

# Local young adults take center stage at national symposium

Megan Nappi didn't mince words as she sat in a circle with young adults from Baltimore and Washington, surrounded by some of the nation's leading adolescent catechesis experts Nov. 6 at the Maritime Institute and Conference Center in Linthicum.

Asked what advice she would give on teen formation, The University of Maryland student and parishioner of Millersville's Our Lady of the Fields told the 100 attendees of the four-day National Symposium on Adolescent Catechesis, "Don't water it down."

The response drew audible gasps, and even applause, from the gathering of academics, educators, youth ministers, bishops, practitioners and other leaders. The symposium was a project of three national Catholic youth formation groups brought together in one organization called the Partnership for Adolescent Catechesis.

"We have a whole spectrum of spirituality here," Robert McCarty, executive director of the National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry said at the event. "I think we have a real progressive kind of approach to spirituality and Catholicism and the traditional. I think we've struck a nice balance."

Ms. Nappi's statement served as a wake-up call for some and a confirmation for others at the event, which had been in discussion for 10 years. The symposium was created to help identify factors that impact adolescent faith formation in the United States and create a universal manner in which to catechize to them.

Mr. McCarty said faith formation opportunities must be seized at retreats, service projects, conferences, pilgrimages and through personal conversations. The standard school setting is no longer completely effective in the education of young people, they said.

"That's a shift," Mr. McCarty said. "My generation grew up in a class, and whether it was in Catholic school or parish, we sat in desks and we had people present to us."

The symposium had experts speak on the current state of adolescent formation, modern youth culture and outcomes of effective catechesis among other topics. During a presentation on well-formed adolescents, Bishop Richard J. Malone of the Diocese of Portland, Maine, said that proliferation of curriculum framework is not the “magic bullet” alone in strengthening adolescent catechesis.

“We do argue, though, that any efforts to improve adolescent catechesis that would exclude those doctrinal elements will fall short of the goal of well-formed teen decuples of Jesus Christ,” he said.

It was the Archdiocese of Baltimore’s Ms. Nappi who stole the show with her bluntness. She said that when she was in college, recent converts had a better grasp on the faith.

“I felt so gypped,” she said. “I had been Catholic for 18 years and I knew nothing. Not that it was watered down, but I didn’t have it.”

Church leaders said such honesty was refreshing.

“They want to know the truth,” Bishop Gregory M. Aymond of the Diocese of Austin, Texas, said of young people. “They may not accept it at that particular time and might not like the rules, but at least they’re challenged by it. I thought that advice was well-given and I hope we heard it in a very realistic way.”