

Pilgrims set out on 50-mile walk in penance, prayer from Emmitsburg to Baltimore

EMMITSBURG - Stephanie Rubeling's support of the priesthood goes beyond thoughts and prayers.

The 54-year-old parishioner of St. Peter the Apostle in Libertytown was among 19 hardy souls who set out Nov. 9 on day one of a three-day trek on foot from Emmitsburg to Baltimore, dubbed "Fifty Miles in Faith: Pilgrimage-Walk for the Priesthood in Penance and Prayer."

It began with a Mass at St. Joseph in Emmitsburg and will end with another Nov. 11 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore.

Pilgrims will arrive as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops make final preparations for its fall assembly in Baltimore Nov. 12-14. The clergy sexual abuse crisis, which precipitated the pilgrimage, tops the bishops' agenda.

Rubeling will miss day two of the pilgrimage, as she and her husband, Gary, will be among the faithful at a Nov. 12 wedding in Montgomery County. The celebrant will be their eldest son, Father Michael Rubeling, associate pastor of St. John the Evangelist in Severna Park.

She had five of her nine other children in tow for the start of the pilgrimage, including Peter, a student at nearby Mount St. Mary's Seminary, who is serving his pastoral year at St. Mark in Fallston and is expected to join his brother as a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Another brother, Timothy, recently entered formation with the Capuchin Franciscans.

"As the mother of a priest and a seminarian," Stephanie said, "we need to do

whatever we can to help priests and the church to repair the damage done and support those who want to move forward in holiness. Coming out of our comfort zone a little bit is a good thing.

“There is so much negative media. We need to go the extra mile, pardon the pun, in support of priests who are trying to lead holy lives, and remind everyone, there are good things going on in the church,” she said.

Story continues below following a news video on the pilgrimage.

Pilgrims set out mid-morning in 41-degree temperatures and in a mist that was forecast to become an afternoon downpour, reasons that, in addition to bottled water, ponchos and hand warmers were available.

They were to stay overnight at St. Batholomew in Manchester and then the Church of the Nativity in Timonium, where they will attend 5 p.m. Mass Nov. 10. The pilgrimage will visit four of the 10 jurisdictions in the archdiocese, including Frederick, Carroll and Baltimore counties, and Baltimore City, and is expected to average 17 miles a day.

It is being led by Father John “Jack” Lombardi, pastor of St. Peter in Hancock and St. Patrick in Little Orleans. He also led “Feet for Francis,” a weeklong, 100-mile walk from Baltimore to Philadelphia in September 2015, in conjunction with the archdiocese, to see Pope Francis on his visit to the U.S.

Walkers and support personnel include several veterans of that pilgrimage, including Paul and Paula Tiller of St. Peter in Hancock, and Pat and Laura Hamilton of St. Agnes in Catonsville.

“This is a reminder that we’re walking for the Lord, to repair what’s been torn,” Father Lombardi said before setting out toward Main Street in Emmitsburg and east on to Taneytown Pike. “It is our privilege to walk.”

Father Lombardi previously served as chaplain of National Shrine Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, another religious landmark in the historic town of Emmitsburg.

He concelebrated Mass with Vincentian Father Harry F. Armone, associate pastor of St. Joseph Parish, which held a listening session regarding the clergy sex abuse scandals Nov. 5.

Father Armone noted that it was the feast day of the Lateran Basilica, the highest of the papal basilicas in Rome, a reminder “to see us as part of something bigger than ourselves. Don’t fall into the trap of American individualism. *We* are saved. It’s not ‘*I* am saved.’”

Vincentian Father Martin F. McGeough is the pastor of St. Joseph, founded in 1793 and with an early parish roll that includes St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.

“Any place that has the remains of the first American-born canonized saint is always a good place to begin a pilgrimage, or end one,” Father McGeough said of Emmitsburg. “This was Mother Seton’s parish in Emmitsburg. Her presence here gives it a special aura of sanctity.”

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