

On Sunday, April 3, 2011, the last session for the semester of “Conversation at the Center” took place at the Assumptionist Center in Brighton, MA. The topic “From Lutheran to Roman Catholic” was the focus of Erik Hesla’s presentation in which he shared his personal story and journey from Lutheranism to Catholicism. Erik, a graduate student at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, is a second year resident at the Center. He and his siblings, a brother and a sister, were born and baptized into a Lutheran family and church. Some years ago now, Erik’s family chose to enter into full communion with the Church.

The Hesla family had belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). The basic principles found in their documents were based on scripture, faith and grace alone. For many years, both of Erik’s parents, as faithful Norwegian Lutherans, had been active in the church and weekly attendees of liturgical worship and made sure that all of their three children attended Sunday school.

However, over time, Mr. and Mrs. Hesla began to experience a ‘falling out’ with their church as the result of the pastor making arbitrary decisions such as eliminating the use of the lectionary, the offering of communion only once a month and not recognizing the real presence in the Eucharist. In addition, the content of the preaching, not the style, and the lack of unity among the various churches, which are all independent of each other, became problematic. And so, Erik’s dad in particular became attracted to the Catholic Church’s sacramental life, where he and Erik alike, saw the Eucharist as the fullness of what it could be. At the same time Mr. Hesla began reading church documents, especially the church fathers while Erik was attending a Jesuit high school. It is significant that it was the church’s sacramental life that eventually drew that family into the Catholic Church. It is not necessary to have full understanding before entering the church, for faith development is a life long process .Another strong attraction was Catholicism’s strong unity while recognizing and honoring diversity within its universality. Soon the attendance at Mass became a significant experience for the entire family. Erik entered the church through the RCIA process in junior high school and came into full communion at the Easter Vigil in 2004.

Reflecting on why it is important to be Catholic and to proudly witness one’s faith, Erik stressed that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, with global universality, deriving its authenticity from Jesus from the time of the apostles, passed down to us in its fullness.

Lastly, Erik spoke of the importance of ecumenical dialogue, as it promotes understanding among churches and eliminates misconceptions.

A discussion followed which raised the possibility of dissention among the extended family members when there is a change in church affiliation. It is a difficult and sensitive process that takes time. Another point of discussion addressed the difference between diversity of practice amidst unity in belief, doctrine and worship and disunity which promotes factions.

The morning ended with a delicious brunch, continued discussion and great expectations for “Conversations…” which will resume in the fall.

Note of importance: Erik will begin his pursuit of a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology at Marquette University in the fall 2011.

{joomplucat:29 limit=12|columns=3|ordering=random}

More pictures »