

At national conference, young adults renew commitment to church

SAN DIEGO - About 500 Catholics flocked to the San Diego Marriott Del Mar June 29-July 1 for a full schedule of educational, spiritual and social programming specifically designed for single Catholics.

The National Catholic Singles Conference previously has been held twice in Denver and once in Chicago.

“This is one of the first events in the diocese to specifically target singles,” said Michele Fleming, director of the Diocese of San Diego’s Office for Young Adult Ministry.

Fleming said attendees told her that the conference had been “very powerful in their lives; it’s renewed their commitment to the church, it’s made them want to go back to their local parishes and become more involved.”

About half the conference participants were from California, she said. But some came from as far east as Florida and as far north as Canada.

The conference was sponsored by the Diocese of San Diego, the Theology of the Body International Alliance, Ave Maria Singles, CatholicSingles.com and CatholicMatch.com.

It featured presentations by top Catholic speakers, including Catholic author and speaker Christopher West, a recognized expert on the theology of the body, Pope John Paul II’s teachings on human sexuality.

West, a faculty member at the Theology of the Body Institute in West Chester, Pa., made two presentations at the conference, “Looking for Love in All the Right Places” and “Sexual Healing: From Marvin Gaye to JPII.”

In his first presentation, West reminded his audience that the “thirst that we all have

for happiness, for love, is a thirst for something infinite.”

“When we look for the infinite in finite things, we make of these finite things idols,” he added. “And oftentimes that hunger we have for the infinite, we seek to fill, we seek to satisfy with sex.”

West reflected on how the most common Google search is for “sex,” while the second most common is for “God.” He said people need “to flip the Google paradigm upside down.”

Because human sexuality is intended to point toward God, West said, it is not only biological, but theological.

“What we learn through the theology of the body,” he said, “is that marriage is only a ... little, little blip on the screen of eternity that is meant to point us to eternity, to point us to the ultimate satisfaction of our yearning.”

Other keynote presentations were delivered by Fleming; Philip Mango, a licensed psychotherapist and director of St. Michael’s Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family; and Dave Sloan, who writes and speaks nationwide on dating, courtship, vocation formation and singles ministry issues.

The opening night also included a preview of “Champions of Faith,” a documentary focusing on the Catholic faith of professional baseball players, and a recorded message from San Diego Chargers quarterback Philip Rivers.

Workshops tackled such topics as “Discerning God’s Will in the Single Life”; “Single Once, Twice, Again” (a session for the divorced and widowed); and “Hearing God’s Call” (a session for those discerning a religious vocation).

Fleming said the goal of the conference was to prepare its attendees for their future vocations. While acknowledging that “there is certainly a single vocation,” she said those who choose it are “a small minority.”

Most feel called to married life, but have yet to meet their future spouse, Fleming said. “We want to encourage them during this time to develop their spirituality so that it will be strong as they present themselves for marriage.”

But while Fleming believes that singles ministry is “a way to decrease annulments,” she also believes that “a good, strong singles ministry ... will eventually develop more vocations” to the priesthood and religious life as well.