

Pope says lay movements can help bishops

VATICAN CITY – A bishop can turn to Catholic lay movements not only when he needs an organized group to implement his pastoral plans, but also when he needs to care for his own soul, Pope Benedict XVI said.

When a movement gathers its “bishop-friends” together, it helps them experience “a more intense communion of hearts, a stronger mutual support and a greater shared commitment to showing that the church is a place of prayer and charity, a house of mercy and peace,” the pope said.

Pope Benedict spoke Feb. 8 at a joint audience for 80 bishops participating in a conference sponsored by the Focolare movement and 110 bishops attending a meeting organized by the Community of Sant’Egidio.

The pope said that from his days as a professor in Germany he has been convinced that “really, the movements are a gift of the Holy Spirit to the church.” The fact that the movements have reached out to bishops who draw strength from their spirituality and activities proves that “the diversity and unity of gifts and ministries are inseparable in the life of the church,” he said.

Pope Benedict said the variety of lay movements responds to the variety of needs and blessings found among the world’s peoples.

“In the rich Western world where, even though a culture of relativism exists, at the same time there is a widespread desire for spirituality, and your movements witness to the joy of the faith and the beauty of being Christian,” he said.

In the world’s poorest countries, he said, “they communicate the message of solidarity and make themselves the neighbors of the poor and the weak” with love that is both human and divine.

The pope said “communion between bishops and the movements” could be the spark needed for “a renewed commitment by the church to proclaiming and witnessing the

Gospel of hope and love in every corner of the world.”

He prayed that in forming solid friendships, the bishops and the movements would help each other in the work of evangelization, service to the poor and peacemaking.