NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Episcopal community: Faith journey led to Catholicism

Mark Zimmermann Catholic News Service | Jun. 8, 2011

BLADENSBURG, Md. -- In the fall of 2009, Pope Benedict XVI issued an apostolic constitution called "Anglicanorum coetibus" to provide a means for entire Anglican parishes or groups to become Catholic while retaining some of their Anglican heritage and liturgical practice.

That document "opened up a door that had previously been closed," said the Rev. Mark Lewis, rector of St. Luke Episcopal Parish in Bladensburg. At that same time, he had been studying a book on Catholicism and Anglicanism.

After a long period of discernment, the Maryland congregation announced June 6 that it would seek entry into the Catholic Church.

"I'm thrilled and tremendously humbled to take this journey with my people at St. Luke, and humbled that I could become a priest of the Roman Catholic Church," Rev. Lewis said in an interview with the Catholic Standard, newspaper of the Washington Archdiocese.

Ordained as an Episcopal priest in 2001, he has been rector of St. Luke since 2006 and hopes to begin the process to be ordained a Catholic priest. Members of St. Luke will begin formal preparation to be received into the Catholic Church, likely later this year.

Patrick Delaney, a junior warden with the congregation, joined the rector in the interview, and said the community's taking that step reflected "the presence of the Holy Spirit at work."

Prayer and study, not any controversies, led the congregation toward unity with the Catholic Church, Rev. Lewis said, when asked whether Episcopal doctrine on the priesthood or sexual issues had precipitated the move.

Over the past several years, the Episcopal Church, the U.S. member of the Anglican Communion, has approved ordaining women priests and bishops, ordaining homosexuals and blessing same-sex unions.

"Those issues on the priesthood and sexuality have been around. The real issue that drove us was our study of the Catholic faith," he said. "The more we looked at it and compared it to Anglicanism, we were drawn to the Church of Rome. It was a natural progression."

Studying the Catholic faith, he said, provided "an opportunity to seek the foundation of our faith. When we discovered who we are, the choice was easy," said Rev. Lewis, who is married. He and his wife, Vickey, have two grown children.

In recent months, members of the congregation have been utilizing the Cathechism of the Catholic Church in their Bible study, and their upcoming formation also will draw upon the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults.

During the discernment process, the St. Luke community received support from both Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl

of Washington and Episcopal Bishop John Bryson Chane of Washington. Rev. Lewis said that when they approached Bishop Chane about their desire for unity with the Catholic Church, "he was fully supportive, he believed it was a continuation of our journey, a fulfillment of our faith."

This past fall, Cardinal Wuerl was named by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to guide the incorporation of Anglican groups into the Catholic Church in the United States. In "Anglicanorum coetibus," Pope Benedict provided for establishing ordinariates for Anglican groups seeking to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.

An ordinariate is a geographic region similar to a diocese, though typically national in scope. Until one is established in the United States, St. Luke's congregation, which has about 100 members, will come under the care of the Archdiocese of Washington.

In the June 6 statement, Cardinal Wuerl noted, "We welcome the St. Luke community warmly into our family of faith."

When the nation's Catholic bishops meet June 15-17 for their spring general assembly, Cardinal Wuerl will report to them on the progress toward incorporating Anglican groups into the U.S. Catholic Church under the provisions of "Anglicanorum coetibus."

Rev. Lewis said in his interview that a special role model for his community's journey of faith is Blessed John Henry Newman, the famous 19th-century British theologian and spiritual writer who left the Anglican Church and became Catholic. During a pastoral visit to Great Britain this past fall, Pope Benedict beatified Cardinal Newman, whose episcopal motto was "Heart speaks to heart."

"I think Cardinal Newman is very much a trailblazer for us," said Rev. Lewis, who has been studying his writings on Catholicism. "We are a mirror to his journey."

In May, following months of discernment at St. Luke, the vestry there took a formal vote to enter the Catholic Church, and at the two services he celebrated June 5, Rev. Lewis announced that the parish is formally requesting to join the Catholic Church. Two members of the vestry who were lifelong Anglicans also spoke in favor of the move, offering "powerful witness, not just to Christ, but to unity in the Catholic Church," said Rev. Lewis said.

He noted that only one family expressed uncertainty about the change, but the other members supported the move with a show of hands. Later, at the community's coffee hour, "it was like a celebration, very joyful," Rev. Lewis said.

When asked to describe the congregation, he noted, "It's a community of believers of traditional Christianity. It expresses its tradition in an Anglo-Catholic style of worship."

"Our hope is that we can grow and build a new building and school, so we can do more ministry in the Bladensburg area, and keep the focus on children... That's where God has placed us," he said. "That will always be our number one priority, the children of the Bladensburg area."

Rev. Lewis, 51, will continue to be pastoral leader of the community. Father Scott Hurd, a former Episcopal priest who was ordained a Catholic priest for the Archdiocese of Washington, will serve as a chaplain to the St. Luke community during the transition period.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/30/2017 - 20:15*): https://www.ncronline.org/news/episcopal-community-faith-journey-led-catholicism