

SJB NEWS NOTES

FRANCISCAN FRIARS

Office of Communications

Province of St. John the Baptist



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PHOTO BY TONI CASHNELLI



At the end of their journey, the pilgrims pass under the arches of the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land.

A walk to remember

All along the way,
'God kept surprising us'

*Our God (our God) is an awesome God
He reigns (He reigns) from heaven above
With wisdom (with wisdom) pow'r and love
Our God is an awesome God!*

— refrain from *Awesome God*, by Rich Mullins

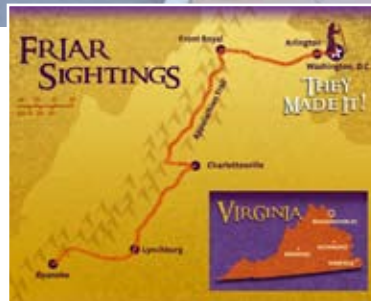
By Toni Cashnelli

Of all the sights Richard Goodin has seen in the past few weeks, this is probably the most remarkable. It is a photo of himself with fellow friars Mark Soehner, Clifford Hennings, Ed Shea, Joshua van Cleef and Roger Lopez, walking single file along a busy road in Arlington, Va. And it's on Page 1 of the *Washington Post*, competing for attention with the big news of the day (July 29), "Senators Close to Health Accord."

Richard unfolds the paper on the kitchen table at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land and leans in for a closer look at the story. "It's just [he pauses] *incredible*," surely one of the most succinct statements this loquacious friar has ever uttered. But at this point, there is little left

that should surprise him. On the grace-filled journey he has just completed, God intervened with such regularity at such opportune moments that some would call it miraculous.

The night before, Richard and his brothers had hiked up Quincy Street in northeast Washington, D.C., clapping and singing the refrain to *Awesome God*, the toe-tapping hymn of praise that became the anthem for their journey. They were met by a beaming Jeremy Harrington, Guardian and Commissary at the Monastery, the destination for their walking pilgrimage because it was symbolic of the birthplace of Christ. The six friars – four of them aged 30 or younger, accompanied by two formators – started their trek June 21 in Salem, Va., a few days after three of them took their first vows as Franciscans.



Heeding an admonition from the Gospel of Mark to "Take nothing for the journey," they walked in the spirit of St. Francis, trusting in God that there would be food to eat and places to sleep along the way. When they landed in Washington, D.C., on July 28, they had logged more than 300 miles on the highways and byways of Virginia and left behind a trail of good will, reflected in the article in the *Post*.

What they learned about themselves was "transformational," Ed says. But it's what they learned about others that they are most excited to share. When the road seemed endless, a passing Samaritan would give them a ride. People emptied their wallets so the friars could have supper. Strangers opened their doors, invited them in and treated them like family. Their capacity for kindness was endless – boundless.

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From Jeff is on Page 7



**Pictures from the road,
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“There’s little reservation left in my heart that people are good,” Richard says, “and God is humongous.”

••••• **Creature comforts**

The moment they land at the Monastery, the Walking Friars (so dubbed by Welcome signs) are eager to process their pilgrimage. The physical demands of the journey are much on the minds of listeners. Were they ever hungry? Lost? Frightened? In a country where walking to a car parked two rows from the mall is considered a hardship, how could anyone walk hundreds of miles in a long-sleeved habit – in the summer?

Surprisingly, they say, the heat was tolerable. Mosquitoes weren’t so bad. The thing that really bummed them out was ticks, “jumping in on the ankles and heading north,” Josh says. Cliff came to realize “that you can’t sit on the grass anywhere without picking them up. Everywhere we stopped, somebody had Lyme disease.”



PHOTO BY TONI CASHNELLI

Pilgrim friars kiss the floor of the Monastery in D.C. in gratitude.

“We never went a day without food, without some nutrients,” Josh says, even when the daily ration was a couple of Clif (energy) bars. The owners of a vineyard fed them cheese, baguettes and chocolates – and sent them on their way with three bottles of wine. Accommodations ranged from wood-and-stone shelters on the Appalachian Trail to the floor of a Baptist Church to a couple of rooms at a Hampton Inn (after a meal at a steakhouse, purchased by the same kind soul who footed the bill for the hotel).

There were no real “scary” moments during the

pilgrimage, Ed says, despite the proximity of bears lumbering along the Appalachian Trail. “It was just the insecurity of it, not knowing where the next meal would come from.” At the end of their second day on the road, “We were hot, tired, hungry, had no place to stay.” Around 7 p.m. they decided to pursue the course of last resort, cold-knocking on doors, introducing themselves as Christian pilgrims in need of help. At one house where a yard sign read, “Happy Birthday, Jesus,” the man who answered the door invited them into the garage. “My faith tells me to give you what you need and send you on your way,” he said, then pulled out his wallet and handed the friars \$19 – almost everything he had. With that, they bought a loaf of bread, two jars of peanut butter, two bags of potato chips and Little Debbie snack cakes. “It was,” Mark says, “the *best meal*.”

Next day, same story: no food, no place to sleep. This time a driver stopped his car, rolled down the window and offered, “Let me buy you lunch.” And that, Ed says, became the pattern for the journey. Whatever you call it – serendipity, synchronicity, divine intervention – something special was happening. “God never stopped surprising us with the goodness of people,” Josh says. Secular Franciscans came out to cheer them on. Churches of every denomination formed a network of hospitality that stretched from the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Tidal Basin. One day when the friars were lost in Shenandoah National Park, they got directions from a Mennonite fisherman, water and granola bars from a Catholic lady, a ride down the mountain from a Jewish gent, and lodging for the night with a Hindu family – all in the space of an hour and a half. (“You can stay here as long as you don’t mind sleeping under [a statue of] the Buddha,” the Hindu woman told them.)

“I think that may be God’s greatest gift to us,” Richard says. “We told every single person we stayed with, ‘You are a part of the big journey.’ To me, we have been instruments in people’s lives, and they’re the vehicle that got us here.”

Of course there was anxiety, Roger admits – especially when the water ran out – and they wondered, “God, what are we gonna do? Where are we gonna sleep? We don’t have sleeping bags. We didn’t take tents.” That’s when a lot of prayers went out. The response would come in the form of an out-of-the-blue offer of lodging, a bag of protein bars from a passer-by, hot dogs shared by hikers. According to Josh, “We had little angels all over the

place taking care of us.” Whenever there were doubts, Roger says, God was there to remind them, “Do I have to show my trust to you *again*? Do I have to show my generosity to you *again*?”

••••• ‘You made my day’

Naturally, six guys walking down the road in brown robes, extolling the wonders of creation in song, attracted their share of honks and waves. By the time they got to Harrisonburg, Va., they had already been featured in four newspapers and photographed hundreds of times by gawkers hanging out of their cars with cell phones. But there were surprisingly few drive-by taunts and upraised fingers. “Francis has this universal appeal,” Ed says. “We entered into that. People saw us in our habits and thought, ‘Oh, Franciscans. They’re fine.’” One woman pulled up alongside them to say, “I just wanted to thank you. You made my day so much brighter.”

The pace they set – 10 to 15 miles a day – gave them time to chat with anyone who asked what the heck they were doing. Teen-agers, impressed with the friars’ intensity of purpose, considered them cool. “Some thought we were Amish. Jedis. Ninjas,” Josh says. “Most people were very, very kind. They would come to talk to us about ‘the sacred,’ whatever that was to them. We became ‘ears’ for people to tell their stories to. A lot of people wanted to talk about the struggles in their lives. Others said God was working so generously in their lives they wanted to share.” The friars prayed with them, blessed their children, heard their confessions. “We were there to listen,” Cliff says. They measured their progress not in distance, but in the friendships they forged.

When they could, they worked to earn their keep by weeding flower beds, mowing lawns, painting sheds and picnic tables, transplanting trees, moving furniture, fixing lights and toilets and organizing rooms full of junk. The worst job, they say, was sifting through about a ton of gravel to separate the dirt for landscaping. “Thanks be to God,” Roger sighed when that tedious task was finished.

Early on, the issue of money (they took none with them) reared its ugly head. “If people said, ‘Do you need money?’ we told them no,” Mark says. But what happened at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Salem was typical: During a going-away party for the pastor, “People kept slipping us money,” Richard says, a total of \$402.70. That’s when they decided, OK, we’ll take it – but we’ll give away what we don’t spend in one day. Most of that windfall was donated to a poor parish in Roanoke. With the rest, they had a nice meal at Jersey Lily’s and tipped the waitress \$70.

In Fairfax, Va., near the end of their trek, a mom running errands with her kids loaded the friars into her minivan and bought them lunch at Chick-fil-A. It was she who called the *Washington Post* to tell them about the pilgrimage (see story, right). That led to a four-hour

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‘So many connections!’

PHOTO BY TONI CASHNELLI



Mary Williams and her children were reunited with the friars at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land.

By Mary Williams

I grew up on the other side of the woods behind St. Leonard’s in Centerville and spent most of my childhood playing and exploring the woods on their property. We attended Mass there mostly in my early teens.

The day I met the friar pilgrims, my children and I were returning from an errand [in Fairfax, Va.] and heading towards a new Chick-Fil-A. I saw the friars walking down the sidewalk, and in a split second decided I really needed to stop and talk to them. I was amazed by their story and asked if I could take them to lunch. I had faith that there was no harm in picking up four complete strangers and putting them in my car (with my kids, no less!), and they had to have faith in me, too. I discovered that Br. Richard is from the same town in Kentucky where my dad’s company has a plant, and his parents are good friends with dad’s business partner. Also they told me about Fr. Mark being from Archbishop Alter H.S. in Kettering, Ohio, my alma mater. So many connections!

After lunch, I asked if they needed a place to eat dinner and/or sleep that night. I was sure my husband would think I was a total nut, inviting strangers to stay in our house, but I just had to do it – they were Franciscans; how could I not! They ended up staying with us on the following night [Friday]. The next Monday I read in the *Washington Post* a well-done article about Iraq war amputees and how they have coped with that through humor. An idea formed that maybe a similarly written article about the friars would be good on so many levels. The whole concept of young people doing something so positive in their lives and answering the call might inspire other young people. I e-mailed the journalist at the *Post*. He then forwarded my info to William Wan, who ultimately wrote the story about the friars.

It has been a life-changing event for me in so many ways. The friars may have completed their physical journey, but their spiritual one will continue for the rest of their lives. The same should be said for the rest of us – but how many of us can say that it’s true? How many of us live our lives as Christians, doing everything we should be doing, but not really thinking and examining our faith, digging into it at a deeper level, getting down to its roots and the very core of it? How many of us would be willing to do what the friars did, if not literally, at least spiritually?

interview with reporter William Wan, who was so impressed with the friars he later returned to walk with them a ways.

••••• No autographs, please

By the time the *Post* hits doorsteps Wednesday morning, July 29, the entire world has heard about the Walking Friars. Or maybe it just seems that way. The switchboard at the Monastery in D.C. is lit up with callers anxious to make donations, invite the guys to dinner, sit them down for an interview.

The media blitz begins before noon. The diocesan paper wants anecdotes, so Josh tells the story of Healing Bear, a Native American healer who put them up in his home and taught them a thing or two about prejudice and stereotypes. A writer for the *National Catholic Reporter* asks Roger what he's learned, and he responds, "It's not about the destination; it's about the journey." When BBC-Radio shows up and shoves a microphone at Josh and Richard, the general reaction is, can this be happening?

More than a dozen people drop by to visit, including a family from Roanoke and Mary Williams, the woman who tipped off the *Post*. It turns out that Mary grew up on a street behind St. Leonard's, the friars' school of theology in Centerville, Ohio. Today she's here with her three children to deliver a heaping plate of chocolate chip cookies for the friars to eat on the drive home to the interprovincial post-novitiate house in Chicago. Others who wander in to meet the pilgrims are cheerfully accommodated.

The long, eventful day ends with a meet-and-greet reception at the Monastery. The resident priests and brothers, most of them retired, seem spellbound by the stories of the Walking Friars. Fr. Stephen Sabbagh, a 78-year-old veteran of ministry in Nazareth and Amman, is inspired by their witness. "You're young and enthusiastic and you're willing to put it into practice, willing to show us new ways, and that's important – putting the life of Christ into actual being in our times," he says. "Sadly, we oldsters become content with letting things be the way they are. We can't do that. We have to live every single day. We have to let Christ live through us. You youngsters have to teach us how to become new, day by day."

Throughout the pilgrimage, Josh says, "It was such a humbling experience to meet people who didn't know me, but knew the friars. We were collecting all the fruit from people who knew them. It was like, I got to share in their lives because of the goodness of all the friars who came before. We felt the province was not only supporting



PHOTO BY TONI CASHNELLI

"But I'm not a Walking Friar," Jeff Scheeler protested when this lady herded him into the picture. "Doesn't matter," she said.

us, they were with us. When any part of the group becomes itinerant, we all become itinerant."

"Is this the end of the road?" a resident friar asks. "It's really not 'done done,'" Mark says. "In a way, it's just beginning."

"This is the pilgrimage destination," Richard confirms, but not the end of their experiment in "radical trust." Hopefully, "The Lord can help us find ways to integrate it. Some of us would like to do this as a lifestyle. This is Friar Minor energy flowing out in pure fashion."

Because of this experience, Roger says, "I'm different. I'm changed by this event. Life will be different." When a beggar asks for food, "I will help him find something to eat. What I did before and what I do now will be different."

••••• 'God is all good'

Thursday morning, Provincial Minister Jeff Scheeler arrives in Washington to greet the Walking Friars and celebrate the safe completion of their journey. "I imagine you've probably learned a lot about yourselves and one another, about fraternity," he tells them during an informal ceremony in the friars' chapel at the Monastery. "One of the core insights of Francis is that God is all good, and you can trust that. My hope for you is that you'll be more committed to the Gospel, to Franciscan life, to Francis and Jesus, and open to new experiences." Jeff hands each of them a journal and a card tucked in an envelope as a thank-you gift. One of the cards reads,

“Life begins at the end of your comfort zone.”

From here, four of the friars are heading to Chicago; Roger and Josh will leave separately for vacation before starting school at Catholic Theological Union. Stowing their backpacks in a borrowed van, Mark, Cliff and Richard say their goodbyes at the front door of the Monastery, then take a look around. “Have you seen Ed?” one of them asks. Just then, Ed turns the corner, followed by a youngster of 10 or so, then another. A trickle turns into a stream of children, nearly 50 in all, accompanied by their teachers from St. Luke Lutheran Church in Silver Spring, Md. They’re here on a field trip from Music Camp to meet the Walking Friars. Delaying their departure, the guys gather on the front porch to kibitz with the kids, responding to queries like, “Did you really sleep on a trampoline?”

– a reference to their most memorable (and sleepless) night on the road.

After Ed leads a hand-clapping chorus of *Awesome God*, Roger assumes the role of ringmaster. “We’re going to do the loaves and fishes thing,” he

Below, before leaving the Monastery, Ed leads the kids in song.

says, brandishing the plate of cookies from their friend, Mary. “I want you to break off a piece of cookie, then pass it along to the next person,” so that, theoretically, everyone gets a bite. When the plate has made the rounds – in surprisingly orderly fashion – there are cookies to spare.

The Walking Friars gather around a statue of Francis for a photo with the kids, then four of them take their leave. One youngster, following the crowd to the church bus parked out front, says she’s glad she came because “we got to meet people who were in the newspaper.”

Now *that’s* awesome.



Above, the Walking Friars with children from St. Luke Lutheran Church in Silver Spring, Md.

PHOTOS BY TONI CASHNELLI





Bart Pax, OFM

Celebrating Bart

Last Sunday, as **Frank Jasper** was beginning the homily for **Bart Pax's** memorial Mass, the lights went out at St. Mary of the Angels in New Orleans. Frank had to laugh. Four years after Hurricane Katrina, a defining moment in Bart's ministry, the darned power still wasn't working right. Other than that glitch, "We had a wonderful celebration," says Pastor **Joe Rigali**, whose friendship with Bart and similar vision of pastoral ministry inspired him to come out of retirement and move to New Orleans.

With an enormous photo of Bart as the backdrop, Frank borrowed his message from the inspiring homily **Page Polk** had delivered at Bart's funeral in Cincinnati a few days earlier. "I talked about his opening his heart to people and their giving theirs to him," Frank said, "how Katrina brought out the best in him." And he spoke of how "Bart delighted in keeping people puzzled. He was a man of mystery. When you asked Bart how he was, he would say, 'I am.' You never knew whether he was serious or not."

Even without the electricity to amplify the instruments and power the microphones, "The music was just wonderful," Frank says. "At the offertory they brought up a broom, a mop, a school bell and keys," symbolic of Bart's dedication to the parish school and his unflagging efforts to reconstruct and reopen the flood-damaged parish. People spoke about "just how grateful they were for Bart's efforts not just for the parish, but for the neighborhood." Throughout Bart's 16 years at SMA, "He stood up for the rights of his people and became one of

their most ardent supporters," Frank said. "He really did fall in love with them."

As Joe says of his friend Bart, "He loved people, he fought for people, he worked his tail off for them."

Tadi finds a home

By Ed Gura, OFM

(Last fall Ed Gura accompanied his sister, Beth, to Africa when she adopted a child from Ethiopia. We checked in recently with Ed to see how his nephew, Tadi, is faring with his American family.)

Tadi has been doing exceptionally well during his time of transition, having formed many friendships at preschool and in the neighborhood, while forming strong attachments with my sister, **Beth**, and her husband, **Matt**, and their biological children, **Chloe** and **Rachel**. So much is this true that early on when his mother decided to take him to an Ethiopian store, thinking that he would enjoy seeing things which reminded him of his homeland, Tadi became extremely quiet and physically sick. We learned later that the reaction was caused by a feeling he was being taken back to Ethiopia. It was sad yet comforting to know that, in a very short time, Tadi had become so close to his new family.



Tadi with his American sisters, Chloe and Rachel.

Tadi is also quick to learn; within his first two months (at age 3) he had already picked up a considerable amount of English. He has also acquired a sweet tooth (not part of their Ethiopian diet), as Halloween, Birthday and Holiday celebrations have provided ample opportunities for consumption. However, in a family big on fitness and exercise, such comes in moderation.

On a recent visit with family in Cary, N.C., I saw Tadi again for the first time since our return from Ethiopia last September. His daring and adventurous spirit is no less, as he was constantly on the run, especially having fun with all of his nieces and nephews. He has grown four more inches and gained a healthier looking appearance with a fuller head of curly hair. He smiles all the time and has an energy that seems endless. In fact, my sister has Tadi do some yoga exercises with her in the morning before preschool to help him burn off excess energy. This and “penny rewards” have helped Tadi become a better participant during their school’s one hour of quiet time.

We are all excited and blessed by the presence of Tadi, while wondering what the future holds for this child whom God has sent to us.



FOCUS ON FRIARS

■ The community of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church in Shreveport will celebrate **Andre McGrath’s** 50th jubilee of profession at the 9 a.m. Mass on Sunday, Aug. 16. A reception follows in the Community Center.

■ **Pat McCloskey’s** answer to a question posed last year to the Ask a Franciscan column in *St. Anthony Messenger* was the springboard for this month’s issue of *Every Day Catholic*, “Will My Grandbabies See Heaven?” by **Gloria Hutchinson**. A grandmother, heartsick that her grandchildren had not been baptized, wondered if she could do it herself. Pat advised against it, saying, “The parents must be willing to raise their children as Catholics.” But, he continued, “Please do not underestimate the power of your good example. Children are sometimes more influenced by the faith of their grandparents (or great-grandparents) than by the apparent lack of faith of their parents.”

■ From **Page Polk**: “A thank you to those who have returned the Joint All Province Assembly Registration Forms and a reminder to those who have not returned

them that I would appreciate your doing so as soon as possible.”

■ **Murray Bodo’s** 1 hour and 20 minute DVD, *Celebrating 800 Years of the Franciscan Life*, is now available from Tau-publishing.com. The program was filmed live on the Feast of St. John the Baptist, June 24, 2009, at historic St. Mary’s Basilica in Phoenix, Ariz.

■ We were not surprised to receive this e-mail from Jamaica and the accompanying picture.

“Let me introduce

Vincent John Joseph Bok-Gerchak,” Jim

Bok wrote recently.

“We will call him

either **Vinnie** or **Vejays**

(get it—one V and

2 J’s). He’s pretty

cute and I don’t have the slightest idea how to raise a puppy. *Dog Training for Dummies* is coming in very handy!” It goes without saying that “life will be different for a while. He requires much more time and attention than Clare did.”



IN GRATITUDE

■ On the behalf of my family, I thank you for your kind words and fraternal support upon the death of my sister, **Margaret Polk Green**.

— **Page Polk, OFM**



On the WEB

■ This month’s installment of our 150th anniversary series is on the history of St. Anthony Messenger Press. Check it out at: http://franciscan.org/who/August_150Anniversary.asp

FROM JEFF

From Wednesday to Saturday, Frank Jasper and I attended the annual convention of CMSM (Conference of Major Superiors of Men). This annual gathering gives us the opportunity to network and dialogue with the leadership of other men’s religious communities in the United States, and helps to give us a broader view of the context in which we all live and work. The particular issues that we deal with in our province are part of larger trends and patterns of our Church and country. The keynote presenter this year was Papal Nuncio to the U.S., Archbishop Pietro Sambi. Dressed in civvies, the Archbishop was delightful, speaking with simplicity, humility, and humor. He brought us back to our center and reminded us that we should not be “prisoners” of any problems that we face, but joyfully announce the Gospel. I found it helpful to remember that “what is mine to do” should be done with an awareness of this bigger picture, and done with joy and freedom.

— **Jeff Scheeler, OFM**

WALKING WITH HOPE

A JOURNEY OF FAITH AND DISCOVERY



Pictures from the road

PHOTOS BY MARK SOEHNER, OFM; CLIFFORD HENNINGS, OFM; ED SHEA, OFM;
RICHARD GOODIN, OFM; ROGER LOPEZ, OFM; AND JOSHUA VAN CLEEF, OFM



Left, with parishioners of St. John the Evangelist in Waynesboro, Va.; below, Roger mowing the grass of the DeSimone family.



Left, Clifford paints a shed for the DeSimones, who offered a place to stay; below, Trappistine nuns at the Monastery of Our Lady of the Angels in Crozet, Va., offered wonderful hospitality.



Left, enjoying the scenery.





Left, Roger resting along a river after leaving a Trappistine monastery; right, the friars stayed with Russell and Joan Berrier in Lynchburg, Va., one weekend.



Right, Josh REALLY loves horses; far right, along Highway 460, near Montvale, Va.



Above, Josh meets his college classmate, Robbie, a Virginia State Trooper; right, sanding a picnic table for Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish in Arlington, Va.



Pictures from the road

Pictures from the road



Left, exploring the National Mall in D.C.; below, outside of Marshal, Va.; lower pic, a member of the Wyatt family in Harrisonburg.



Above, en route to Harrisonburg, Joshua and Richard were greeted by gentle horses.; below, Mike and Chris Nestor, gracious hosts in Front Royal, Va.



Above, Richard settles in for the evening at St. Stephen's in Cumberland, Ky.

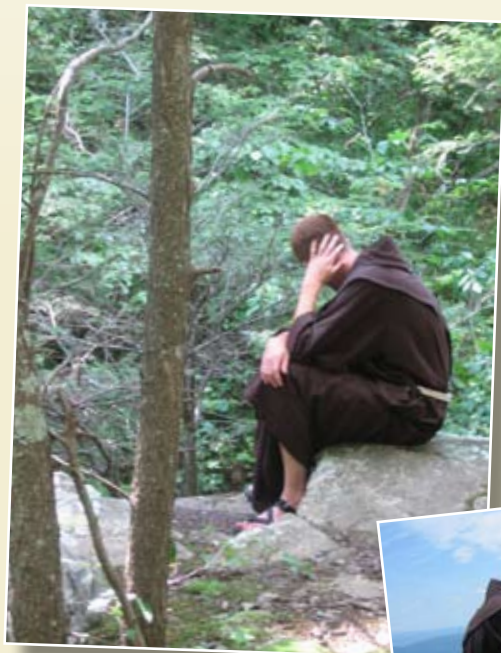


Above, shelters on the AT were a blessing for friars carrying only a blanket.

Below, Richard's feet after three days on the Appalachian Trail.



Right, Cliff soaking in the view along the Appalachian Trail.



Above, Richard reflecting on the beauty of creation; right, preparing to celebrate Eucharist on the AT.



Right, A sign post on the AT gives hikers directions and distances.



Pictures from the road

Pictures from the road



Above, Mark enjoys a break.



Above, saying hello to the city of Salem; left, Mark takes necessary precautions to prevent ticks.

Below, Roger offers Jefferson his hat in exchange for a photo op at Monticello.



Above, Richard joins a game of Wiffle Ball in Harrisonburg, Va.

Left, a black bear spotted along the road near Crozet, Va.



Pictures from the road



Left, resting on the porch of the Nestor family after a morning of painting and gardening; right, on the Appalachian Trail outside of Harrisonburg, Va.



Right, at Monticello on Independence Day with Fr. Gregory Kandt.

Below, Cliff at a park in Thaxton, Va., with the Blue Ridge Mountains in the background.



Above, leaving the Appalachian Trail; right, Richard and Susan Bill, who offered a place to stay in Front Royal, Va.

