

Atlanta archdiocese shows fruits of renewed devotion

Archbishop's focus on eucharistic adoration has resulted in full seminaries, dynamic parishes and a vibrant Catholic spiritual life

By Mary DeTurris Poust

If you ask the people of the Atlanta archdiocese what has caused a surge in vocations to the priesthood or what makes their parishes so dynamic or what draws thousands of people to their annual congress, they all attribute it to one thing: eucharistic adoration.

Ten years ago, on the feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, Archbishop John F. Donoghue, then the newly installed archbishop of Atlanta, requested that a perpetual-adoration chapel open at the Cathedral of Christ the King. Citing a 1992 Gallup poll that found only one-third of U.S. Catholics polled believed in the true presence, Archbishop Donoghue

encouraged all parishes in his archdiocese to promote eucharistic devotions.

"At such times, when the central mystery of God's redemptive act is assailed, then the faithful must meet the doubters with renewed conviction and visible witness," he wrote in a 1993 pastoral letter. "God has given us everything by giving us the life and death and resurrection of His Son — now we must respond by giving ourselves devotedly to His real presence."

Today, 10 parishes in the Archdiocese of Atlanta have perpetual-adoration chapels, and at least 40 other parishes have adoration on a weekly or monthly basis. The archdiocese also has seen vocations to the priesthood jump dramatically, from eight seminarians in 1985 to 50 seminarians today.

"I believe our success in vocations comes from eucharistic adoration, people taking time to pray before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament," said Father Brian Higgins, director of vocations

for the archdiocese. He said many people can't comprehend the idea of relying on such a "simple solution" for a complex problem. "I am more confused why vocation directors don't promote eucharistic adoration."

Father Higgins told Our Sunday Visitor that often when people hear about eucharistic adoration they think that it's "pre-Vatican II" and, therefore, not something that complements a contemporary faith.

"How can Christ and prayer be considered pre-Vatican II, especially when you see results?" he asked. "Everything springs from the Eucharist. Sometimes we want to put the cart before the horse. People want to do the Rosary or scriptural study and then build up to Eucharistic Adoration. No, it should start with eucharistic adoration. It's just not as difficult as we make it out to be. Christianity is not difficult. Christians have just made it that way. We can be the people that Christ created us to be, but we just have to put the



Starting adoration in your parish

Perpetual adoration can seem a daunting undertaking at first. So, start with establishing First Friday adoration in your parish. From there, it can grow into weekly adoration and perpetual adoration if your pastor and parish can support it.

"You start with a Thursday or Friday adoration, and you build on each side of it. As you educate, you add hours," said Mary Elkins, who coordinates perpetual adoration at Atlanta's Cathedral of Christ the King. "You'll be amazed. As you educate the people, those hours fill up."

Elkins said that today's society needs adoration more than ever.

"One of the things that I find is that our world and Satan want us to keep our focus off of God. If our heart is not there with Jesus, our priorities won't be there," she said. "As the Holy Father has said, the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith, and through the Eucharist we will find salvation and grow because of the love Jesus had. This is Jesus, present all the time."

For more information on how to begin Eucharistic Adoration, visit www.therealpresence.org, which provides background information and Church documents on the Eucharist as well as a download of the "Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration Manual." The site also lists days and times for eucharistic adoration in churches and chapels around the country.

effort forward and request it."

Lives changed

The people of the Archdiocese of Atlanta have been willing to put the effort forward in a big way. When the cathedral's perpetual adoration chapel first opened, 850 people signed up to be guardians, some of them driving across the archdiocese for their hour-long vigils.

"We had no idea it was going to grow the way it has. We have seen lives changed," said Keri Z. Allen, director of evangelization for the archdiocese and director of adult enrichment and evangelization at the Cathedral of Christ the King. "There are people that get engaged in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and that's wonderful. There are parents that bring their children to adoration, and that's wonderful."

Allen said every RCIA candidate at the cathedral parish is asked to spend at least an hour a week in front of the Blessed Sacrament.

"We have seen the impact that makes on their prayer lives," she told OSV. "It's a great way of getting them into silence, into listening, into prayer, and to be exposed to the true presence."

All Catholics can reap the same benefits, Allen said.

— for our Church and for our nation," she said.

20,000-strong

In addition to Eucharistic Adoration, in an effort to help Georgia Catholics deepen their understanding of the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, the Archdiocese of Atlanta holds an annual eucharistic congress on the feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. The 1996 congress, the first called by Archbishop Donoghue, drew some 1,500 people. This year, 20,000 people of all ages attended the program, which included special tracks for children, teens, young adults, Hispanics and Vietnamese.

"You could tell Archbishop Donoghue was being called, as he was called to start eucharistic adoration in the archdiocese, to take it to the next level," said Mary Elkins, special events coordinator for the archdiocese and the one responsible for the logistics of the annual congress.

"We are losing reverence for the Eucharist. It has become so casual. People receive Communion and then walk right out the door. What does that say to your children? What does that say to the rest of the faith community? What do you truly believe? Was that Jesus you received? Would you

ing and experiencing the real presence of Christ for Catholics."

Better than therapy

Elkins told OSV that her own life has been dramatically changed by her participation in eucharistic adoration.

"The time for me, that hour that I spend in adoration, is better than any therapy I could ever pay for because I'm spending it with the Lord. I'm able to sit in the quietness. It forces me to stop and listen to God," she said. "And then there are times when I just need to ramble, and I can ramble in my mind in prayer, and I know He's there and He will calm me. He puts me right back where I need to be."

Because the feast of Corpus Christi falls on Memorial Day weekend next year, the 2005 eucharistic congress will be moved one week back to June 4. That date also happens to be the 50th anniversary of Archbishop Donoghue's ordination to the priesthood, something that Elkins sees as more than just a happy coincidence.

"It's just amazing that this would happen for a man who took such a step," she said. "Of the many things he brought to Atlanta, this is the greatest gift he's ever given. He has given us back a love of the Eucharist."

Mary DeTurris Poust is a senior correspondent for Our Sunday Visitor.

Resources

■ "Eucharistic Adoration" pamphlet (Our Sunday Visitor, pkg. of 50 for \$12.95)

■ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* ("The Church of the Eucharist"), 2003 encyclical by Pope John Paul II

■ To find a site for adoration in your area, visit www.therealpresence.org

■ For more information on eucharistic adoration, visit www.therealpresence.org or call 1-800-368-3688

■ For more information on the annual eucharistic congress, visit www.therealpresence.org or call 1-800-368-3688

e
l
a
cor
cto/
cto/
to
en
d
81