

Spirit Blows into Annual Pilgrimage

Many Made the Eight-Mile Trek To Holy Places

Ken Schnipke, C.P.P.S.

WINDY was the forecast for Saturday, May 8, 2010, and *WINDY* it was for the seventh annual *Stepping Up the Call: A Pilgrimage for Vocations* held in Mercer and Auglaize counties



**Vocational
Views
C.P.P.S. for
Tomorrow**

in Western Ohio. Neither blustery winds nor snarling grey clouds would

deter the prayerful pilgrims who walked the eight-mile journey and/or drove to multiple churches and chapels to affirm and celebrate the gift of vocation as single, married, deacon, sister, brother or priest.

The day began at St. Augustine church in Minster with Fr. Rick Nieberding, C.P.P.S., welcoming pilgrims and calling us to prayer. Judy Ruen, reflecting on her call to the single life, reminded participants that, "there is no solitary Christian. We need to be connected with God, with Jesus and with others to be truly alive." Linda and John Hageman shared their thankfulness for the blessings of life and the tragedies too. "Our home flooded when I was younger and John came to repair our home," said Linda. "God works in both the good and bad helping us find our vocation in life."

Carrying a *Stepping Up the Call* banner the walkers set out

on the 3.6 mile journey to St. Joseph church in Egypt, Ohio. The wind was brisk and cool, but the spirit blowing among the walkers was stronger. The driving pilgrims made their way to Sacred Heart church in McCartyville.

At St. Joseph we heard from men and women discerning the priesthood and religious life. Jarred Kohn, a seminarian with the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, described his vocation discernment as a surprise. He was feeling that maybe he was called to be a priest so he made an appointment with his parish priest.

"I went in with all the reasons I was not called to be a priest and I came out with all the reasons I should be a priest," he said. "God works in funny ways."

Cassie Schemmel described her vocation discernment with the Sisters of the Precious Blood as the voice of a pestering younger sibling, "Cassie, Caaassie, Caaaassie" and then the persistent tapping on the shoulder to get her attention.

Matt Keller with the Missionaries of the Precious Blood emphasized the importance of being involved in your spiritual life and being open to where the spirit will lead you.



Pilgrims gather outside St. Augustine Church in Minster, Ohio, where *Stepping up the Call* began on May 8.

(Photo by Fr. Ken Schnipke, C.P.P.S.)

"It will take you more places than you ever dreamed possible," he said.

Tonya Broerman, discerning with the Sisters of the Precious Blood, described her journey as a love story that is deeply nurtured by the sacraments and the gift of faith.

Jim Keller of Maria Stein was deeply touched by the sharing of these young people. "Their heartfelt honesty of witness renewed my hope for our Church and the whole planet for that matter. God is certainly still at work through such fine young people."

The next leg of the journey was a 4.4-mile trek for the walkers to Maria Stein Relic Shrine and a stop for those driving at St. Mary church in Philothea. We were welcomed at the relic shrine with lunch and then participated in Benediction. Deacon Paul Luthman never could have imagined himself reading in front of people not to mention serving as a deacon, but "with

buckets full of God's grace" he made his way through classes and was ordained to serve God's people.

Sr. Patricia Kremer, C.P.P.S., admitted that she was somewhat of a wild child growing up and that she still has fun being a sister and principal of a grade school.

The final stop of the pilgrimage was St. Charles Center, Carthagena for the celebration of the Eucharist and to hear about life as a priest and brother. Fr. Kyle Schnippel, vocation director for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati described his mother's reaction and his own action after telling her that he wanted to be a priest: "I helped her up from the floor!"

Fr. Schnippel described his life as "striving to be a living icon of Christ who leads others to Christ. An icon points to something deeper and draws people into mystery."

Br. Ben Basile, C.P.P.S., shared his musical talents as organist for the Eucharist and noted that his life as a brother makes sense only in the context of community. "Go with your gut feeling," Br. Ben encouraged discerners, "investigate, talk with people, ask questions and get to know the group you are considering. That's what worked best for me."

The pilgrimage was coordinated by the Sisters and Missionaries of the Precious Blood, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and volunteers from parishes throughout the St. Mary's and Sidney deaneries. Indeed, God's abundant blessings were revealed this day through many people.

Traditionally, a pilgrimage

is a journey to a shrine or holy place for a religious reason. Pilgrimages presume something physically challenging and a profound belief that God responds to prayer. *Stepping Up the Call* was a journey that took us to several holy places, highlighting the vocation each person receives in baptism, and placing special emphasis on the call to the priesthood and religious life. It was an adventure marked by challenge and driven by prayer. Is there someone you know who may be called to the religious life as a priest, brother or sister?