

Faithful at Newark expo consider and celebrate the question: 'Why?'

BY MELISSA MCNALLY
Staff Writer

NEWARK — Hundreds of faithful from around the archdiocese gathered last month to recognize the work of small Christian communities and local evangelization programs that enrich the spiritual lives of Catholics.

Most Rev. Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D., Auxiliary Bishop of Newark, celebrated Mass Dec. 5 at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart and acknowledged parishes that have participated in evangelization missions such as RENEW International's "Why Catholic?" program.

Following Mass, a free expo and reception for the small Christian communities was held at the Archdiocesan Center. Representatives from RENEW International based in Plainfield, and other faith-based organizations were present to share resources with the faithful.

Developed in recent years, evangelization programs such as "Why Catholic?" and "Disciples in Mission" stress the importance of spreading faith through small groups that perpetuate discussion and sharing. Presented by RENEW International, "Why Catholic?" is an adult faith-formation process based on Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and is updated to include citations from the newly published United States Catholic Catechism for Adults.

Disciples in Mission, a ministry of the Washington-based Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association, fosters parish-based evangelization programs and is also used throughout the archdiocese.

Father Abraham Orapankal, a retreat director for RENEW international, said, "Why Catholic?" program divides the catechism into four booklets that are easy understand. The goal of the expo at the Archdiocesan Center was to encourage the small parish communities to still meet and share their faith after "Why Catholic?"

"Christianity was spread through small, house churches, not huge mega churches or cathedrals," Fr. Orapankal noted. "The definition of a parish is the communion of many communities. The parishes that participated in 'Why Catholic?' have a renewed vitality in their personal and parish life. When we started 'Why Catholic?,' 42 parishes and about 6,000 people took part. We have to keep these groups going."

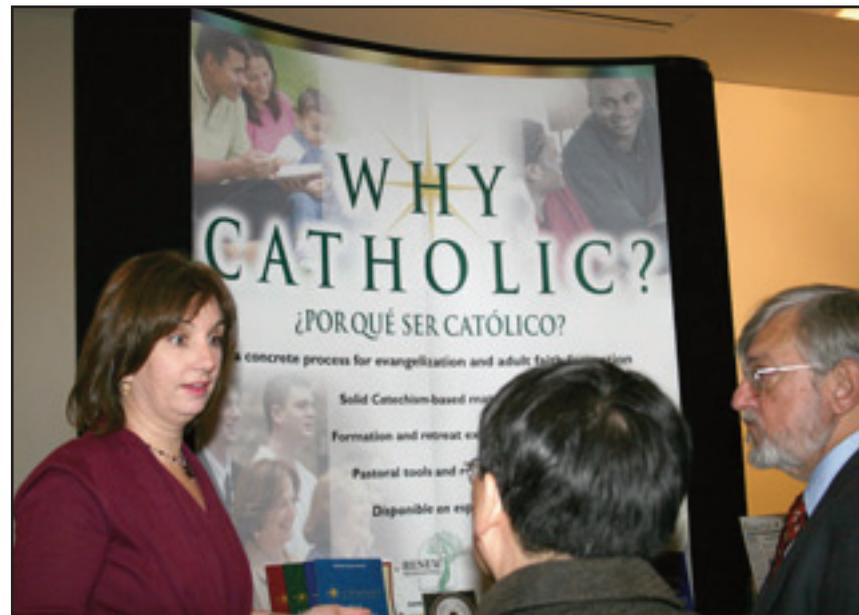
Using faith-sharing materials in a smaller group setting may be more inviting to those uncomfortable with expressing themselves to a large group, Fr. Orapankal said. "That is what is so attractive to people. Increasing fellowship creates a greater parish life."

Linda Pinto, a parishioner at Saint Phillip the Apostle Parish in Saddle Brook, has participated in the "Why Catholic?" program since its inception. She and her husband John hosted the group discussions at their home once per week. In each six-week long session, the focus shifted to a different aspect of faith. The discussions fostered a sense of community and deepened her faith.

"'Why Catholic?' enriched my spirituality," she said. "It's hard in this world to practice faith and like minds make it easier to share. We were like a family; we had some arguments but we all left joyful."

John Pinto attended the expo to gather more ideas for the small faith-sharing groups at his parish. He believes the Holy Spirit was present during the group sessions and the program created a sense of parish unity.

"We met people we have come to cherish through 'Why Catholic?'," he said. "It's not just about you alone; it's about community. Christ was coming through to us through others. People, who you didn't think would open up, blossomed."



Advocate photo — Melissa McNally

Deirdre Trabert Malacrea, left, director of marketing and communications at Plainfield-based RENEW International, engaged hundreds of faithful at the Dec. 5 Archdiocesan Center expo, providing information on the accomplishments of small Christian communities and local evangelization programs.