

Summary of Qualitative and Quantitative Results of the “Becoming Lutheran Research Project”

By: Rev. Dr. Matthew Richard

The journey for an American Evangelical into Confessional Lutheran thought is a 1- to 4-year journey that is difficult due to Evangelicals moving out of 15-30 years of Evangelicalism and away from approximately four different theological movements. The journey begins when American Evangelicals have a crisis of faith typically due to despair over works righteousness. While the crisis of faith gives them instability within Evangelicalism, they are influenced to examine Confessional Lutheranism by either coming across Lutheran media or being directed to Lutheranism by family and friends. Thus, the daunting journey begins as American Evangelicals separate themselves from popular top-ten authors and begin to explore the writings of dead theologians, many who are unheard of and unfamiliar. While reading these new authors and wrestling with the Scriptures, they begin to understand the Bible with new categories such as Law and Gospel. This new understanding of Law and Gospel drastically changes how they view the Bible, themselves, and the Christian faith in general. They see themselves as great sinners, but they also see that they have a greater Savior, Jesus Christ. They learn that the sin problem is not resolved by yielding more, surrendering more, or trying harder by their work. They learn that absolution for their sins is not found in decision based means of grace such as the altar call. Rather, they learn and travel to what they once believed to be powerless: God’s powerful and efficacious Word and Sacraments. As they are interacting with these new sources and experiencing changes in how they view reality, their language begins to change as well. The biggest change is their emphasis of words and sentences. Instead of talking about themselves as the subject of sentences and doing all the verbs, they begin talking about God as the subject of the sentences and doing all the verbs to them. They also tend to abandon certain words and then are faced with the task of learning new words. Finally, there are emotional concerns that are raised as well. For those who tend to join Confessional Lutheran churches early on, they experience a degree of fear due to the unknown; but overall they have a pleasant journey. However, those who are unable to join Confessional Lutheran churches and stay in Evangelical churches as they process Lutheran thought will experience anger and a negative decline in their journeys. This negative dip typically will occur after two years of wrestling with Confessional Lutheran thought and will be primarily due to them being either stuck in Evangelicalism or having a difficult time letting go. Alas, the letting go is not only a letting go of American Evangelicalism’s theology and practice, but for many it is a loss of family and friends coupled with subtle persecution. However, there is a bright side. Even though many of these former American Evangelicals lament the lost time that they spent in synergistic theology, they feel an overwhelming peace, freedom, comfort, and assurance as they come to understand the objective Christ-centered Gospel and Sacraments within Lutheranism.

Pastoral and Congregational Considerations for and During Catechesis of Former American Evangelicals

By: Rev. Dr. Matthew Richard

The collective message from the research participants to pastors who are currently attempting to minister to former Evangelicals joining their churches is:

Dear Confessional Lutheran Pastor and Congregations,

As you receive former Evangelicals like us, we humbly ask that you be patient with us. While it may not look like it, we have been through a lot to get to your church. To you it may look like we are high maintenance, which is absolutely true. We will be high maintenance at first, but once we are catechized, we are certain that we will be your biggest advocates for the Lutheran theology you preach and teach. Therefore, please don't assume that our questions are meant to challenge you. Don't assume that we know the basics, we often don't. Please hear our questions, and then explain everything; please teach us. You can be theological with us. Not only do we need your patience, but we need you to remain steadfast to your church's confession. Please don't water Lutheranism down. You can preach the Law strongly to us and the Gospel more strongly still. Be Lutheran, and don't be ashamed of this! We don't want Evangelicalism. Teach the liturgy; teach the Small Catechism. Point us to Christ crucified for that is what we all need. Thank you in advance for being our shepherd and our new church family.

In Christ,

The Becoming Lutheran Research Participants