

New Adoration chapel honors Pope John Paul II

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April 26, 2009

BY RENA FULKA

The world's first adoration chapel in honor of Pope John Paul II is a restful place.

Housed in a former office at St. James the Greater Catholic Church in Sauk Village, the soothing prayer room features refurbished pews, a replated tabernacle and religious art of Jesus and the Blessed Mother.

Encapsulated in glass is a white zucchetto, or scull cap, once worn by John Paul. It was a gift from Oscar Delgado, a local man who was baptized 47 years ago on the date John Paul was installed as pope in 1978.

Like the cap, the artwork and services were donations from Southland residents.

"This chapel is a complete gift from the Lord," the Rev. David Simonetti said.

"The Lord kept putting gifts in front of us for nine months, and on April 5, the chapel was given birth."

The priest said he learned of the chapel's first-of-its-kind status in a letter from the the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Mass.

Unless there's a designated devotion, the Pope John Paul II Chapel of Eucharistic Adoration is a quiet sanctuary. At its center is the Eucharistic host, exposed in a monstrance for adoration by the faithful from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. daily.

Visitors can pray the rosary or another devotion, read the Bible or sit quietly in front of the host.

"Someone needs to be there when the sacrament is exposed, so we asked people to commit to one hour per week," Simonetti said.

"When people spend time with the Blessed Sacrament, they're spending time face-to-face with the Lord. It leads them back to Mass and confession."

Simonetti proposed the chapel for his 1,300-member congregation two weeks after becoming pastor of St. James Church, which was founded by German immigrants and named in honor of the first apostle martyred in 44 A.D.

"For me as a priest, my job is to lead people to the love and mercy of God," Simonetti said.

"I wanted to build something that will lead them to prayer and open them to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

Simonetti is a Chicago Heights native who attended St. Agnes Catholic Church and taught eighth grade for 10 years before entering the seminary.

"In sixth grade, I felt a desire to be a priest, but I took the scenic route," he said.

He began his ministry in 2005 at Queen of Martyrs Catholic Church in Evergreen Park.

Among Simonetti's fondest memories is a 2003 visit to Rome, where he met face-to-face with John Paul, who was an advocate of Eucharistic Adoration.

"The pope's greatest contribution to the church was to bring people back to God," Simonetti said, adding that he hopes the new chapel will do the same.

"Parishes that have Adoration grow because they're blessed by the Lord," he said.

"The disciples sat at the feet of the master first. Then he sent them out in his name."

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The Pope John Paul II Chapel of Eucharistic Adoration is housed at St. James the Greater Catholic Church, 22400 S. Torrence Ave., Sauk Village.

The chapel, which has its own entrance, is open daily from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Every hour on the hour, the faithful pray the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy devotion and the official prayer for the beatification of Pope John Paul II. Prayer cards are provided in the pews.

<http://www.southtownstar.com/lifestyles/fulka/1542629,042609keepingfaith.article>