

Holy Redeemer Parish
2020 Harvest Bazaar Quilt

“Roses In December”

“God gave us memory so that we might have roses in December.”
– James M. Barrie (from A Window In Thrums)

For each of the past forty years, the parish's Piecemakers quilting group has hand-sewn a quilt to raffle off at the annual Harvest Bazaar. We decided in January to dedicate this year's quilt to the honor or memory of all those quilters who came before us, and who kept the tradition going for so many years. A list of their names can be found below.

In choosing the design, we were inspired by Sarah Fielke's quilt, “Positives and Negatives,” from her book Old Quilts New Life. While her medallion-style quilt has a black center, with white appliqué and borders in shades of gray, we wanted something more colorful. The central “Whig Rose” pattern, popular in the mid-1800s, was traditionally done in red or pink, with green and perhaps a bit of yellow, on a white background. We have reversed that, using a snowy white-on-white florentine print for the appliqué, and a floral batik with roses and leaves in shades of blue, purple, and green for the background.

Diagonal quilting on the rose batik throughout the piece is meant to represent trellising. There is no quilting in the narrow, pale blue borders. The braided cable stitched in the inner dark blue border was suggested by one of our members, who found it in a design book one morning while patiently waiting for the rest of us to arrive. She really wanted us to use it, so with that as our fixed starting point, we chose the other elements of the quilt and got to work.

We were interrupted in mid-March by the Covid-19 shutdown. One member took some fabric home, hoping to make a bit of progress during what was supposed to be a 15-day hiatus. That was extended again and again, ultimately disrupting our work for two-and-a-half months. During that time, the center medallion was finished, but adding the borders, batting, backing, and quilting had to wait for the first phase of re-opening. We began the quilting on June 6, and were finished by mid-September.

Positive and negative; dark and light; presence and absence, of color and of people due to 'social-distancing': these opposing attributes have been highlighted during the past several months. We miss our absent friends, the people we love and can't be with. But as theologian Henri Nouwen wrote: “One of the mysteries of life is that memory can often bring us closer to each other than can physical presence.” Memories are made and stored and recalled by the working of chemicals in our brains, and so actually have become a physical part of us. In this way, a remembered friend may be absent, but present after all. As the threads of our lives go on and on, sometimes moving toward each other, sometimes in parallel, sometimes moving apart, they intersect at points along the way. Those points of interaction are where we make our most important memories, to carry with us as we go on.

Someone recently asked how long it took to make the quilt. Data from diaries and calendars yields an estimate of 560 hours, and more than 300 yards of quilting thread -- one stitch at a time. And in every stitch there is a thought, a prayer for absent friends, a new memory.