

A Pilgrimage Experience...Peter Chouinard, Earthen Vessel CLC

I had always been interested in stories of pilgrimages and have contemplated my own desire of walking the Camino or at least part of the Camino in France/Spain some day. That dream still lives within me.

As fate would have it, this summer I had plans to be in Ontario and I was asked if I might be interested in a walking pilgrimage from Loyola House in Guelph, Ontario to the Martyr's Shrine in Midland, Ontario, a journey of 188 kms. I thought about it and looked at the pilgrimage website; ignatiusguelph.ca/pilgrimage.html to see if it was something I might be interested in doing. Since 2002, a group of pilgrims journey from the Ignatius Jesuit Centre in Guelph, to the Jesuit Martyrs' Shrine in Midland – a place that honors early Jesuit missionaries who introduced Christianity to the Huron Wendat Nation. I prayed about it and decided that; "If I ever truly want to bring to fruition my desire to

walk on the Camino, this is an opportunity to see if I have what it takes." So I registered!



So on August 2, 2014 60-70 of us gathered at the Jesuit Retreat Centre in Guelph, Ontario for Mass, a blessing and the beginning of our *communal* journey towards the Martyr's Shine in Midland. I say *communal* because it is a communal experience. There are moments of silence during the pilgrimage but for the most part you are walking,

eating, pitching your tent and spending the evenings with other like minded pilgrims, each walking for their own reasons, each with their hopes and desires.

We slept in tents that were carried by support vehicles and that were put up each night when we reached our destination for the day. Each day's journey would cover 20-28 kilometers, depending on where we were staying for the evening. Our campgrounds were Church grounds, adjacent to individual homes, farms, patrons of the pilgrimage, etc. each offering their own gifts of space.



A doctor was with us as well as a nurse for the latter part of the journey. We were fed each day by various groups – Knights of Columbus, Catholic Women's League, Parish's, individual sponsors, all friends of the pilgrimage. The attached PDF map shows the route we took and the stop over locations.

It was an ongoing part of my healing journey for me and one I am thankful for in many ways. I am thankful that I was able to complete the walk, every step of the 188 kms, including the last day and a half, after stepping on a nail and limping for quite a while. A lesson in how much pain one can endure if we only put our minds to it. For another, to have met such committed people who also had their own spiritual reasons for walking and for all of those who joined us, some even for a portion of the pilgrimage.



(This couple pushed their baby carriage and many took turns in helping them out. (Photo shows Sr. Laurence, an Xavier Sister, giving them a little rest) The truck was one of two support vehicles that carried our personal items, tents, food, etc.)

We had Mass every morning on the way (sometimes in a church, sometimes in a barn) with a Jesuit Priest, Fr. Bert Foliot, sj walking every step of the journey as well - an inspiration to us all.

As the website says; “Those who walk the Guelph to Midland pilgrimage find it to be a unique and grace-filled experience. For eight days, pilgrims pray, sing, laugh, and share stories with others as they journey. Although the journey is not always easy, it is always rewarding.” I can attest to that and I encourage any of you interested in a pilgrimage experience to consider this as one way to hear God’s voice in His beautiful creation. The scenery was outstanding, the company wonderful

and the food delicious!



At the end of the seven days we were very grateful to have reached our destination. (A little tired and I for one was definitely in need of a shave!)

We gathered at the Martyr's shire after

burning our prayer intentions, carried every day in our pilgrimage arc. A journey's end with God's gifts so gratefully accepted.

