

► Kathy Baxter, left, and Karen Fitts in the adoration chapel at St. Mel Parish in Fair Oaks.



OUR STORY

## ‘Come to the quiet’

**EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION RENEWS YOUR SOUL, SAY KATHY AND KAREN OF ST. MEL PARISH IN FAIR OAKS**

BY JULIE SLY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE GERMAN



**atholics can show their adoration to God in many ways, but in Eucharistic adoration “we spend time adoring the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist,” says**

**Kathy Baxter, co-coordinator of eucharistic adoration at St. Mel Parish in Fair Oaks.**

Eucharistic adoration is “more powerful than you can possibly imagine,” says Kathy, who has been an adorer in the chapel since 1989 and a member of the parish since 1988. “Once you become involved, you come to realize it’s one of the most perfect

ways to develop a personal relationship with Christ. If you come, you are drawn to want to be there every day.”

Eucharistic adoration is a centuries-old ritual and falls within a broader category of devotions and rituals that are associated with the

sacrament of the Eucharist. In a particular way, eucharistic adoration is an extension of the worship and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament that occurs in every Mass.

When Catholics say they are “going to adoration,” they are typically referring

to eucharistic adoration. In its most basic terms, it’s the worship of Jesus Christ outside of the Mass. A consecrated host is displayed in a monstrance on the altar so that all can see and pray before Jesus present in the Eucharist..

For more than 30 years, St. Mel Parish offered perpetual adoration, where the faithful were able to pray before the Lord at any time, day or night, with one person present in adoration at all times, because Jesus may never be left alone. That had to be altered with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The chapel is now open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each day.

Kathy, who grew up in Hutchinson, Kansas, attended Mass each morning during the first eight years of Catholic elementary school. Now married for 43 years with two adult daughters, two granddaughters and

a grandson, Kathy says adoration “brings peace into my personal life.”

“During the difficult years of raising teenagers, sometimes it was the only place I could go and just be calm, and realize that I am not in control. You give everything, all your worries, to God. Sometimes sitting before the Blessed Sacrament gives you that calm. It’s a place to go to find peace and comfort. God is in charge – you just let go and let him in your life and you do what you can.”

Adoration helped with her grief following the deaths of her mother-in-law, her father and a young nephew. “Much of my consolation came through adoration and it allowed God to lift me out of myself,” Kathy recalls.

Parishioners are often curious and ask her what she does during adoration. “We

have many prayer guides available, but I always tell people to go in and sit – with no plan of what you are going to do – just be there worshipping the Lord in the second most perfect way,” she notes.

“The Mass is first, and adoration will increase the action of knowing Jesus Christ personally. Anything that you might experience when you receive the Eucharist at Mass – spiritually and emotionally – increases your love and understanding of God’s creation and helps toward warding off temptations in your daily life. Adoration is not participating in a communal action as in Mass, but it’s having a personal one on one with the Lord. Pope Benedict once said adoration outside of Mass prolongs and intensifies what happens during Mass.”

There’s not much “quiet time” in today’s culture.

Kathy expresses concern that “especially among our young people – their lives are filled with technology, music and noise almost all the time. I’d like to get more of our young people becoming adorers to experience something different.”

Karen Fitts, who coordinates eucharistic adoration with Kathy, has been active at St. Mel Parish since 1982 and has three adult children and seven grandchildren. She’s been on the schedule for an hour of adoration each week since the chapel opened in 1988. “I would bring my little kids in for visits during the day when I could, and it’s been a part of my life since those early years,” she notes.

“It does seem amazing I’ve been adoring all these years, but the thing is, once God gets you, it’s hard to let go – for me anyway,” she says. “It’s the knowledge that God is there waiting for someone to come and visit him. That’s just how

I responded. Not everyone responds the same way. I invite people to come in and visit for a while. Sit down and be yourself in front of the Lord and let him reveal himself to you. You don’t have to go in and tell him everything, as he knows everything.”

Karen’s main source of prayer is attending Mass each morning. But she adds, “It’s almost impossible to do adoration an hour a week for 30-plus years and not notice a change in yourself. I can’t even imagine what my life would be without it or my Catholic faith. It makes you more introspective. It hasn’t always been perfect – sometimes I’ve gone and couldn’t wait for my hour to be over. Other times I’m anguished over something and I pour my heart out. It does change you and God takes his time working on you. It doesn’t happen overnight. He gradually starts chipping away at you. I’ve seen other people come in and kneel down in tears. It’s a place where people can come to feel unity with the Lord, and be healed and changed.”

“Once you’ve experienced adoration on a regular basis, you can’t just drop in once a year,” Kathy concludes. “You discipline yourself to (come) once a week or once a month and it’s a vital part of your life. Once you have experienced growth in your personal relationship with Jesus as your best friend, you will never leave him.” †

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▲ Karen Fitts, Kathy Baxter, and students at St. Mel School, Matthew and Lila Covert, pray before the Blessed Sacrament.



#### LEARN MORE

About eucharistic adoration at [www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/eucharistic-devotion](http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/eucharistic-devotion)





## HISTORY OF THE ADORATION CHAPEL AT ST. MEL PARISH IN FAIR OAKS

In 1990, St. Mel Parish added a new facility to house a eucharistic chapel, a school/parish library, school computer lab, and offices for youth ministry and religious education. Eucharistic adoration had begun prior to that on Feb. 11, 1988 on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Nick and Mary Murphy, at the behest of Father Richard Doheny (who died in 2006), pastor at that time, were the original coordinators of the chapel. The Murphys moved away in 1990 and Lou and Marge Della Villa became coordinators. Lou died in 2000, and for the following 21 years, Marge coordinated the chapel, making sure it was cleaned “and there was always someone present in the chapel 24/7 every day, except for Holy Thursday night until the Easter vigil,” Kathy recalls.

Marge’s daughter, Lennore Freeman, told Kathy “they were on duty all the time during holidays. Seldom did they get to prepare to have a family dinner on Thanksgiving or Christmas that wasn’t staggered due to someone having to cover the open hours at the chapel. Marge did have the help of Bill Savage and Chris Guzman over the years.” Marge suffered a stroke in December 2021 and died in May 2022. Following in Marge’s footsteps, Karen and Kathy, along with Kathy Yanez, Cheryl Hoffmann, Scott Crow and Doug Crumley, stepped up to coordinate continuous adoration in the chapel.

## SPEND TIME *in* EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION

**W**HAT WE LOOK AT has the power to change us. Our eyes are like portals to our imagination. Seeing something has a unique ability to stimulate new thoughts, clarify former ideas and significantly alter our perception. To gaze upon the Grand Canyon, the face of a child or, more problematically, images of war or immoral acts, means we encounter it in a different way than simply hearing about it or reading a description. Our days are filled with a constant barrage of images, videos and other visual stimulants which threaten to overwhelm us and cause us to think only about the here and now, the immediate and, in many cases, the visually pleasurable. As an antidote to the visual storm of the world, the Church has always used imagery to tell the story of salvation history. That is the genesis of the beautiful stained glass windows in so many of our churches, and beautiful art such as the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Ultimately, though, no art, architecture or image can replace gazing upon the face of Christ in prayer, and eucharistic adoration offers us a unique opportunity to do just that.

St. Teresa of Calcutta was famous for inviting everyone to encounter Jesus in the “distressing disguise of the poor,” but she was also known for spending significant time, every day, adoring, imploring and loving Jesus in the Eucharist. “Spend as much time as possible in front of the Blessed Sacrament and he will fill you with his strength and power,” she said.

It requires God-given faith to believe that what looks like a little piece of unleavened bread contained in the gold monstrance is supremely worthy of our attention, honor, worship and time. In eucharistic adoration, we direct our vision toward Love himself, encounter a mystery beyond the world’s comprehension and, most importantly, find ourselves in *his* gaze. Pope Benedict XVI once said, “Adoration is essentially an embrace with

Jesus in which I say to him: ‘I am yours, and I ask you to stay with me always.’ In a world full of competing attractions, constant stimulation and disorienting visual noise, time with the Blessed Sacrament can heal our wounds, calm our minds and redirect our gaze toward He who is the source of our joy, hope and ability to live in the world, but not of it. So spend some time adoring Jesus in the Eucharist because He never tires of looking lovingly upon you. †

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