

# Baltimore's Blessed Sacrament celebrates 100 years

Ben Gregorek's eyes widened as he scanned the inside of Baltimore's Church of the Blessed Sacrament. It had been decades since the 47-year-old had stepped foot in the church, and he thought about the many prayerful days he spent as a child with his mother there.

"This is the church I was baptized in," Gregorek said. "This is real special to me."

Gregorek was among many former parishioners of Blessed Sacrament who returned for its 100th anniversary Mass Sept. 18. Longtime parishioners, such as Wilma Myles and Helen Scott, welcomed back old friends with smiles and warm embraces.

"You see so many people that were young people and young adults and now they have their own families and their own kids," said Myles, a parishioner of 55-plus years. "I knew some of their parents. It was just a close-knit group."

Scott found Blessed Sacrament easy to define.

"It means home, family, friendship, unity and Christian charity," Scott said.

All of that was on display during a weekend of anniversary celebrations, which included a Sept. 17 gala attended by nearly 130 people at Columbus Gardens.

Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden celebrated the Sept. 18 anniversary Mass. He said that Blessed Sacrament has historically been rich in vocations, citing the 40 women who became religious sisters, 24 men who became priests and three men who became religious brothers. One former parishioner, Bishop Madden said, had become a bishop. That man, retired Bishop William C. Newman, concelebrated the anniversary Mass with Bishop Madden.

"This is indeed a very special community and this house of God, so filled with prayer and grace, is a sacred space," Bishop Madden said. "It is the place of the Blessed Sacrament. It is the true home of the Blessed Sacrament community."

The parish has been an anchor in the surrounding Pen Lucy community. The parish's former convent is now home to the Marian House for women leading lives post-addiction or post-homelessness. Scott said the parish maintains that building and the former school, which houses Safe Haven shelter.

The parish has been through its share of struggles. Scott said there are fewer parishioners than decades ago. But, Blessed Sacrament is seeing a renaissance thanks to lay people taking on larger leadership roles.

"They've given their time and the talent," Myles said.

Father Joseph L. Muth Jr. became pastor of Blessed Sacrament early in 2010, while retaining his pastor duties at St. Matthew, Northwood.

During closing comments at the Mass, Father Muth said Blessed Sacrament is only starting to make history thanks to a spirit of selflessness and prayer.

"I don't know what you've heard over the years, I don't know what rumors you were told, I don't know what stories were shared with you," Father Muth said. "You might have heard 'Blessed Sacrament is closing, Blessed Sacrament is dying, Blessed Sacrament is falling apart. Ain't it a shame? It used to be this and it used to be that.' Brothers and sisters, if you don't remember anything else today, remember these four words: Blessed Sacrament is alive!"

With that, the hundreds assembled rose to their feet applauding and shouting "Amen!"