

Centralia Man Chosen by Archbishop for Five Years of Studies in Rome

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Tyler Johnson

Tyler Johnson, a Centralia High School graduate, received the rare opportunity to spend five years in Italy, helping him complete his goal of becoming an ordained priest.

Two weeks ago, one Centralia man left for the spiritual journey of a lifetime after he was selected by an archbishop to further his seminary study in Rome.

Tyler Johnson, a Centralia High School graduate, received the rare opportunity to spend five years in Italy, helping him complete his goal of becoming an ordained priest.

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Johnson was adopted and brought to the United States at the age of 3. As a Centralia local, the 29-year-old graduated from Centralia College in 2006 and later attended Central Washington University to receive his bachelor's degree in fine arts, specializing in graphic design.

An internship with a Centralia-based company led him to a full-time job in the graphic design field before he decided to explore ministry work within the Catholic church.

After volunteering his time at St. Mary Catholic Church, he began working as the youth minister, a key decision that would later lead him into the seminary.

His immediate family members are practicing Catholics and were instrumental in raising him within the faith. He has been in the seminary for two years now, beginning his third, and he said the decision was one he would never take back.

“... I can honestly say there is nothing else I would rather do,” he said. The possibility of studying in Rome was first proposed to Johnson last December, although at first he was hesitant. Not wanting to leave behind his family and friends, his initial fear made him second guess the opportunity.

“After some reflection and a lot of prayer, I concluded that God was calling me to have faith and accept this challenge to follow him on this new journey,” Johnson said in an email. “I often think about the New Testament Bible account when Jesus said to his disciples that they must deny themselves and carry their crosses in order to follow him.”

That ultimately caused Johnson to begin the journey.

Bryan Dolejsi, director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Seattle, said Johnson is a good fit to go to Rome because he is in the right place both spiritually and personally.

“Just going to the seminary in general to study to become a Catholic priest is a unique opportunity. But to go to Rome, it’s a great blessing because you are kind of at the mother church with people from all around the world,” he said.

Until mid-August, Johnson is currently in Assisi, Italy, studying Italian. He said the classes are challenging, but through the intensive courses he has already gained the skills to have basic conversations with the native people.

Afterward, he will attend Pontifical North American College, a seminary in Rome, located close to the Vatican. From his dorm window, Johnson can see the main piazza and the very dome of St. Peter’s Basilica.

His schooling at PNAC will begin in October, and will consist of classes in Italian. He will start the day promptly at 6:15 a.m. with community prayer and Mass, with an afternoon filled with study, more prayer, conferences and meetings.

After three years of theology study, Johnson will hopefully become a deacon, the minister you become before becoming a priest. After year four, he hopes to be an ordained priest and continue further studies in Rome to receive another degree specializing in an area of theology. His trip will last him at least five years.

“The most rewarding part of this experience so far has been the ability to make pilgrimages to many holy places and learn more about the amazing saints of the church,” he said. “... All I can say is that I am truly honored and humbled by this opportunity to study in the ‘Eternal City’ and will be forever grateful to all those who have afforded me this opportunity.”

Father Tim Ilgin, a priest at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Chehalis, has known Johnson for 12 years and said he is an outstanding young man, both faith-filled and devout. Johnson is the only Lewis County local he knows that was selected to study in Rome.

“He’s very intelligent and outgoing,” he said. “We saw good leadership qualities in him and thought he would be a good choice for Rome to study there.”

Along with his studies, Johnson plans to experience and travel Europe, while ultimately getting closer to God and his calling.

“I thank all who have supported and encouraged me in my vocation to the priesthood, and I will continue to pray for the good people of Centralia, and hope that they will also pray for me,” Johnson said.