

Amen: Peaceful road warrior

By Paul McMullen

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What makes Tim Rubeling – and his younger sisters and their big brothers – walk? It would not be a Fortnight for Freedom without Father John L. “Jack” Lombardi leading a band of pilgrims on a walk of approximately 100 miles and one week, nor would those exercises in support of religious freedom be the same without a Rubeling or two or three.

Father Jack and company are again preparing to provide their steady, sweaty witness in support of the unborn and those who protect them. They’ll bed down the night of June 14, Flag Day, at St. Mary’s in Annapolis, head out the next morning on a walk across the Eastern Shore and pull into Ocean City June 23.

They’ll see the Atlantic two mornings after Archbishop William E. Lori opens the Fortnight for Freedom, but there is a good reason for the head start, as all will be rested and refreshed come June 25, when Deacon Michael Rubeling is ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

His formation included a 2005 pilgrimage to Kolkata, India, with Father Jack, who took Peter Rubeling, a seminarian for the archdiocese, on a 2010 pilgrimage to missions in Peru.

Claire, 17; Emily, 15; and 13-year-old Monica Rubeling, for that matter, are all veterans of Fortnight for Freedom marches to Baltimore (2012) or Washington, D.C. (2013), from Father Jack’s base at St. Peter in Hancock.

Tim, 19, is a relative latecomer, as his first pilgrimage with Father Jack came last June, to Ireland.

We met last September, on the 110-mile Feet for Francis/Pilgrimage of Love and Mercy from Baltimore to Philadelphia to see Pope Francis.

“Walking is so simple,” Tim said, “but 100 miles is a big thing. People find meaning in that, especially when it’s for religious freedom. I walk because of the sacrifice. I get to experience community. You get to meet people, and you get to evangelize. You’re sacrificing, and reaching people in a different way.”

His most vivid memory of that pilgrimage is from our second full day on the road, on Route 1 in northern Harford County, where two dozen strangers in yellow T-shirts comforted a woman who had just been in an auto accident.

All along the way, Tim walked and strummed his half-sized Luna guitar – when he wasn’t preaching the Gospel face to face.

“Father Jack is great about pushing you, to expand your reach,” Tim said. “He’ll hand you a prayer card and a rosary, and say, ‘Go up and talk to that person.’ It gets

easier and easier, and eventually you realize, 'I can do this on my own.' "

That gets to why Father Jack includes teens on his pilgrimages.

"The age-old answer is, they're the future of the church," he said. "They also like to travel, can roll with the punches and have more vigor."



Tim Rubeling hikes Ireland's Wicklow Mountains in June 2015. (Courtesy Tim Rubeling)

An Eagle Scout, Tim was barely a teen when he headed to the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico and hiked 100 miles through the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. He's canoed 100 miles in Minnesota, the land of 10,000 lakes.

After his brother's ordination, Tim will head to Montana to spend the summer working as a camp counselor.

Unlike his older brothers, he is not considering the seminary. After he finishes his associate's degree at Frederick Community College, his discernment will take him on a 2,160-mile solo stroll in 2017, up the Appalachian Trail.

Getting out of his comfort zone has included taking a guitar into a nursing home at Christmas, covering Matt Maher and performing his own songs of worship. Does he plan to take the half-sized Luna to Springer Mountain, Ga., next March?

"I'm debating it," Tim said. "I'd love a career that incorporates outdoors and youth ministry. I'm confident God has something in store for me."

Read more commentary here. For more on walking pilgrimages, including last year's "Feet for Francis" pilgrimage, read Paul McMullen's blog here.