

# Williamsport parishioner plans pilgrimages far and near

While attending a friend's funeral at St. Joseph's Passionist Monastery a few years ago, Ron Doub was struck by the beauty of the historic Irvington church.

"I had never been there and I was just blown away," remembered Doub, a parishioner of St. Augustine in Williamsport. "It occurred to me that most Catholics didn't even know it existed."

Doub began thinking about all the other Catholic churches in Baltimore - many of which are more than 100 years old.

"It popped into my mind how it's great to go to Rome or the Holy Land to see all the beautiful sites," Doub said, "but what about all the beautiful churches right here - the seat of Catholicism in our area?"

Doub placed a call to David Wendt, owner of an Ohio-based Catholic touring company, and asked if he would consider expanding his offerings in the Baltimore-Washington area. Doub was familiar Wendt Touring, having gone on a pilgrimage to Italy with the company.

Doub, who had been looking for a job when he placed the call, began working for Wendt - offering pilgrimages to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Jude Shrine, Shrine of St. Alphonsus, Holy Rosary, the Mother Seton House and other Catholic destinations in Charm City. He also offers two or three European trips every year and has put together a series of six pilgrimages for Catholic schools that trace the history of the Catholic Church in America in the region.

"It's been a pretty incredible journey," said Doub, who also dreams of organizing pilgrimages to the ethnic churches of Baltimore.

Doub has worked with 20 parishes in preparing pilgrimages. Sometimes parish priests serve as pilgrimage hosts, he said.

"In doing this for three years, it's just been incredible to get to know the wonderful priests we have in the archdiocese," he said.

Pilgrimages are about more than mere site-seeing, Doub said. They are meant to deepen a person's relationship with God.

"The history of pilgrimages goes back to the early church," he explained. "I always look at it as a kind of cleansing. The people you meet on the pilgrimage, the different saints you venerate and the shrines you visit all bring you closer to Christ."

Great fellowship is an added bonus of traveling with like-minded people, Doub said.

"I will never forget a salient moment coming back from Florence," he said. "We visited all these wonderful shrines and I was just amazed at how wonderful it was to sit down to a nice dinner and talk about what we did. It seemed more enjoyable."

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