

For 20 years, they've kept watch with their Lord 24/7

By Peg Quann, staff writer

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Bill Fraser/Photojournalist

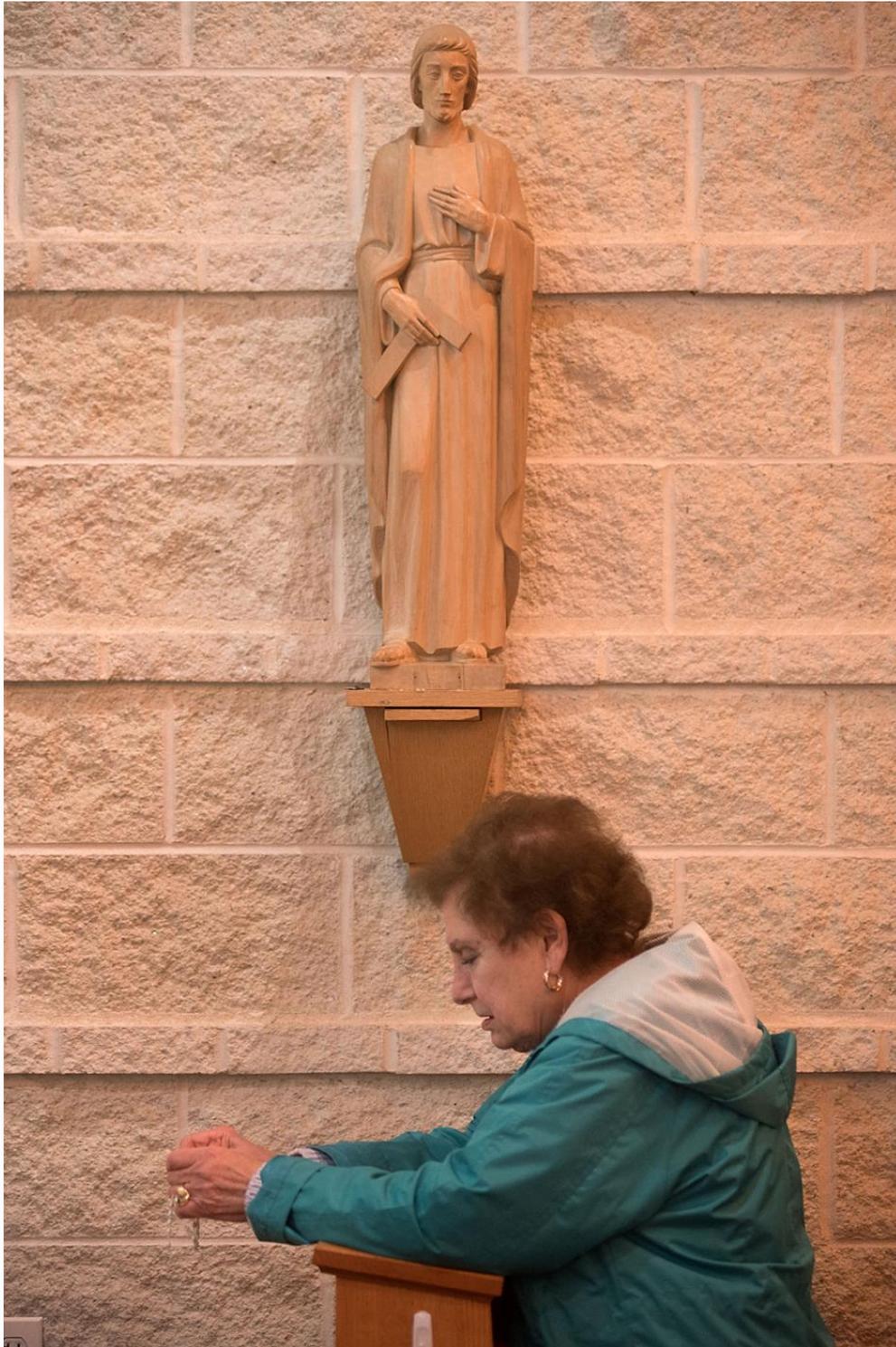
Parishioners pray inside the Adoration Chapel at St. Bede the Venerable Church in the Holland section of Northampton. The parish is celebrating 20 years of 24/7 prayers in the chapel with a special event this Sunday, January 21.

In both the silence of the night and the bustle of the day, they visit with their Lord.

For 20 years, hundreds of local Catholics have made sure that the Blessed Sacrament — the consecrated communion wafer that they believe holds the mystical body of Christ — is adored around the clock at two area parishes, St. Bede the Venerable in Northampton and St. Ignatius of Antioch in Lower Makefield. Other area parishes offer limited times during the week to do the same.

Those who pray before the host say it offers them comfort and peace in an often troubled world. "We have teams of people who are committed to being there 24/7," said Monsignor John C. Marine, pastor of St. Bede's parish. "Catholics believe the bread has been consecrated into the

Body of Christ and there is the real presence of Jesus.... The Blessed Sacrament is not left unattended."



Bill Fraser/Photojournalist

Pat Waters of Holland prays before the Blessed Sacrament in the Adoration Chapel of St. Bede the Venerable.

The belief is based on the Scriptures' description of the Last Supper during which Jesus consecrated bread and wine as his body and blood and told his followers to do so. Catholics consider receiving the Eucharist — the consecrated bread and wine — a sacrament. Consecrated hosts normally are placed in a tabernacle when not given out for Holy Communion during Mass or put in a special holder called a monstrance for adoration. Praying before the host is a way to stay close to the Lord, those who participate in adoration say.

On Saturday, St. Bede's will hold a retreat to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the founding of its adoration society and thank those who have made the round-the-clock prayer vigils possible. St. Ignatius' parish is planning a celebration for March 25.

Other parishes offer adoration at varying times throughout the week. For example, St. Frances Cabrini parish in the Fairless Hills section of Falls has a chapel that is open for adoration from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and from 12:30 to 6 p.m. Sundays, after the morning Masses.

The Eucharistic adoration began after St. Frances Cabrini and St. Joseph the Worker parishes merged last fall. The prayer vigils that took place at St. Joseph the Worker moved to the chapel in the former convent at St. Frances Cabrini, which parish members had renovated into an activities center.

"It never skipped a beat," said Susan Moratti, a young woman from Bristol Township who formerly prayed at St. Joseph and stopped at St. Frances to pray Wednesday afternoon, her rosary beads held in her hands before her.

"They stop by after work, before they go to work. It's a peaceful thing," said Monsignor Michael McCormac, pastor at St. Frances, as he pointed to an enclosure that parishioner Tony Pitaro made from wood taken from St. Joseph the Worker to surround the monstrance holding the consecrated host.

Sean and Debbie McDermott have coordinated the adoration society at St. Bede's for the past six years and have been members for 19 years. Debbie estimated that more than 200 people are "regular adorers" and many more visitors come to pray in the special chapel that was built over a decade ago and is separate from the larger church. Those who want prayers for a sick loved one, or another cause, will write down the request in a petition book so that it will be included in the prayers of the people visiting the chapel.

"We always have a constant flow of people coming for visits. It might be for five minutes or however long they have," she said.

McDermott takes a midnight-to-1 a.m. shift at St. Bede on Wednesday mornings. "You always feel so much better after you made the visit. It's like a little glimpse of heaven — it really is," she said.

The chapel serves not just members of St. Bede's, but people from neighboring parishes that might have adoration programs one or more days a week but where it isn't feasible or safe to have a building open around the clock. McDermott said members of St. Andrew parish in Newtown Township, St. Vincent de Paul in Northampton, Our Lady of Good Counsel in Upper Southampton and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Lower Southampton also come to St. Bede's chapel to pray, when the adoration programs at their own parishes are not taking place.



Bill Fraser/Photojournalist

The Adoration Chapel at St. Bede the Venerable Church.

Kate Duffy of Northampton, who has lived in the parish for more than 40 years, has been a regular since the adoration program began. She takes the 5-to-6 a.m. hour every Monday morning. "It gets the week off to a good start," she said.

Dot Rodgers, also of Northampton, and another woman have the 1-to-2 a.m. shift every Thursday morning. "I drink a little extra coffee and stay up," she said, laughing. A mother of seven — including four married children — she said all of her kids still go to church and she

credits the prayers they say as a family and the prayers she makes in the wee hours of the morning. "It's truly a miracle," she said.

For widow Helen Visco of Northampton, the visits are so important that she told family members in Montreal about the Eucharistic adoration, and their church there started a similar program. "You come here. You forget everything for an hour. You just sit here and talk to God."

Sometimes, when the prayer teams leave the chapel, they will see police on the overnight shift patrolling outside.

Amy Wall, a deaf child whose cure of hearing loss became one of the miracles in the canonization of St. Katharine Drexel, was a member of St. Bede's. McDermott said that has been a blessing bestowed on the parish, possibly because of all the prayers offered there.

The 24/7 adoration program at St. Ignatius of Antioch parish also has a group of more than 200 regular members, including those from neighboring parishes in Bucks County and New Jersey. An adoration chapel is set up in the parish's Antioch Center. The chapel is open to all but is accessed through a keypad for security, so people who want to participate should call the church office for more information about the program.

Marianne Kloc of Lower Makefield, the coordinator at St. Ignatius, said she, her husband, Walter, and their grown sons participate regularly as well as many other people who are scheduled in quadrants, with each hour having its own supervisor who makes sure that someone is always there for that specific hour. Organizing the effort is "a community happening," she said.

"We really believe it is Jesus, that he is with us.... He is blessing us," she said.

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