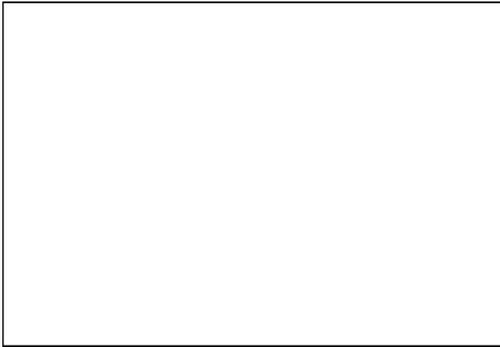


Christmas Eve Service makes Front Page Photo

Posted At : January 5, 2009 5:08 PM | Posted By : Steven Erat

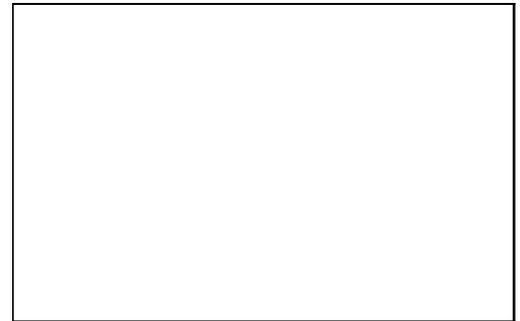
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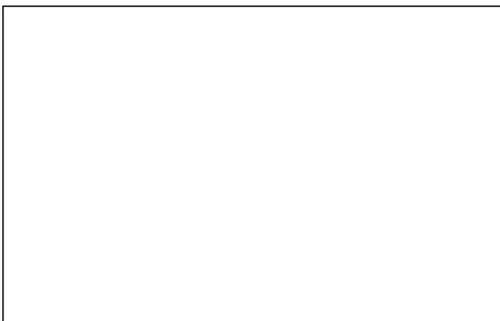
A couple weeks ago a friend at the First Parish Photography Club suggested the idea of photographing an outdoor, candlelight service on Christmas Eve in Concord, Massachusetts. As a recent graduate of the Professional Digital Photography program at the **Center for Digital Imaging Arts** at Boston University, I embraced the opportunity as a means of practicing real event photography, a genre of its own requiring distinct skills apart from other types of photography.

This event was the first outdoor service in the 300+ year history of the First Parish, due to ongoing renovations this year. Historically as many as four services are held there on Christmas Eve, having as many as 500 attendees per service. This made planning a bit of a challenge because the number of attendees could range anywhere from a hundred to perhaps a thousand.

Anticipating upwards of 1000 people wandering about in front of the parish, I set up 3 video lights from the street and a ladder in case I needed to get a decent exposure of the crowd from behind with the church and steeple in the distance. I ended up not using the lights because the crowd was in the range of 100-200 people, compacted closely in the arching driveway at the base of the parish steps.



I decided to move up front and try to get right in the middle of the action, a lesson I learned from CDIA instructor **Matt Teuten**. Don't fear, just jump right in. So I did. During the 30 minute service I crept from the edges towards the middle of the action between the choir on the steps and the audience just a few feet in front. I worked my way in to the center, creeping low to not block the audience's view and plopped right down on the driveway into the middle of a puddle from some melting snow.



It didn't matter that I was wet in freezing temperatures. The eye level view of the children was incredible and loved being immersed in the middle of it all.

All I could think about was composition and trying to get the autofocus to connect with something of contrast. It was a very dark event. Of course I couldn't use any flash because it would be terribly disruptive at

a candlelight service. So I had to shoot at ISO 3200 to achieve the candid nature with the ambient light. I used two cameras including Canon 20D at F4 with a 10-22mm ultra wide angle lens, and a Canon 30D at F2.8 with a 24-70mm, both set to aperture priority exposure.

The autofocus was having some difficulty because of the darkness so I found that if I put a focus point on an area of brightness like one of candles, then I could get faster and better focusing. Then my optical viewfinder kept fogging up making focusing even harder. No time to stop and clean the camera so I just kept shooting while trying to detect the red flicker of one of the focal points activating.

The effort was well worth it. I could sense that I was getting excellent composition, up close, and I was delighted at home that night during the editing (*yes, I did the editing on Christmas Eve: **Thank you Lightroom!***) because I found most of the images had a reasonably sharp focus for the conditions. In **Lightroom** I bumped up the Luminance Noise Reduction and Color Noise Reduction filters to 100 to reduce most of the noise produced by shooting at 3200, then ran them through a **Noise Ninja** filter as a batch action in Photoshop CS4 just for good measure. Back in Lightroom I bumped up the contrast and clarity to their midpoints and that was it. In an hour and a half I was able to edit 250 images down to about 30 and quickly post process them and upload to Flickr.

To wrap things up, I sent an email to the town newspaper, **The Concord Journal**, with small versions exported from Lightroom. They replied later to request print quality versions of three images. The day of publication, January 1st, I checked the online version of the newspaper and found that none of the images were shown. Moderately disheartened, I put it out of mind.

Tonight I received a call and email to congratulate me on my front page photo, and I was bewildered. Then it dawned on me that one of the photos must have run, and I was thrilled to see that it made the lead photo of the print edition. Yay!

At CDIA we were taught that as Professional Photographers to never diminish the value of our work and to not work for free and to not drastically undercut other photographers just to get the job. Still, I did this work out of my enthusiasm for photography and my membership in the parish photo club. Although I didn't receive monetary payment for the image running in the news, it still has value to me. The value is getting my name out there in a prominent location attached to a quality image that demonstrates my skill and my product.

A well established, local photographer in Concord, **Pierre Chiha**, emailed to congratulate me where he added, "It's rare that the Concord Journal uses for the front page an image which was not taken by one of their own photographers, and even more rare to give proper credit."

To me, the best shot during the service came when a little blonde haired girl perched herself on an empty area in the parish steps right in front of me with a single candle cupped in her hands. She sat there for a few fleeting moments looking right into the lens as

though to say with her eyes, "Take my photo". As a photographer, it was a tiny, perfect moment.

[View the set on Flickr](#)

