

Take up your cross

By Elizabeth Skalski

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The loss of a child to AIDS and another in a car accident are crosses that two Archdiocese of Baltimore mothers must endure every day of their lives.

The women shared their personal testimony March 9 during the Way of the Cross, a modern and non-traditional take on 14 Stations of the Cross. The Way of the Cross was one aspect the three-day Mid-Atlantic Congress for Pastoral Leadership, which kicked off March 8.

The conference, held at the Hilton Hotel Baltimore, worked to strengthen pastoral leaders in their ministry and in the church from across the region and offered classes, trend sessions and nearly 100 breakout sessions. The theme was “Witness Hope!”

Religious educators, deacons, priests, liturgy directors, principals, music ministers and other attended.

Dee Hawthorne, a parishioner of St. Bernardine in Baltimore, who is a papal honoree and has worked with youths for decades, spoke about losing her son Anthony to AIDS. Linda Howard, a parishioner of Church of the Resurrection in Ellicott City, spoke about the pain of losing her daughter Tara in a car accident in 2006.

Hawthorne said that at age 27 (her HIV-positive son was) “condemned to death by a health care system.”

“He was condemned to death because he was poor,” she said.

Keeping in mind the theme of hope during the Way of the Cross, individuals shared stories of tragedy to depict the stations and how they have found Jesus.

Michael Ruzicki, coordinator of adult and sacramental formation for the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the creative director for the Way of the Cross, said the Way of the Cross celebrated the Stations of the Cross.

“Growing up, I would see Catholics come together to ‘celebrate’ the cross on Fridays in Lent. However, it never seemed like a true celebration,” Ruzicki said in an email. “Celebration doesn’t need to have clapping, dancing and an overwhelming amount of joy. More so, we know this celebration of the cross ends with the greatest glory of all.”

Sharon DeSipio, director of religious education for a church in the Archdiocese of Trenton, called the Way of the Cross “exceptional.”

“I knew it would be different than traditional stations,” said DeSipio, who said she enjoyed the personal witness stories. “It has to sink in.”

Marion Pierri, a youth minister and coordinator of confirmation for a church in the Archdiocese of Trenton, said she thought the personal witness stories were “very unique.”

“I expected it to be different – I wasn’t sure how exactly they were going to do it,” Pierri said.