

Sacred Heart Pilgrimage to Saint Gabriel, Twice a Year

Reviewed 5/18/16

The Haiti Twinning Ministry (HTM) leads pilgrimages to our twin parish St. Gabriel twice a year for growth in spiritual life and developing partnership through relationship. All parishioners are invited. Members going on the pilgrimage go through various steps in their preparation. First they gather for a pre-retreat to discuss how to get physically and spiritually ready for the pilgrimage. Second Fr. Dan Klem gives them and the ministry a blessing before the journey; Fr. Ady Mytial also gives them a blessing before returning home; this to help the pilgrims to stay on the path that leads to God and for His protection. Also members of the HTM and of Sacred Heart keep a **vigil** while the pilgrims are away. They stay awake in their prayers for the conversion of pilgrims and for their safety.

This year **the pilgrimages** are scheduled March 3-10 and June 11-18. Fr. Ady collects the pilgrims from the airport in Port-au-Prince and drives them in a pick-up truck to **the rectory** in Lascahobas, about a two hour drive.

The pilgrims are housed in newly renovated bedrooms on the second floor. Typically the ladies share one room and the men another. Often, we all share the same bathroom. Electricity is not reliable and running water or buckets of water is cold.

The day starts with the rectory keeper, ringing the church bells at 5:00 am. Fr. Ady celebrates **Mass** around 6:00 am during the week days and 8:00 am on Sundays. The pilgrims typically go over the readings before Mass in order to better follow Mass celebrated partly in Haitian Creole, partly in French. Fr. Ady, when not busy with a project, has breakfast with the pilgrims.

The rest of the morning is free. We often go to the **daily market** and to St. Gabriel School before it gets hot. All **visits to the school** are scheduled in advance and visitors are toured by Mr. Fritz André, the Head of School or the Abbé. Pilgrims share some chores in order to focus their stay on Jesus: laundry, sweeping the bedroom floors, carrying water for the bathrooms and collecting potable water for brushing teeth.

Lunch is served around 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm. Guests, traveling priests, and nuns often join us at the table. Most of the conversation is in Creole among the natives. Pilgrims make an effort to **learn some Creole** in order to communicate with their hosts and friends. In the early afternoon, pilgrims gather for communal and individual reflections and prayers and discussing an article from the Pilgrim Manual.

When time is available during the summer which is the rainy season, Fr. Ady takes the pilgrims for a field trip to **the school vegetable farm**. Mr. George, the local farmer picks manioc, string beans, eggplants, bananas and others for the kitchen at the rectory and at the school. He also sometimes brings us to a couple of the **parish chapels**.

There is ample time to meet with **old and new friends**. Home visit are a possibility for pen pals and hospitality can vary from a chair on the porch with or without a cool beverage. Lunch is not often extended to the pilgrims since resources are scarce and food is a luxury in Haiti.