

Message resonates at “Why Catholic?” workshops on reconciliation

By Jay Nies

The key to getting the most out of the sacrament of reconciliation is knowing how to prepare for it.

That was one of the central messages during a faith-enrichment session led by Sister Marie Cooper SJC of RENEW International at locations throughout the diocese this month. In all, about 360 people attended.

The reconciliation workshop was scheduled to be

said Sr. Marie, a Sister of St. Joseph of Cluny who is a program manager for RENEW International’s “Why Catholic?” program.

Adapting St. Ignatius’ examination of conscience, she suggested visualizing sitting on a couch with Jesus and trying to examine each day from His vantage point.

“Where was God present in my life today? What were some of the exterior blessings I received? How about

what is really standing between us and God,” she said. “It helps us get down to the root causes, and those are what we should take with us to confession.”

She noted that Catholics in the state of mortal sin are obliged to receive reconciliation before they may receive Holy Communion.

“But we don’t go to confession just because of mortal sin,” she said.

“We go to ask for forgiveness and healing and receive that grace of the sacrament that will further strengthen us to live a Christian life.”

She suggested that rather than viewing reconciliation as “going before a tribunal to be judged,” Catholics should see it as “a meeting with the healing Christ.”

Communal sin

Sr. Marie also pointed out the communal nature of sin. “We’re baptized into the community of the Body of Christ,” she said. “So no matter how private we think sin is, it still affects the whole community.”

That’s one reason parishes hold communal reconciliation services, often during Lent and Advent. “Those services help to raise our awareness of the effects of our personal sin on the community, and impact of our community’s sin on the world,” said Sr. Marie. “Communities need to reflect on how they fall short of living as Christ would have them live.”

“Are we a welcoming people?” she asked. “Are we reaching out? Do we lose sight of the fact that whatever good we’re doing as a community, there’s always more we could be attempting? Without this awareness, Christian communities can easily fall into the kind of institutionalized sin that Jesus condemned among the Pharisees,” she said.

“We don’t hear this



held in six locations. Marshall and Macon were cancelled due to snow but have been rescheduled for Feb. 15 in Macon and Feb. 17 in Marshall. Both will begin at 7 p.m.

The theme was: “Why Catholics Go to Confession: Celebrating God’s Forgiving Love.”

“We’re trying to get away from the ‘grocery list’ and move toward looking at our lives through Jesus’ eyes,”

interior blessings? Where did I really step up and do the right thing? What were the roadblocks that got in the way of my doing the right things?”

When visited regularly, questions such as these, along with asking God for the grace to do better tomorrow, becomes the groundwork for receiving reconciliation, said Sr. Marie.

“It helps us begin to see

enough in our churches: ‘How are we as a community failing to live our identity as the Body of Christ?’” she said. “Viewing the answers to those questions through Jesus’ eyes can be a community’s first step toward becoming more like Him.”

session with a reflection on the healing ministry of Jesus, “Held in God’s Mercy.” At the close, she led the participants through a prayer, “Sent Forth in Freedom,” that culminated with individuals writing on purple strips of paper a root sin or chief impediment to a grace-filled relationship with Jesus and the community. They were placed in a flowerpot and burned to symbolize what God does with the sins of those who seek forgiveness — totally forgiving and transforming them into something new and life-giving.

Good participation

Sr. Marie has led faith enrichment sessions on a variety of topics in the Jefferson City diocese since parishes in the diocese began the “Why Catholic?” experience in 2009.

“What I have seen in your diocese is that people have a great desire to deepen their

faith,” she said. “They come with great knowledge; their questions go deep, which is wonderful.”

She plans to return the first week in April to lead a series of two-hour prayer experiences on the Eucharist as Bread for the Journey.

In the meantime, RENEW International will post before Lent at www.renewintl.org a helpful five-minute audio podcast in English and Spanish on the sacrament of reconciliation. People will be able to subscribe to that and future podcasts through iTunes.



Sr. Marie Cooper SJC

Fire of God’s love

Joining Sr. Marie at the faith enrichment sessions were Jim Kemna and Carolyn Saucier of the diocesan Religious Education Office.

Mr. Kemna gave a history of the sacrament of reconciliation in the Church. He said the need for healing and reconciliation has remained constant throughout faith history. However, the way that ministry is understood and carried out in the Church has evolved over time in dramatic ways.

Mrs. Saucier opened the

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