



The author passes a marker on the Camino de Santiago de Compostela bearing the scallop shell, an ancient pilgrimage symbol.

Relationships on the Road to the Shrine of St. James

A Portland Serran accompanies his priest son on a life-changing hike

Fr. Jeff Eirvin, Director of Vocations for the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon, and his father, Jeff Eirvin, Sr., Vice President of Vocations for the Portland Serra Club, walked the Camino de Santiago de Compostela June 29–July 8 for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. They walked 230 kilometers (142 miles) for 10 days on the Portuguese Way. They asked members of the Archdiocese to be a part of the pilgrimage by sponsoring them, following them and praying with them along the Way. They also carried prayer intentions from anyone who asked to the tomb of St. James through their Facebook site @camino4vocations. All donations went toward local vocation events in the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon, such as Quo Vadis Days, the Nun Run and other discernment retreats.

by Jeff Eirvin, Sr.

I was unsure what to expect when my son asked me if I was interested in joining him on his second Camino. I was excited, of course, that he would ask me, but I was also apprehensive because I was not sure I was capable of walking 10 days straight averaging 14

miles per day. So, I started walking as much as I could in preparation for this journey. Physically, I was prepared, but what I didn't realize is that I wasn't prepared for my real challenge on the Camino – building relationships!

Jeff and I have a great relationship. He respects me and I admire his choice of vocation and his job as Director of Vocations for the Archdiocese. He helps form other young men to become priests. I realized that his formation as a priest was not only a spiritual journey for him, but a true change in his personality. During his childhood, he was a bit unorganized; but on this trip, I saw him as a very organized young man. He scheduled the flights, reserved the hotels and albergues (hostels), helped me shop for clothing and equipment, and helped pack and organize my backpack.

While walking, we made sure that we had our own time on the trail. He needed time for his personal prayer and I enjoyed the time alone thinking about my life. I thanked God for his neverending relationship with me and all the good things that have happened in my life and all the relationships I made throughout life. It was during these alone times that I realized that God was

leading me to where I am today and where I will be in the future. I worked hard for what I wanted in life, but looking back I see that God wanted more from me than I thought was possible. I was humbled that one of my children would answer God's call. Never did I think I would be in Europe walking an ancient Catholic pilgrimage route with him.

Another relationship that resulted from this Camino was with other pilgrims (see middle photo at right). When I encountered them along the way, I would ask if they spoke English, engage them in conversation, ask if they were doing the Camino for spiritual reasons or just hiking. In doing so, we made friends on our first day with 11 others from Poland, Italy, France, Slovakia, Romania, and Arizona. They journeyed with us throughout the trip. However, we met many others, like 7-year-old Christopher from Ireland who walked with his father who at one time was a seminarian! When we met these people and they found out Jeff was a priest, they asked immediately if he was celebrating Mass on the road and if so, could they attend Mass with us. They were eager to receive Jesus and make him the central figure during their journey (a portrait of Jesus is decorated by pilgrims, bottom right). Each morning when we met them on the trail the first question out of their mouths was, "When will you celebrate Mass and where?" (One such *alfresco* Mass is pictured at top right.)

One other relationship that appeared was the intervention of the Holy Spirit. On at least three occasions the Holy Spirit made his presence felt by all of us. First was when we were told that we could not celebrate Mass on the grounds without permission of the person who ran the albergue. Just as we were discussing our next option he showed up expectantly and opened a room that was perfect as a chapel. He was thrilled to have us celebrate Mass at his albergue.

The second time I felt the Holy Spirit was when we as a group arrived late at the albergue and were turned away because there were not enough beds for us. While deciding what to do, a man overheard our conversation and offered to us an apartment he had for rent. A true gift of the Holy Spirit!

The third time is this: when we left for the trip, Jeff brought along enough hosts for the two of us. However, we did not anticipate having others join us. So, he would just break off small pieces so that everyone attending received. As the days passed, we started to worry that we did not have enough hosts for the remainder of the trip. But, at the very last Mass there was enough for everyone! We had more than enough to feed the all the hungry!

All who walk the Camino have a different experience, but I know that without Jeff's vocation as a priest, the camaraderie of our Camino group, and the help of the Holy Spirit, my journey would not have been as wonderful as it was. God has blessed my family with a son who chose to serve others, form others, and promote his faith here in Portland and in other places of the world. 🙏

