

St. Mark's South Milwaukee Grant Report

2016 Congregational Development Grant

Drexel Town Square

Oct. 15, 2017

In December of 2016, St. Mark's South Milwaukee was awarded a Mission Development Grant of \$3600 to hold events in the new Drexel Town Square development in Oak Creek.

The Original Plan

St. Mark's would begin hosting a series of events which would be held in a new community in Oak Creek called Drexel Town Square. The attendees would be from this community and the events would take place in the community, perhaps at the Oak Creek public library or at the Water Street Brewery or Starbucks. St. Mark's would employ a part-time leader to run the events. Our parish priest, Fr. Steve Kuhl, would be favored. There would be about 24 sessions during the first year beginning in January, 2017. The sessions would be promoted by St. Mark's to the local community using local websites, social media, and by posting notices at the library and in the apartment building lobbies.

The Actual Events

In April of 2017, we started a website called "Spirit on the Square." We used the website to promote an event called Spiritual Trivia. Our Master of Ceremonies was Fr. Steve Kuhl. Spiritual Trivia was a series of 30 trivia questions related to spirituality, Christianity and other religions. The participants played in teams. Points were awarded for correct answers and winning teams received gift cards as a prize. We offered free appetizers during the event. Participants purchased their own beverages.

We chose to hold our events using a section of the Water Street Brewery. This restaurant is within the Drexel Town Square community. This allowed us to be out in the target community at a very public location.

After having a trial run at the church, our first event was held on May 18th. We then held five more events about every two weeks during the months of May, June, July and August. In early August, we began using a social media site called MeetUp to promote the events.

Results

Attendance ranged from 10 to 15 players per event. St. Mark's parishioners made up about 80% of the participants. Over the course of the summer, we had altogether about five new people attend who were not congregants or their family members. Using MeetUp was helpful. The event we held after posting it on MeetUp included three new people who attended because of the posting.

Through August 17th, we spent \$1669, including \$289 on food, \$240 on prizes, \$875 on wages, and \$74 on online fees for the website and MeetUp.

Challenges

We ran into a few challenges along the way. First, our original opinion of Drexel Town Square being a mini community within a community did not match the reality. For the most part, it is just a shopping area located near apartment buildings and a library which largely all act on their own. This made it difficult to deliver our message. For example, though the library has a video display in its main lobby, it is only used to display public notices, not anything from participants in the community. There is no “Drexel Town Square” website to post announcements. None of the apartment buildings have public online bulletin boards. However, using MeetUp seemed to resolve some of these issues. This was our one promising discovery in the area of promotion.

The facilities available for an event such as ours were limited. We did not want to use the library conference rooms because they were too sterile for this type of event, were expensive to rent and they closed at 7:30 pm. The Water Street Brewery was the only restaurant that was big enough to give us use of a section for a couple hours. And while they were gracious hosts, they would not allow us to put up any signage or promote our event. And it was too noisy for some of our guests.

Our group felt that if we had a better venue and a better way to advertise, then we would have better results.

Future

Though our attendance was low, we are satisfied with our type of event. The trivia seems to be entertaining. It draws the right audience and gives us a good chance to interact one-on-one with visitors.

What we plan on doing next is to hold a session of Spiritual Trivia at a restaurant closer to St. Mark’s in South Milwaukee called Pat’s Oak Manor, tentatively scheduled for November 9th. While it is outside of Drexel Town Square, having it closer to St. Mark’s gives us some better recognition within the community and it gives us a less noisy environment to be in. We will continue to use MeetUp to promote the event.

Conclusion

We will continue this endeavor into 2018. While we have not found a formula that works to our satisfaction, we will continue to try different things to see if we can reach more people to spread God’s Word and to continue to develop our congregation.

Yours in Christ,

Thomas Junger
Grant Administrator
St. Mark’s, South Milwaukee
tomjunger@gmail.com

Fr. Steve Kuhl
Rector
St. Mark’s, South Milwaukee
skuhl1@wi.rr.com