

Friars deliver message of love on Baltimore streets

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Wearing hooded grey robes cinched at the waist with ropes, nearly a dozen Franciscan Friars of the Renewal marched through the streets of downtown Baltimore Aug. 9 carrying a large crucifix, an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and a papal flag.

A few curious onlookers honked their horns in support of the bearded friars and several people on the sidewalks stopped them to ask for their prayers. One man broke out into song at the sight of the simple priests, bellowing in a deep baritone, "I have no loss because of the cross."

The priests visited Baltimore as one of the stops on a first-of-its-kind spiritual pilgrimage called "The Future Depends on Love" tour Aug. 3-11. The New York-based friars, who were joined by several seminarians from across the country, started their journey in Philadelphia - making stops in Wilmington and Baltimore before ending in Washington, D.C. on Aug. 11.

In each city, the priestly pilgrims walked up to 13 miles a day - praying, celebrating Mass, volunteering in outreach ministries and evangelizing in the streets.

The friars arrived in Baltimore Aug. 8, celebrating Mass at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Roland Park. During their two-day stay, they also assisted at the Gift of Hope Aids hospice at St. Wenceslaus, volunteered at Our Daily Bread Employment Center and prayed outside two abortion clinics.

They celebrated Mass and toured the restored Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary and also made a prayerful stop at Holy Rosary in Fells Point. Holy hours and talks were given at St. Joseph in Cockeysville and St. Philip Neri in Linthicum.

Father Lawrence Joseph Schroedel, C.F.R., one of the pilgrims, said the name of the tour came from the last line of the play, "The Jeweler's Shop," written by Pope John Paul II as a young man. The purpose of the event was to promote the sanctity of life, encourage Eucharistic devotion, help people live out the spiritual and corporal works of mercy and to raise awareness about vocations and marriage, he said.

"The walk itself is very powerful," said Father Lawrence, an Atlanta native. "You can see the expressions on people's faces that show how glad they are to see us. Their whole demeanor changes."

Three women changed their minds about having abortions after speaking and praying with the friars, Father Lawrence said.

As the friars made their way down Liberty Street in Baltimore, Yvone Robinson stopped one and asked him to pray the Our Father with her at the bus stop.

"Seeing them says to me that the Lord is coming," said Ms. Robinson, a non-Catholic who clutched a Marian prayer card the friar gave her. "It's important to believe."

Father Lawrence said he hopes the friars will conduct future tours.

For more information, visit www.futuredependsonlove.com.