Priest draws motivation from survival

REligion | Catholic's New Dean Nearly Died As Child

BY CARLA HINTON

The Rev. Justin Lindstrom, the new Dean of St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral, said he was 21 years old and attending seminary when he first heard the amazing story of his medical mystery history.

And perhaps the most surprising part was that his father — and fellow seminarian — was the person who shared the tale for the first time, as they sat together in a seminary class.

Lindstrom, 40, said the instructor had asked each class member to share some reasons they were there. His dad, Joel Lindstrom, began to tell about a time one of his children lay near death in a hospital.

The elder Lindstrom told the class that his youngest son, Justin, was 6 months old when his chest cavity was flooded with a mysterious jellylike substance, and his lungs collapsed. He said the family's Lutheran clergymen were called to the medical facility to give the child what essentially were to be his last rites after doctors said the child could not breathe on its own.

The elder Lindstrom, a schoolteacher, said he asked that everyone leave the room when doctors said they wanted to turn off the machine that helped the child breathe.

Justin Lindstrom said his father told the class that he knelt in front of the bed where his tiny boy lay covered with a large plastic, teatlike bubble. He and his wife, Joanne, couldn't even touch the child without placing their hands in gloves that enabled them to grasp him inside the bubble that insulated the weakened boy from disease.

Joel Lindstrom told the class he simply prayed: "Lord God, if you save my son, I

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will make sure he becomes a number in your church, and I will die,” said Justin Ushkowitz, who is the son of the late Rev. Father Justin Ushkowitz.

As he prepared to lead one of Oklahoma City’s oldest churches in its first service since the death of St. Paul, Ushkowitz said the knowledge of his father’s sudden death has motivated him since that time.

“I think God does that for all of us — intervenes our story with the people in our life,” Ushkowitz said. “I think that’s why the young man decided to become a priest. He saw it as a way to help others.

After working with the Episcopal Diocese of the Southwest, Ushkowitz went on to serve as rector of a church in Oklahoma City.

In 2003, Ushkowitz founded and served as Episcopal Church of Christ, which has a membership of 500 members.

He said the church was part of a broader movement to bring people together.

“Many of the people who come to this church are looking for something more,” Ushkowitz said. “They’re looking for a sense of community, and we try to create that.

Ushkowitz said the church was founded as a way to bring people together.

“It’s a place and a people that people can do"