

Personal Connection: Planning Makes Perfect

One thing that makes *Why Catholic?* appealing is the bonding that occurs among members of a faith-sharing community.

That has been the experience of Sheri Isham, who is catechetical coordinator for the Diocese of Nashville, which is in the fourth year of the *Why Catholic?* process from RENEW International.

Why Catholic? consists of four 12-week programs for small Christian communities, each program based on one of the four pillars of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: the profession of faith, the sacraments, moral life, and prayer.

“What stands out to me,” Sheri said, “is how people build a strong bond within the small community—and, of course, it’s a spiritual bond.”

The connections people form in *Why Catholic?* groups, Sheri said, help to make their experience more fruitful.

“A lot of time,” she explained, “people can be intimidated about talking on spiritual subjects, but because they become so close in their groups, they feel more free to talk.”

She said the feedback she receives suggests that participants also appreciate the diversity of the groups, which include people of varied ages and people with a wide range of faith experiences— from “cradle Catholics” to converts.

Sheri said *Why Catholic?* has been well received in Nashville, and she thinks that, in part, that’s because the diocese participated in another RENEW faith-sharing program.

Sheri said that while some parishes experience a dip in participation after the first year of *Why Catholic?*— something she described as “natural in most ministries” — retention and enthusiasm seems to be greatest in parishes in which there was good planning before the process began.

“I found that parishes that had the most success were those that followed the program,” Sheri explained. “They put together a planning team, came up with promotional ideas, and stayed with the plan.”

One parish, for example, began with 50 groups three years ago and still has 50 groups.

Sheri, who said she has participated in the small Christian communities, also knows a few things about *large* Christian communities—specifically about the hundreds of women who each year attend the Catholic Women of Faith Conference, an inspirational event that she founded.

“It was just kind of a response to a calling,” she said. “I attended a conference myself that was non-denominational. I wanted to hear a Catholic singer who was there. I was sitting in the balcony, and I heard the Lord himself say, ‘I want you to do this for Catholic women someday.’”

“It was a lot of work, but it came together by a special grace. We had 1008 women at our first conference. It has become a regional event, not just Nashville. Our seventh conference will be on March 24, 2012.

“It’s a chance for women who are so busy at home to break away and come be blessed. That’s always the theme: “come be blessed.”

