

Adoration chapel in Towson celebrates 20 years of perpetual prayer

TOWSON - The perpetual adoration chapel at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Towson opened to the public on a fair November day in 1998, the realization of an idea championed by Monsignor Edward Lynch, pastor, and Martin Barry and Paul Smith, two of his parishioners.

On Nov. 25, nearly 20 years later to the day and under strikingly similar weather conditions, worshipers celebrated the anniversary with a formal rededication ceremony and reception, following a noon Mass celebrated by Bishop Mark Brennan.

The rededication included Bishop Brennan blessing all in attendance with holy water.

Father Joseph Barr, pastor of Immaculate Conception since 2010, reflected on the experience of worshipers who visit the chapel in prayer.

"Wherever we acknowledge God's gifts, we prepare ourselves to take part fully in the Eucharist, especially as we enter into this adoration chapel," he said. "We experience the sum of all blessings, the crown, the source of all thanksgiving."

A short reception honored the founders (Barry died shortly after the opening, Monsignor Lynch in 2014) and those who have worked hard since to maintain the chapel. They included Smith, who was pleased that a 20-year-old idea was still going strong.

"Those who took over a few years ago did a marvelous job of keeping everything going," Smith said. "It makes me very happy."

Inside the chapel, the Eucharist is exposed inside a monstrance around the clock so visitors can pray and worship Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

Loretta Hoffman, a parishioner of Immaculate Conception for 30 of her 80 years, has been a regular at the chapel since it opened. For her, it is a place to reclaim peace.

"I can tell you from my own experiences that if I'm in the height of something that's causing me a lot of difficulties," she said, "I come here, spend an hour, and I come out in peace, a peace that surpasses all understanding, that Jesus promised to give us in Scripture.

"You go in sad, you come out smiling. It is a beautiful place of refuge. For everyone."

The adoration chapel is open to all, and Hoffman routinely prays there with non-Catholics.

"There's one lady who comes after my commitment," she said. "She's Protestant, and she gets down on her knees to praise the Lord. I don't know if God has a mind for her to become Catholic. Maybe not, but she's here."

According to therealpresence.org, there are approximately 150 adoration sites in Maryland. In addition to the Adoration Chapel at Immaculate Conception, others offering perpetual worship in the Archdiocese of Baltimore include Holy Family, Davidsonville; St. John, Westminster; St. Joseph, Sykesville; St. Maria Goretti High School, Hagerstown; St. Mary's, Annapolis; and St. Peter the Apostle, Libertytown. Many other parishes offer scheduled times for adoration throughout the week.

Maintaining the schedule for a perpetual adoration chapel is no easy feat. In 1998, Bernie Pilon took on the responsibility of scheduling volunteers to ensure the chapel remained open 24 hours a day. Beth Van Natta, his daughter, moved the entire process online last year, simplifying a task that tracks hundreds of volunteers serving one-hour shifts.

"I make sure that all of the open hours get filled," Van Natta said. "I will find somebody to do it, or I will do it myself."

She has seen an increase in worshipers in recent years.

"People aren't necessarily signing up for hours, but they are coming in anyway," Van

Natta said. "I'm finding that we have at least a half-dozen people in there now every time I go in."

Newer proponents include Tess Sandkuhler, a regular adorer for three years, whose testimony was read by Father Barr at the reception.

"I feel like I have found the best-kept secret ever," Sandkulher wrote. "It is absolutely my privilege and honor to spend this time with our Lord. He has so generously given me and my whole family an abundance of graces. Being with Him in the chapel has drawn me closer to Him. I can't imagine any place more peaceful. Adoration is the spiritual engine I need to help me on my journey to heaven. ..."

Father Barr noted the regional support of the adoration chapel.

"We couldn't run this without the help of other participants coming from north Baltimore County," he said. "I think we need to have the same model as they do for parishes when we're talking about regions and pastorates.

"We have to have this mentality that it's not just one parish's adoration chapel; it is a regional responsibility, opportunity and privilege."

For more information, visit
https://www.theimmaculate.org/church/worship/adoration_chapel/index.html .