

Why Catholic? program receives rave reviews

When Muriel Johnson started her Why Catholic? group at St. Cecilia, Baltimore, she had 12 people attending.

The program quickly expanded, and eventually Mrs. Johnson ran out of materials for all of the people gathering on Sunday mornings before church. She said her group used the African American and Archdiocesan versions of Why Catholic? and is very excited to pick up their materials again for the spring session.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore's four-year Why Catholic? program started in early September and was created to help adults rediscover why they became Catholic. Through readings, discussions and individual sharing parishioners remember what they learned in school years ago and get answers to nagging questions about their faith.

"For many Catholics the idea of discussing faith topics and sharing ones own faith and God experiences is sometimes a little intimidating," said Sharon Bogusz, coordinator for evangelization and adult catechesis. "What is so great about the Why Catholic? program is that it facilitates that process, making it easier for the participant to share faith thoughts and feelings in light of Catholic teaching."

Ms. Bogusz said overall, the first session of Why Catholic? was a success in the parishes. In the coming weeks she will be meeting with Why Catholic? coordinators to share ideas to better the program.

"It's important to me that our parish leaders know that I am here to support them in this endeavor and to offer opportunities for each parish to learn from one another,"

said Ms. Bogusz.

Members of Mrs. Johnson's group joined for a variety of reasons, including one individual who was trying to gain information about the church since he didn't grow up attending Mass regularly.

"They are a very enthusiastic group," said Mrs. Johnson. "They bring a lot of experience to what they are learning."

One woman took what she learned home to share with her mother who is unable join the group.

"This is a way of renewing their understanding of the ways the church does things," said Mrs. Johnson, whose group did not want to break up into smaller groups because they were comfortable with each other. "They sit around and share their experiences which is important."

Deacon Loren Mooney's parish of St. Patrick, Cumberland, decided to have two Why Catholic? meetings, one Monday nights and one Thursday mornings. Deacon Mooney said his parish has done small group programs in the past and the planning team believed small groups wouldn't appeal to parishioners so they, like St. Cecilia, decided not to break up into smaller groups.

"Adult Catholics do not seem to typically have the experience of sharing together the content of our faith," said Deacon Mooney who has been the director of religious education at St. Patrick for 10 years.

Almost 100 people participated in the presentation-style groups. Each group would have a speaker, discussion period, question and answer period and refreshments. The one complaint from the participants was that they needed more time for discussion, which Deacon Mooney hopes to fix in this upcoming session.

At Sacred Heart, Glyndon, 35 groups, including five composed of Spanish speakers,

met at different times and different locations to accommodate people's needs. Some parishioners met on campus, some in the group leaders' homes and one group even met at the local senior citizen housing facility.

"It gives parishioners something to talk about other than the parking lot," joked Sister Judith Cianfrogna, S.S.J., who helped set up the program at Sacred Heart. "They enjoyed the sense of community."

Sister Judith said they provided reflection books for the parish's homebound parishioners and when visitors came they would discuss what they were reading. She said parishioners were starting to think about why they became Catholic in the first place.

"It gave everyone a deeper feeling of faith and unity with the universal church," reflected Sister Judith. "It gives the people of our parish a sense of unity."