



# FaithLife

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## Why Catholic? to focus on catechism in parish groups

By Jason Koshinski  
FaithLife editor

Ever ask why it is that as Catholics we believe what we believe? Don't want to go through the daunting task of sifting through the massive Catechism of the Catholic Church on your own?

Beginning in Lent 2006, Catholics in the Erie Diocese will be able to get the answers they seek with other inquirers at the parish level.

Bishop Donald Trautman is urging parishes to sign up for the *Why Catholic?* program, which is a journey through the catechism and an approach for evangelization and adult faith formation.

"In this day and age, when we see so much misunderstanding about the faith, there are contemporary questions that arise," Bishop Trautman says. "People aren't familiar with the answers to these questions. This is a program designed to update our people in their understanding of the Catholic faith and hopefully lead to a new witnessing of the faith, a new love of the faith and a new love of Jesus."

Calling *Why Catholic?* a guidebook to the catechism,

Bishop Trautman says many Catholics have simply inherited the faith without knowing why they are Catholic.

"Many times as adults we have been satisfied with the Catholic formation received in grade school and high school many, many years ago, and we haven't grown in the faith since that time," Bishop Trautman says. "Many people are not open to the insights of Vatican II or not open to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which came out several years ago. *Why Catholic?* is meant to be a particular tool for Roman Catholics in small faith-sharing communities to reacquaint themselves with the full picture of the faith as contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church."

The program also applies the catechism to the concrete and contemporary situations we face in the church today, Bishop Trautman says, citing the understanding of living wills and embryonic research.

"It gives people a foundation so they can be informed about why the church holds these views," he said. "We must explain to our people more than ever the rationale for the faith. I think apologetics is a very good

and much needed course today. *Why Catholic?* is truly an effort to supply the rationale behind why we hold what we hold."

*Why Catholic?* is also a program of RENEW International, which has been well received in the diocese in the past. The format, however, is different. While RENEW focused on the Sunday Gospel readings, *Why Catholic?* concentrates on Scripture related to the catechism.

"While the program content has changed, it still has the element of people gathering in small groups, which was the stronghold of the RENEW process in our diocese," says Sr. Nancy Fischer, director of Community Formation and Lay Ministry Training for the Erie Diocese. "At that point, we had almost 20,000 people meeting in small groups."

*Why Catholic?* is an opportunity for parishes that have not developed the small community group approach since RENEW do so once again, Sr. Nancy says.

"I'm looking beyond the adult education and catechism components of it at it as something that will form people so that they will want to continue in the small community experience when *Why Catholic?* is over,"

she says. "Small communities are the number one way that adult formation is presently being done in the United States."

So far there are 30 confirmed parishes participating with others that are considering.

One of the parishes that has already signed on is St. Joseph Parish, Sharon.

*Why Catholic?* will help continue what the parish has already started, says Fr. Glenn Whitman, pastor of St. Joseph Parish. After starting a question box approach

to adult education along with discussion nights, *Why Catholic?* underscored what the parish was already doing.

A common start for all Catholics is the catechism, Fr. Whitman says, adding that the format is one that works.

"By breaking it down into small groups and dividing up the sessions, it's a commitment that people are able to make and it's pretty effective," he says. "It can leave people asking, 'What's next?'"

### WHY CATHOLIC? JOURNEY THROUGH THE CATECHISM

*Why Catholic?* is a four-year program that focuses on Scripture related to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Small faith sharing groups will meet once a week during two six-week sessions each year. Each year follows a different guidebook from RENEW International.

- Year 1 – The Profession of Faith: What We Believe
- Year 2 – The Celebration of the Christian Mystery: Sacraments
- Year 3 – Life in Christ: Walking with God
- Year 4 – Christian Prayer: Deepening My Experience with God

To support the program, other initiatives include: small community leader formation, faith formation workshops, retreats, catechetical leader workshops, ongoing pastoral support and parish kits.

Launching workshops and facilitator training are currently being scheduled for fall. Dates have not yet been set.

## Pro-life walkers arrive in Erie after 1,100-mile crusade

By Jason Koshinski  
FaithLife editor

After walking from Minnesota to Erie, Joey Kerlin was tired but in a jovial mood.

"I just walked from Minneapolis to Erie, and boy, is my everything tired," the 21-year-old-college student quipped. Resting on the steps of St. Peter Cathedral, he looked at the tan lines on his feet after two month of walking in the summer sun in sandals.

Kerlin is one of 16 young people who made the two-month, 1,100-mile trek as part of the Crusade for Life 2005. The crusade is an initiative of American Life League, a Washington, D.C.-based pro-life group. The group's goal is to bring an end to abortion and proclaim the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The journey left the travelers feeling weary, but it also put them on a spiritual high. For some, the experience was hard to put into words.

"It's weird," Kerlin says. "It's hard to believe it's over. I know we're all really tired. One thing that sticks with me is that we walked 1,000 miles and people still don't care. In a way, it's just the beginning."

The walkers, made up of college students, left St. Paul



Crusade for Life walkers rest on the steps of St. Peter Cathedral, Erie, after their arrival July 28. The group walked 1,100 miles from Minneapolis to Erie.

Cathedral in Minneapolis on May 29 and arrived at St. Peter Cathedral in Erie on July 28 at approximately 4:30 p.m.

"About halfway through the trip, I didn't think I was capable of walking anymore," Kerlin says. "But it's amazing what the Holy Spirit can do. The Spirit definitely carried me the rest of the way."

Clad in red T-shirts that read "You can't be Catholic & pro-abortion," the group walked

through seven states processing with a crucifix and Vatican flag. One of the memorable encounters with passers-by occurred a few miles outside of Erie. A man in a convertible drove by honking then pulled a mini Vatican flag from the car and waved it toward the group.

During the two-month crusade, the students would walk during the day while a handful would ride several miles ahead in a van setting up appointments

with youth and pro-life groups. They were on their own for food but were dependent on the hospitality of parishes and families for lodging.

Not everyone was accepting of the group's message. But for 19-year-old crusader Karen Mahowald, the warmth and openness of the many people she met during the trip outweigh the rudeness of a few.

"It's amazing how pro-life Americans really are," says

Karen Mahowald, 19, a Minnesota native and student at Catholic University in Washington. "It takes a lot more energy for someone to support 16 strangers and give them food and shelter than to shout something out of a car window."

Some of the tougher times of the trip were during stops at various abortion clinics.

"It was really hard just seeing how much the mothers and fathers were hurting," Kerlin says. "At the same time, Jesus wins every day. He sacrifices himself on the altar."

After arriving in Erie, the walkers met with members of People For Life, an Erie-based pro-life group. On July 30, the group joined People For Life in demonstrating downtown outside of Erie's only abortion clinic. Walkers also spoke about their mission at many area churches during Masses July 30-31.

On Aug. 1, the group headed to Washington to meet with other crusaders. American Life League also sponsored crusades in the Northeast from Augusta, Maine, to Washington and in California from San Diego to Sacramento.

There won't be much time to rest for these crusaders, though. They'll also be heading to Cologne, Germany, for World Youth Day Aug. 16-21.