

Perpetual adoration returns to Boston after 40-year absence

BOSTON – New billboards featuring the Eucharist displayed in a monstrance aim to get the word out about the return of perpetual adoration to Boston after a 40-year absence.

The two giant signboards tower over the streets in two Boston communities, Brighton and East Boston. The words under the image read “The Son’s rays for your soul.”

Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley of Boston was scheduled to celebrate Mass at St. Clement Eucharistic Shrine Aug. 15, the solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to mark the start of adoration.

From then on, the Eucharist will be exposed in a monstrance all day, every day, apart from regularly scheduled Mass times. Currently, the shrine offers adoration six hours or more daily.

Tim Van Damm, coordinator of the effort, said the grace at the already vibrant St. Clement community will be multiplied.

“Anytime the Lord is present 24 hours a day, seven days a week, people are changed,” he said. “This is a way to build spiritually and bring people together in prayer.”

Van Damm said St. Clement, a community he has been active in since 2000, was a natural choice for perpetual adoration because it is a eucharistic shrine, designated as such by Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston in 1945.

St. Clement was originally staffed by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, who maintained perpetual adoration from 1945 until the late 1960s. The Oblates of the Virgin Mary began staffing the shrine in 1976.

The effort to bring perpetual adoration back to Boston is a direct response to the call

of Pope Benedict XVI to have spaces dedicated to prayers for vocations and the sanctity of priests during the Year for Priests, which began this June and runs to June 2010. St. Clement will be the designated site in the central region of the archdiocese.

Van Damm said the inspiration for his involvement came from his own need to adore the Lord in the Eucharist. He told *The Pilot*, Boston's archdiocesan newspaper, that adoration has "reignited" his faith and given him much peace.

Marie Baranko, another member of the St. Clement community, agreed. Before she came to the shrine, Baranko said she did not believe in Christ's real presence in the Eucharist. Raised Catholic, she had never before seen adoration. After being invited to the shrine by a roommate, she attended adoration and recognized Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

"When you seek the truth, God honors that," she said. "He reveals himself to you."

Her experience also has resulted in the discernment of her vocation. She will be entering the Sisters of Life order in September. She will be praying from New York for the success of the perpetual adoration at St. Clement, she said.

"The shrine has played a major role in my vocation," she said. "It's centered around the Eucharist."

She hopes that perpetual adoration at St. Clement will help others to "fall more in love with the Lord."

Father Peter Grover, an Oblate of the Virgin Mary who is director of the shrine, said perpetual adoration has a "powerful effect" wherever it is instituted.

"Any church that emphasizes prayer is going to affect the church of Boston as well as the community," he said. "It will be a big grace in the city."

In addition to the billboards, organizers were sending e-mails and posting signs in neighboring parishes to invite everyone to adoration at St. Clement. Van Damm has been a guest on two national radio shows, and organizers also hoped to be able to buy advertising space on local subway trains.

In an interview Aug. 4 on the show “This Is the Day” on Catholic TV, a television ministry of the Boston Archdiocese, Father Grover likened spending time at eucharistic adoration to staying at a place his brother owns “in the deep woods of Maine.”

There, the priest said, he just sits by the lake soaking in the quiet and the beauty, and when he returns to the busy, noisy streets of Boston where the shrine is, he still has with him the peace and serenity of the outdoors.

“That’s adoration for me,” he said. “I just soak in (God’s) beauty, his grace, his patience, his strength, his courage,” which he said helps him face life’s daily challenges. “It’s just the greatest thing,” he added.