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By JAMES W. WADE III
Staff Reporter

St. Adalbert/Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament church reopened Sunday to a standing room church full of old and supporting members. St. Adalbert located in the heart of the inner city at 2347 East 83rd Street has claimed to be the first and only African American Catholic church in Cleveland.

The church had been closed since June 6, 2010 so members are happy that the doors are open once again. One of the mainstream members, Linda Gamble, was joyous at the door as she greeted everyone. “If I were any happier today, I’d have to go to heaven! If I was any happier today, I’d be in heaven!” Gamble said.

The musical part of the service was rendered by Sandi Chapman and Michael Gulley. They had everybody involved in the songs. The new pastor, Father Gary D. Chmura, talked about what he had to do is visit a longtime member.

“Today is like a rebirth. I have been a member of this church since the seventies. Coming back today is like a new beginning,” said member Cynthia Sullivan. Sullivan fought back the tears as she shared how happy she was for the church to be open.

“St. Adalbert/Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament is church for all people… immigrants and Blacks. The church is not down the street or down the road, St. Adalbert is the church that will be in this location and it’s not going to be easy to rebuild but we will,” said Father Gary D. Chmura.

The new pastor was upbeat smiling as he shared his thoughts for making St. Adalbert a strong vibrant church again. “I will struggle with you, I will be working day and night with you, and I will pray with you and for you,” he said.

One of the great highlights of the Mass was when Father Ken was asked to come up for a few comments. Cheers rang out around the church as he was greeted with a standing ovation.

“You are all a powerhouse of prayer. This is a church where you can come home again,” said Father Ken. He talked about how much the church had suffered and how much they cried together. “Because of your faith and trust in the word, we have complained and grumble many times, but now St. Adalbert is open,” he added.

Father Gary spoke about the history of St. Adalbert/Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and why is important for everyone to help keep the doors open again. Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, established in 1922 as Cleveland’s first and only Black Catholic Church. But by 1961, Blessed Sacrament was in need of major repairs, so the diocese closed it and the congregation migrated a few blocks away to a dying Bohemian church, St. Adalbert’s on East 83rd Street.

“This day is a glorious day for St. Adalbert parish,” said Sister Juanita Shealey. The Shealey family is long time members and has been faithful to the church for many, many years. Sister Juanita and her sister Joy were busy making sure everything was going smooth.

“I am glad my church is back open. I am coming back,” said a tearful Rudy Thompson. Many like Thompson went to other parishes but missed what they had at St. Adalbert.

Long time member Leila Britt, mother of former City Council Member Pat Britt, was so happy to have the doors of St. Adalbert open again. “This is an excellent day for me and my family. We have been coming here a long time and I am proud of everyone who made this a special day,” she said.

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No matter where you went in the church you were greeted with a smile.

In closing, Father Gary let everyone know the new times for Mass and asked everyone to make sure they pick up an offering envelope to help keep the doors open. “Let me say this before leaving, above all I believe St. Adalbert/Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament will not be a good parish, it will be a great parish,” said Father Gary.