolate (and pounds of butter) were used to make amazing cookies and savory treats. Most ingredients were donated, and many bakers donated their favorite sweet or savory fare for sale. The cookies were offered in bags of 1-dozen cookies and smaller bags. The frozen meals were offered for sale on the day of (no pre-orders this year) and remained very popular. On Friday night, the Tasty Treats tent provided dessert for sale. This was a great idea but since the dinner was inside, it seems that not everyone knew to venture outside to purchase a dessert from the Tasty Treats tent. We will make this clearer in 2024. In addition – coffee, hot cocoa and popcorn were offered for sale on Saturday.

Vintage (formerly known as Trinkets & Treasures)

Purpose: To offer a unique shopping experience of fine, antique, costume jewelry and fashion accessories for both men and women

When: Early starts in Summer that continue throughout Sept, Oct and Nov

Where: Parish House

How many attended: Committee of 4 with helpers/shift workers during Fri eves and Sat event

Generous donations of gold, sterling silver, costume and antique jewelry continue to be crowd favorites at the Vintage booth. Designer silk and cashmere scarves, evening bags, bow ties and leather goods are popular as well. All items are thoughtfully priced and displayed. We appreciate access to the locked storage space in Parish House. We hope to expand storage space, which would allow us to collect donations throughout the year. We have risen to the challenge of an outdoor booth with the need for a portable set-up of items in a time-sensitive manner as opposed to the indoor boutique setting of years past. A designated entry point for Sat early-birds would be helpful as this year we again had dealers hovering around the Vintage booth making Saturday morning preparations even more challenging.

Children's Activities

Purpose: To provide shopping and crafting opportunities for children during the Saturday Village

When: Throughout September, October and November

Where: Parish House for Planning; Rood Screen Room for Event

How many attended: 12

It was tremendously helpful to the event but an important byproduct of the Christmas Village to build community, to have Barbara Hobbes recruit volunteers for the Children's Village. With Cannie Shafer there were 12 volunteers, and she was able to space them out throughout the event so that everything was covered. Many thanks to Cynthia Spadaro and her daughter Emily who were busy at the craft tables the entire event. Pam Hamilton and Arden Saligman put in lengthy shifts and Emily Gibb and Danielle Trucksess and their daughters were expert photographers! As always Sallie Greenough was indispensable.

Location, location, location! It was so helpful to take away the weather factor. The Rood Screen Room also became a shopping place and adults shopped! Having access to the porch and passing by the playground and the popcorn machine was also enjoyable. We used the large Santa's Toy Shop cardboard display arch over the door as an attractor from the outside and some signage on the playground fence. We used 5 tables at the front of the room for sale tables and a display for the raffle (this year a book and stuffed animal companion to the story.) Then we used 4 large round tables in the back half of the room for crafts. The large monitor had cheery winter scenes and

Christmas holiday music playing! We used a card table in the hallway for the donation -- given Saturday morning -- of Christmas cactuses to sell. The photo stand was also in the hall and people ate out there as well and it was a fluid stream of lookers and shoppers all day! Many commented on how they liked having food available at the kitchen window. We had a wide variety of inexpensive gifts for children to buy to give to their family members and even their dog! We were able to put out a flyer to the Church School families this year explaining the purpose of the sale and the spirit to reinforce that it is “more blessed to give than to receive.”

We had a little scramble on Saturday morning as we did not realize we could not use the rental tables and so we had to re-set up BUT it all worked out well particularly for the first time using the space. It is a bit nerve-wracking on the Saturday morning of Village to transport from Masterman Hall and get everything upstairs. It takes MANY hands...but somehow, they appear, and it was all wonderfully and creatively put together. Cannie had spent the afternoon before setting everything onto rolling tables in Masterman (for pricing) and so that it could be moved into the elevator to get upstairs! Being able to use the Masterman Hall locked closet was much appreciated!

Outside Vendors

Purpose: To fill the tents with vendors selling unique and desirable items

When: Early asks begin in January and continue throughout the year as we look for vendors willing to commit

Where: Courtyard

How many attended: 1

The 2023 Christmas Village had 7 vendors send in non-refundable deposits to secure a tent. Of these, 6 showed up for the Village. This is the second year that we have had a “no show” on the day of the event, and this causes much stress. However, luckily one of the vendors was happy to spread her things out across two tents so it did not appear that we had a vacancy.

Vendors are asked to give a percentage of their sales to Community Connections, and the total raised from the vendors in 2023 was \$2706. One vendor who did attend the Village notably did not make any donation, which is unfortunate.

Silent Auction & Item Solicitation

Purpose: To procure items for silent auction the proceeds of which support Community Connections

When: Throughout September, October, and November (Auction closed Friday night of the Village)

Where: Parish House (and online)

How many attended: 2

Parishioners generously donated unique items for the silent auction. In 2023, we began the solicitation of items even sooner than we did in 2022, which resulted in a nice offering of “bigger ticket” items. Lacking a chair in 2023, Caroline Manogue took this on (while Elisabeth Cooke focused on the vendors). We would like to again solicit a wider variety of high-quality items – carefully curated to maximize our fundraising. And to have them on hand early allowed them to be photographed and uploaded onto the virtual auction site in a timely manner and permitted sneak peaks and early bidding. In 2024, we would like all items in hand by the end of October.

The silent auction items were set up in the brightly lit main hallway off the foyer of the Parish House, which we think led to much interest on Friday evening. We received compliments on the layout so we will repeat it in 2024. The bidding was fully online for the third time and although some parishioners still found the software daunting, this automated auction generally resulted in an easier bidding and check-out process. We held “training” sessions during a couple of coffee hours leading up to the event; perhaps we need to hold more in 2024. We need to continue to encourage parishioners to share the bidding link with friends and family outside the parish to encourage more competitive bidding. On the Friday evening of the Village, Caroline Manogue and Emily Snell stayed in the auction all evening to help people with bidding. We need more volunteers to work the auction on Friday night so in 2024.

The closing of the auction was clearly announced 3 times before the actual close (both inside Burns Hall and in the Courtyard). Bidders were also “pinged” on their phones before the auction closed to remind them to check their bids. Regardless, people have said that they did not know the auction was closing so we will strive to announce more often and more clearly in 2024.

Benefactor Solicitation

Purpose: To solicit funds for Community Connections

When: Request letter was mailed with the Village invitation in October

Where: Parish House

How many attended: 4

This year, the benefactor letter seeking was sent with the actual Village invitation. Donors at the higher levels received tickets for their donation, and at the highest levels were also invited to a Patron Party. Through this effort alone, we raised \$50,400 from a total of 67 parishioners, 24 of whom gave at the highest levels and were invited to the Patron Party. We are actively seeking a willing host/location for the 2024 Patron Party as we believe this is a nice tradition that we would like to continue. If you are interested in helping or have any thoughts, please let us know.

Additionally, we are going to revisit the timing of the benefactor letter (perhaps sending it to all parishioners in the Spring 2024) as well as the offering of “free” tickets to benefactors as we think providing those tickets to benefactors at no additional cost negatively affected our bottom-line.

Music

Purpose: To provide music at the Village

When: October and November

Where: Parish House

How many attended: 2+

Parishioners sourced a variety of local musicians to provide music throughout the evening and daytime Village event. An outside vendor set up and “manned” an excellent sound system on the porch of the parish house. Unlike in the past, the music was able to be heard throughout the Village. The groups were plentiful and varied, and we advertised the “lineup” with specific times to assist people when planning their visit to the Village.

Food

Purpose: To source and secure food offerings for both the Friday evening and Saturday daytime events.

When: September, October and November

Where: Parish House

How many attended: Too many to count

We offered a catered buffet meal inside Burns Hall on Friday night, which was a departure from the food trucks of the past. Each of the three “stations” offered food from a different European country – the UK, Germany and France – and guests were permitted to eat as much as they wanted at all of the stations. The purchase of a meal came with unlimited drinks as well – both cocktails outside at the 13th Street Cocktail truck and inside at the bar in the solarium. Based on feedback, in 2024, we will likely limit the number of drinks that come with each meal and sell individual drink tickets for those who would like more. We will also more clearly tell people where to go for food and drinks.

In response to requests to offer an indoor seated lunch on Friday and Saturday, the ladies and gents in Vintage hosted a free lunch on Friday intended for the residents of the local senior living facilities (such as Beaumont and Dunwoody). This lunch was very appreciated by the volunteers but unfortunately did not have as many seniors attend as anticipated. On Saturday, the Redeemer Youth Group hosted the lunch to raise money for their service trip to DC. We believe this was an excellent opportunity for the Redeemer teens to bond while making and serving lunch in the Parish House kitchen, and the kitchen seemed to be doing robust business throughout Saturday. Unfortunately, we believe the price charged was too low, so the RYG did not raise as many funds as they had hoped. This was a learning experience for all. We hope both the Vintage and RYG folks will offer lunch again in 2024.

Communications and Outreach

Purpose: To effectively communicate the Village to the parish and broader community

When: September, October and November

Where: Parish House & throughout the Neighborhood and Internet

How many attended: 4

The Village’s bright logo helped to market the Village and differentiate it from events of the past. Parishioners created weekly communications for the Redeemer bulletin as well as email blasts from time to time in order to raise awareness of the event. We continued to communicate to the outside community in 2023 by reaching out to media outlets such as Next Door, the Enquirer, the Main Line Times, the Patch, Lower Merion Community Network, Main Line Parents Community, etc. We need to continue to leverage social media effectively in 2024 to increase attendance and would love help from a parishioner (maybe even a high schooler who needs volunteer hours?) who would be willing to run the Village’s Instagram page in 2024.

New posters highlighting Outreach were created to adorn the lobby area as people entered the Village – to remind them of why the Village was taking place. We believe these were effective.

We created new lawn signs for the event, and these were much more visible around town than in past years.

We more closely coordinated with the Community Connections/Outreach Grants and Programming committees to strengthen the message that all funds raised support our connection with programming in the community. Having representatives from a few of the organizations in person was also a nice addition in 2023. However, stopping the festivities to have them speak may not have been the best idea (reduces the energy in the room since the event is not conducive to that sort of thing), and we will be revisiting this in 2024.

As noted above, the planning team will consider the timing of the mailing of the paper invitations in 2024, including a donation form. The timing of the paper invitations has to be coordinated with the mailing of the benefactor letter.

Village Decor

Purpose: To decorate the Parish House and courtyard with festive decorations

Where: November

When: Parish House

How many attended: 5

Parishioners festively decorated the front porch, lobby area and courtyard with Christmas decorations, lovely centerpieces and full-sized Christmas trees. People enjoyed perusing and buying donated Christmas ornaments off a tree located near the Christmas Shoppe and cocktail truck. We have asked for parishioners to think about donating unused Christmas ornaments and décor now so that we can again be ahead of the game in 2024.

The white Moravian stars at the top of each tent further illuminated the courtyard. Small versions were again sold at the event.

Accomplishment

Christmas Village

November 17-18, 2023

We believe that we effectively raised funds for Community Connections while bringing together the Redeemer community. People made new friends while volunteering and planning the event as well as during the evening of the event. While some people still miss the Bazaar of the past, we continue to try to establish the Village as something new and different.

Fundraising and Budget

Amount of money raised this year - We netted approximately \$60,000 thanks to generous donations by our benefactors

Status of your group's budget (surplus or deficit of how much) - All net proceeds were donated to Community Connections

Expenditures

Expenditure 1

Tents plus town permit for tents

\$6,138

Rental of tents and tent lights; includes installation and removal. We solicited competitive bids this year and were able to save \$1,756 by going with a different tent company.

Expenditure 2

Catering (The Perfect Setting)

\$14,000

We considered a number of caterers to find the best quality at the right price point. The caterer brought a large team to keep the food fresh and abundant throughout the night, and we think that it was money well spent. We will again interview various caterers before committing to one for 2024. Any and all recommendations are appreciated!!!

Expenditure 3

Drinks (13th Street Cocktails)

\$4,530

This covered the two fully staffed bars (one inside and the other being the cocktail truck outside) plus the wine and drinks, glasses and supplies.

Expenditure 4

Lighting

\$4,155

Outside electrician Jim Hornung facilitated providing electricity to tents and installed decorative lighting around the perimeter of the courtyard. This was less than 2022 since we are getting more efficient with our needs, and substantially less than 2021 which is the year we invested in the cords and lights.

Expenditure 5

Sound System

\$1,600

Sound system and helper for music throughout the event

Expenditure 6

Permit from Alcohol Board

\$150

Necessary expense to serve alcohol in Parish House

Expenditure 7

Signage

\$503

New lawns signs to advertise around town

Expenditure 8

Printing and Mailing of Paper Invitations

\$1500

Mailed invitations to every Redeemer family. Mailing included benefactor solicitation letter, return RSVP cards and return envelopes.

Expenditure 9

Auction Systems

\$1,200

Software fee for online auction system. We have priced this out with other vendors and have found that this price is extremely competitive. We were able to use more of the features of the software this year, using it to keep track of all dinner ticket sales and outright donations, which was extremely helpful. We also utilized the “thermometer” on the home page so that people could see how much money was being raised. Because we had to then back out the cost of the meals/drinks and other expenses, this number was a little inflated but generally gave people a sense of how we were doing throughout the month leading up and following the event.

Expenditure 10

Security

\$1,300

Had overnight off duty LMPD officer guarding tents and property. Because it was a very windy night, the policeman spent much of the evening chasing down items that were blowing out of the tents that were not adequately secured by various vendors. He said that it kept him on his toes all evening.

Reflections and Goals

Reflections

Great collaboration and teamwork strengthened community bonds, but the number of volunteers decreased markedly from 2022 to 2023. This must be fixed in 2024 for the Village to be a success.

Benefactors were the primary support of the financial success of the Village while the silent auction and Redeemer booths were the highest contributors of funds at the event itself. Outside vendors are needed to add variety to the goods / gifts for purchase and festive atmosphere.

Strong interest in baked goods and frozen meals; excellent quality and enthusiastic team, with high effort especially in the last two weeks; could alter the mix/assortment to increase contribution and reduce effort.

The Village remains a great opportunity to introduce the Redeemer to friends, family and neighbors. A lot of feedback was received from first time visitors about how beautiful and welcoming the church is and some visitors have returned to worship with us and/or expressed an interest in the church.

We tried hard to appease those parishioners who have not been openly enthusiastic about the Village in the past by offering the inside dinner. We think that the approach we took provided a nice balance and maybe won over some prior naysayers.

All in all, we think that the Redeemer Christmas Village was again a success!

Goals

Net \$75,000-100,000 for Community Connections

Increase the number of volunteers involved in planning and running the event to build stronger bonds in our community

Take all the lessons learned in 2021, 2022 and 2023 to create an easily repeatable playbook for 2024 while still keeping the event fresh and exciting.

We thank all of our Christmas Village donors, benefactors and volunteers. Here are just a few - thank you to one and all (and apologies if we left anyone off this list)!

Susan Ayres

Carolyn Bartholdson

Evie Bartholdson

Trish Bennett

Barbara Billings

John Black

Lisa Black

Susan Bloom

Ronde Bradley

Prill Bradshaw

Jim Buck

Bobbie Cameron

Catherine Carruthers

Scott Carter

Jan Clarke

Elisabeth Cooke

Peter Cooke

Victoria Cooke

Jennifer Copas

Chris Chojnacki

Kate Chojnacki

Bob Davis

Lisa Davis

Richard Davis

Rita Davis

Carol Donnelly

Kitzie Espenshade

Tucker Espenshade

Ken Garner

Emily Gibb

Sallie Greenough

Bill Gross

Jamie Halloran

Pam Hamilton

Lori Harper

Barbara Hobbs

Katherine Hobson

Jeanne Holeman

Meghan Jodz

Jo Ann Jones

Kevin Leahy

Melanie LeBeouf

Victoria Leidner

Caroline Manogue

Christopher Manogue

Cheryl Masterman

Kevin Maurer

Pam McMullin

Fran Merritt

Bob Mikrut

Carolyn Morris

Perc Moser

Sally Moser

Karen Nagel

Maryann Nevins

Rebecca Northington

Tiffany O'Neill

Jill Ravenscroft

Lisa Raymond

Tom & Josephine Rees

Pablo Ross

Susan Rushing

The RYG Saturday Lunch Crew
Arden Saligman

Jim Schneider

Camille Scott

Diane Senior

Andrew Senn

Cannie Shafer

Win Shafer

Devika Singh

Emily Snell

Cynthia Spadaro

Emily Spadaro

Bonnie Steele

Tracy Steele

Alexis Stephan

Caroline Stephan

Kate Stephan

Ann Strong

Bill Susskind

Leslie Susskind

Danielle Trucksess

Peter Vanderveen

Margaret Welsh

Pat Wesley

Brad Whitman

Rebecca Winfield

Kayla Young

Chris Zafiriou

See everyone in the Redeemer Christmas Village November 15-16, 2024!!! Mark your calendars!!