

St. Joseph's Ladies' Pilgrimage Visits Carmelite Monastery in Fairfield



COURTESY OF KRIS KECK
Members of the ladies' pilgrimage are pictured on the grounds of the monastery in Fairfield.



Ladies work on sewing projects to benefit the Discalced Carmelites in Fairfield.

By Kris Keck
Special to The Witness

Since their foundation in 2018, the Discalced Carmelite Sisters in Fairfield have relied on gifts from benefactors and pilgrims to build their monastery. On Sept. 14, a ladies' pilgrimage from the Latin Mass Community of St. Joseph Parish in Lancaster visited to learn about the Carmelite way of life. Mothers and daughters were encouraged to attend the pilgrimage together. Gregorian chant from the Sisters enhanced Holy Mass on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross with Father Brian Olkowski as celebrant and pilgrimage chaplain.

Following Mass, two reflections were offered. Father Olkowski spoke of the importance of vocational discernment while the Carmelite Sisters spoke candidly from behind their speak-room about the challenges and joys of being a Carmelite Sister.

For Father Olkowski, "It was a great chance for some of the young women who are discerning vocations to the religious life to

talk with and hear from those who are living out their calling to religious life."

With so many young ladies in attendance, the Sisters' advice was especially relevant.

In fact, so

many registered to attend that a waiting list was required. Due to space constraints in the temporary chapel, only 24 pilgrims may comfortably attend at one time.

The pilgrims enjoyed a picnic lunch before completing various work projects at the nearby farmhouse, such as creating a garden, cleaning the inside of the farmhouse and assisting in sewing projects for the Sisters.

St. Joseph Parish plans to offer a men's pilgrimage in May 2020 to assist the Carmelite Sisters with painting, moving, clearing land, log splitting and general repairs.

Since moving to Fairfield in 2018 to accommodate the growing numbers at the Carmelite Monastery in Elysburg, the Sisters have started to build a multi-building monastery in the rolling hills of Adams County. While they build their permanent chapel, cells and enclosure from local stone, the Sisters live in mobile trailer and use a barn for a work area. A guest house serves as the temporary chapel.

The Carmelites live an enclosed, simple and contemplative life of

prayer and work. The Sisters worship God by attending Holy Mass, praying the Divine Office in Latin, and studying Carmelite spirituality, focusing on mental prayer and spiritual readings, to allow for their own sanctification.

Father Olkowski reflected that "The prayers of the Carmelites help give life to the Church."

The Sisters' most important work is to pray for the whole world, with a special emphasis on praying for the sanctification of priests, especially for the bishop and priests of the Diocese of Harrisburg. The Sisters also do manual work, including farming, looking after animals and making liturgical items.

Individuals and groups have supported the Sisters by providing for their temporal needs or by making a pilgrimage to assist in building and maintaining the monastery in. Many spiritual writers have commented on the benefits of

pilgrimage for one's own spiritual life. Not only does it benefit them individually, but also assists the Carmelite Sisters in building their monastery to allow more religious women to pray for the many needs of the Church and the Diocese of Harrisburg.

For pilgrim Christin Miller, "The work the Sisters do in praying for the bishop and our priests and seminarians is of utmost important and is of great benefit to not only our Diocese but also our souls."

To learn more about the Sisters, visit www.fairfieldcarmelites.org.

(Kris Keck is a member of the Latin Mass Community at St. Joseph Parish in Lancaster.)



Father Brian Olkowski, chaplain of the pilgrimage, is pictured with altar servers.

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