

Conference spreads the news of evangelization

As the youth minister of St. John the Evangelist in Severna Park, Cassandra Anderson is always looking for ways to bring new people into the fold.

Many of her peers in the Archdiocese of Baltimore face similar challenges, but thanks to the Upon This Rock Evangelization Conference Aug. 23, reaching out to others might become a lot easier.

The one-day conference, held at the Church of the Resurrection in Ellicott City, featured a variety of workshops that informed participants about attracting people of all walks of life into their respective churches.

The thirst for improving evangelization inside Baltimore was palpable.

“It’s essential,” Ms. Anderson said, “to provide that example, ‘this is how we evangelize and this is what we do.’ If I have better resources and better information from a day like this to intentionally be aware of evangelizing, then I can be a better resource for young people in the parish and encourage them to evangelize to older generations and their families.”

The goal was to provide a diverse group of 300 parish staff members, pastoral council members, lay people and evangelization committees with skills that will help them make their parishes welcoming places for believers and non-believers alike.

Attendance was up approximately 100 – a 50 percent increase over 2007 – thanks primarily to the addition of a Spanish language track hosted by Father Juan Puigbo of the Archdiocese of Washington.

Late in the morning, Ms. Anderson darted down the hallways of Resurrection, trying to choose from a variety of class offerings.

After hearing Chris Weber, director of the Catholic Education Ministries of Central Maryland, teach about advertising and selling ministries, she decided to take in a

seminar on the use of technology.

Ms. Anderson said she hoped the session would give her some ideas about connecting with youths, who, more and more, are using the Internet, computers and other digital technology.

"I try to meet them (young people) where they are and speak their language a little bit better," she said. "Being able to do that helps evangelize and helps bring them into the community and the church."

Growing numbers among Hispanic, Korean and Vietnamese populations in Baltimore could result in a move to a larger venue for the conference in coming years, organizers said.

"I think it's important for us to evangelize, certainly to the Hispanic population and to look really at the whole population, to see how diverse it is and how we can learn from one another," said Sharon Bogusz, coordinator of the archdiocese's evangelization and catechesis office.

While Father Puigbo spoke to Hispanic lay ministers, Father Edward M. Miller gave an impassioned keynote address in English inside the church.

The pastor of St. Bernardine in Baltimore told participants that evangelizing wasn't always a comfortable realm for Catholics.

"My Catholic brothers and sisters, you know your Bible," he said. "Don't let anyone ever intimidate you into believing you do not know the Bible."

Father Miller said that dedication to faith and God's word equipped lay people to tell the world about Jesus, a sentiment complemented by a spiritual he sung with the crowd.

"You do not need a formal title to be an evangelist," Father Miller said. "You do not need an office in the church, and you do not need ordination to be an evangelist."

During a prayer service earlier in the day, Bishop Denis J. Madden, urban vicar, said Catholics face a challenge of loving God more and spreading that love.

“One of the greatest gifts God can give us is the experience of the divine,” Bishop Madden said. “Each one of you, each one of us carries the Christ in us.”