

Hancock pastor will pace walking pilgrimage to papal Mass in Philadelphia

By Paul McMullen

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PHILADELPHIA - As the Archdiocese of Baltimore and Catholic Review Media finalized preparations in early summer to transport hundreds of pilgrims to the only public Mass Pope Francis will celebrate on his first trip to the U.S., the wheels turned.

How about if some of us embark on the ancient concept of pilgrimage, and walk from Baltimore to Philadelphia in September?

Hours after the idea was bounced off Father John J. Lombardi, the Washington County pastor was on board.

He is a veteran of dozens of such walks, most recently in Ireland, and in 2012 from St. Peter in Hancock, one of his parishes, to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore to promote awareness of the inaugural Fortnight for Freedom.

Father Lombardi and I will head up a group of as many as 20 pilgrims, departing that same Baltimore Basilica Sept. 20, making our way through Baltimore City, Baltimore, Harford and Cecil counties, and then into Pennsylvania, using - what else? - the Baltimore Pike to make our way to Philadelphia and the Sept. 27 papal Mass.

"On one hand, there is the ancient tradition of walking, like the original Camino," Father Lombardi said, of the Camino de Santiago, the Way of St. James, in France,

Spain and Portugal, a portion of which he walked in 2008. “On the other, there is a unique difference, with our fast-paced lives, of getting out of our boxes and walking.

“Remember, our Lord walked to all of his appointments ... That, and we will be heeding Pope Francis’ call to help the poor.”



Sara Goldscher/CR graphic

All can help

While few can drop what they are doing and walk 104 miles over the course of a week in our Pilgrimage of Love and Mercy, named for the upcoming Jubilee Year of Mercy, everyone in the archdiocese can join its main outreach, “Feet for Francis,” a fundraiser being coordinated by Florida-based Funds2Orgs. It partners with non-profits, collecting unwanted shoes and sending them overseas, where they are needed.

Parishes, schools and all Catholic institutions are invited to gather gently worn or new pairs of shoes (no singles). Funds2Orgs will supply promotional materials and bags to collect the shoes, and collect them at appointed locations in the archdiocese.

Specifics will be shared with all institutions in the archdiocese, and be posted at CatholicReview.org.

Funds2Orgs will ship the shoes to one of its 26 partner nations, among them Haiti, Pakistan and Togo, where they support micro-enterprises which sell the shoes for a profit.

“By repurposing unwanted shoes, people in the Archdiocese of Baltimore will empower those in the developing world,” said Tom Henderson, executive vice president of Funds2Orgs. “This all goes back to teaching a man to fish, as opposed to feeding him one.”

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Logistical needs

The pilgrimage itself, meanwhile, requires considerable logistical support, some of which has already been secured.

Walking 11 miles Sept. 20, we will unroll our sleeping bags in the parish hall at St. Ursula in Parkville, by the grace of Father Steven Hook, its pastor.

We will spend the night of Sept. 21 at The John Carroll School in Bel Air, thanks to principal Madelyn Ball and her community, and the following night at St. Agnes in Rising Sun, a mission of Good Shepherd Parish in Perryville.

We plan to hike 16 miles daily Monday through Friday, and the Sept. 22 itinerary illustrates the need for ground support. It involves crossing Route 1 at the Conowingo Dam, where pedestrians are prohibited. Vans will transport pilgrims across the Susquehanna, and from the night's shelter to daily starting points.

On a July 22 drive of the route, Father Lombardi knocked on doors, first in the archdiocese, then the Diocese of Wilmington and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, where he secured a roof overhead from Neumann University in Aston and lunch from the Chick-fil-A in Chadds Ford.

Amanda Miller-Wehr, Father Lombardi's administrative assistant, is collating pilgrimage commitments and needs. In addition to the shoe drive, parishes and schools can help by supplying vans and drivers; gas money for those vans; one of our three daily meals and two daily fuel stops.

"We'll get tired, face hardships and have to work as a team," Father Lombardi said. "It will be a mini slice of life."

To inquire about providing logistical support, email Amanda Miller-Wehr at officestpeter@verizon.net

Also see:

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