

St. John Neumann Parish
Pilgrimage through Spain & Portugal
Spring 2026



Sponsored by the Health Cabinet

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Welcome to the St. John Neumann Parish virtual walking program. Beginning on January 26, 2026, we will be flying from the Charlotte airport, Madrid, Spain and then walk through Spain up along the coast to Roncesvalles where we will start following the French Camino de Santiago Compostella to Santiago. We will then head south following the Portuguese Camino, in reverse, to Lisbon with a stop at Fatimas along the way. From Lisbon we will walk to Granada and fly home from there.

This program is sponsored by the St. John Neumann Parish Health Cabinet. The goal of this program is to increase your health of mind, body, and spirit, by increasing or maintaining your activity levels and incorporating mindful prayer into your activity. Participants engage in individual or group moderately intensive activities and report those activity minutes back to the tour director who tallies everyone's miles to calculate how far the collective participants virtually walked. Twenty minutes of moderately intensive activity equals one mile. Why is the Health Cabinet stressing moderate aerobic activity? Regular aerobic exercise, such as briskly walking, swimming laps, running, biking, aerobic classes, dance classes, and similar activities have many positive cardiovascular effects, including lower rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer, and it also reduces stress, increases good sleep time, helps in losing or maintaining weight, and even increases self-confidence.

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that adults have at least 150 minutes of moderately intense physical activity, preferably spread out over the week and 60 minutes of active exercise for teens and children **every day**. It is particularly important to encourage youth to engage in this amount of activity since it helps to promote this pattern for the rest of their lives.

What counts as a mile? Here are some examples of moderate intensity or higher:

20 minutes of walking =1 mile

60 minutes dance class =3 miles

Swimming laps for 40 minutes =2 miles

Tennis for 1.5 hours =4.5 miles

Biking or riding a stationary bike for 20 minutes = 1 mile.

60 minutes of Armchair aerobics =3 miles

Mowing your lawn on with a push or walk behind mower for 1 hour equals 3 miles
(Sorry, no riding mowers time can be counted!)

Activities such as baseball which have long periods of inactivity and brief bursts of activity are not aerobic in nature! Moderately intense activity means getting your heart rate elevated and maintaining it for about 20 minutes at a time but still being able to hold a conversation.

Improving Health with Activity

As mentioned earlier, increasing physical activity can be helpful in many ways. It helps prevent a variety of health problems such as heart disease, type II diabetes, high blood pressure, and various other problems. For adolescents and young adults, most of the bone mass in the body is developed during this time period and weight bearing exercise, such as walking or stair climbing, is important to this process. Adding ongoing weight bearing exercise throughout your life span will help maintain bone health and prevent osteoporosis in later years.

Good nutrition is also important to improving your health. Getting adequate amounts of fruits and vegetables each day provides important vitamins and minerals that you need daily. One serving of fruits or vegetables is generally $\frac{1}{2}$ cup. Try to eat some green, orange, or yellow vegetables every day.

Improving Health with Prayer and Meditation

It may surprise you to know that prayer and meditation can actually improve your health! Prayer and meditation can relieve stress and activities that reduce stress often can have a significant impact on health. For example, if you are worried about something, it can cause a variety of physical problems such as raising blood pressure, disrupting sleep, changing food intake, and many other things. Worrying may also cause disruptions in your relationships with others. When you pray and meditate, you may feel less worried or come to a new understanding of the problems that decrease your stress. Long term chronic stress is often a factor in a variety of chronic illnesses. So, as you increase your physical activity and use some of the activity time to pray and meditate, you can help prevent some illnesses. The mind, body and spirit are intertwined, and we are beginning to recognize how important each component is!

Why is BMI important?

BMI is the ratio of your height and weight and is used to determine your level of body fat. It can be used to determine your overall fitness and your risk of developing chronic diseases. Still, BMI is not the only factor to consider in judging fitness, and it isn't a completely reliable assessment for every body type.

Calculating your BMI

Adult link: https://www.cdc.gov/bmi/adult-calculator/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/adult_bmi/english_bmi_calculator/bmi_calculator.html

Youth link: https://www.cdc.gov/bmi/child-teen-calculator/widget.html?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/bmi/calculator.html

Fill in the information requested to get your BMI

The standard weight status categories associated with BMI ranges for adults are shown in the following **BMI Chart:**

BMI	Weight status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5-24.9	Healthy weight
25.0-29.9	Overweight
30.0 or higher	Obese

—Week 1

Taking the Time

“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

Psalm 139:16

Have you ever said, “There just aren’t enough hours in the day”. Our days can become cluttered – and yet God says in Psalm 139 that “all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” Does that mean that God knows when we waste time or when we pack too much into our days? Isn’t it a mystery that we don’t know the number of our days or what the future holds? Only a wise God – ever knowing and ever wise – could create such a system. And yet, we live and act as if we know everything and can control our future! Maybe we need to ponder how we fill our days. We can take the time to ponder, and while we walk this week, let’s do just that – take the time to ponder the mystery of our all-knowing, all loving God who knows what lies behind, before and with us today.

Questions to ponder:

God thinks of me constantly. How often do I think of Him?

What percentage of my day is spent on God?

What percentage of my day is spent on enriching my relationships with family and friends?

Health Tip:

Making time for yourself is important in this busy world. It is quite easy to get caught up with tasks and things, rather than taking time for contemplation and prayer. Both activities, along with physical activity, can help us relax and lower blood pressure. Try to determine what tasks you do that are optional or can be done by someone else. Then delegate these tasks. This includes tasks your children or spouse could do. And then use the resulting free time for yourself and in building your relationship with God.

Forms for recording your miles, and for your weekly prayer intentions care at the end of the booklet for easy printing

Week 2

Where am I Going?

“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Phil 3:14

Are we almost there now? Are we really going to Canada and beyond? How much longer before we get there? These are questions that may recall memories of past journeys traveled as a child or with children. Most of us know what it's like to be the child and the adult in such a situation. As a child, we must trust that the adult really knows the way. As adults we must press on toward the goal, knowing that if we follow the map and continue to travel, we will eventually reach our goal. Having a goal helps us to continue until we reach our destination.

Your physical goal this week may be to walk 2 miles – or 5 miles – or 50 miles. Having that goal helps us to continue. Your spiritual goal may be to read the Word of God daily, pray daily or memorize a Bible verse. The deeper spiritual goal may be to have a deeper personal relationship with Jesus, to confront each other in a kinder more loving manner or to forgive someone. The ultimate spiritual goal is to become more Christ-like in our everyday encounters with people and society.

Questions to ponder:

Do I have physical and spiritual goals for this week?

Do I have physical and spiritual goals for my life?

What is one thing I can do to help achieve my physical goal?

What is one thing I can do to help achieve my spiritual goal?

Health Tip:

Last week, the health tip encouraged you to take time out for prayer and contemplation and physical activity. This week consider the goals you want to set for that time and for your physical activity. You wouldn't take a vacation, unless you intended to stay home, without selecting a destination and determining how you are going to get there. Similarly, in your spiritual life, you need to develop both short- and long-term goals or you will be going around in circles. Your physical health is interwoven with your spiritual and mental health status which is why being regularly active, and praying are an important life goal.

Week 3

Making the Decision:

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

2 Corinthians 5:7

The 259 steps up to the Whispering Gallery of St. Paul's Cathedral in London are challenging. The passageway is narrow, the steps sometimes slippery and the light is dim. The view at the top, however, is breathtaking. Not all visitors to St. Paul's make the decision to climb to the Whispering Gallery. Some have legitimate physical reasons for bypassing the challenge, but others are too hurried or not convinced that the climb is worth the exertion and energy. We make decisions everyday regarding our physical, spiritual, and emotional health. It is so easy to procrastinate and fill our days with everything but that which is good for us. This week as you progress on this walking journey and decide to be good stewards of the body God has given you, may you walk by faith and grow stronger spiritually and physically as you spend time with your Heavenly Father. Congratulations on making that decision to come on this journey!

Questions to ponder: How has my faith developed throughout the years?

Were there special people who mentored me in my faith?

What steps am I taking to strengthen that faith?

Is God telling me to step out in faith about some issue?

Health Tip:

When the problem or situation is more complex and /or emotionally connected, deciding is more difficult. For example, many young families struggle with determining where to spend their Christmas. Do they do alternate years with each of their families? Do they spend it at home? If their families live far apart, figuring out how to manage is tough! Sometimes, however, we avoid making decisions because of fear, anxiety, or even laziness. It is too hard to find the time to exercise or pray. I don't feel well enough to exercise today, etc. serves as our excuse. This would be a good week to look at whether we already to make a sincere commitment to spend more time with the Lord and on keeping or getting fit. But remember, no one is perfect so don't be surprised if you backslide. Just recognize what you have done and begin anew.

Week 4

Preparing for the Journey

He told them,” Take nothing for the journey – no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic.” Luke 9:3

Think about the last journey you took that lasted more than one day. What did you take with you? I find that even for a few days, I need to pack a suitcase not only with clothes, but personal care items and power cords! No matter how hard I try to pack light, the suitcase is always heavy.

When Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick in the Gospel of Luke, He instructed them to travel light! No staff – no bag – no bread – no money – no extra tunic! What a feeling to be able to simplify our lives of clutter and things and enjoy those things in life that truly last – God, people, and the Word of God. Those are the only “items” we will take into eternity – our ultimate journey. A deep and personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ will make Heaven an easy transition and continuation of that relationship. Loving relationships with family and friends will continue into eternity. So – to life! Seize the moment! Enjoy God and people! Keep short accounts! Repair relationships as much as it is in your ability to repair! Forgive! The energy and time put into those relationships will bring life, hope and health – physical, spiritual, and emotional.

Questions to ponder:

Are there any relationships in my life that need some repair?

Do I need to make some phone calls?

Do I need to simplify my life?

Health Tip:

Gratitude has been the focus of several studies in recent years and it has been shown to increase peoples’ health. The more we express sincere gratitude, the better we feel. How often do we thank God for something we have received or somehow he has helped us? And how often do we ask God for forgiveness? It is one way to reduce the emotional baggage we carry around every day. Similarly, how often do we forgive others or ask for forgiveness? This can be awfully hard to do depending upon the situation but can really improve our relationships with families, friends, or anyone else where forgiveness is needed. When you are grateful for something someone has done, thank them. And if you need to ask for forgiveness, ask. And forgive others quickly.

Week 5

Who is My Neighbor?

He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and, Love your neighbor as yourself.” Luke 10:27

How's the neighborhood? That is sometimes one of the first questions a perspective buyer asks when looking at a house, but for many, gone are the days when neighbors sit on porches and spend time with each other. It's difficult enough carving out time for family, let alone neighbors. Jesus says we should love our neighbors as ourselves! This week if you walk through your neighborhood, consider it an opportunity to pray for your neighbors. Pray as you walk by each house. If you see bikes and swing sets, pray for the children in the house. If the drapes are drawn and there's little activity, pray for those who live in the house. Sometimes homes become secret cocoons of pain and strife. Just as only God knows what is going on inside our lives, God is sometimes the only one who knows what goes on in our homes. Pray that the Holy Spirit can break through and ease the pain and strife that your neighbors may be experiencing.

Questions to ponder:

What can it possibly mean to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind?

Think about yourself. Are you pleased with yourself? Do you love yourself? Are you able to love others?

Health Tip:

It is good to vary your types of exercise. Riding a bicycle exercises different muscles than you use in rowing. You can easily do different types of aerobic exercises in a gym but if you don't belong to a gym, often the parks provide a variety of exercise opportunities at low cost. Some parks have pools, others have tennis courts, and most provide some opportunity for walking, even if it is only around the baseball field! Many recreational facilities open to the public have some exercise machines and most offer some type of class that involves aerobic exercise. Think outside the box: do you like to dance? Many dance classes provide aerobic benefits. Or you may find a spinning class, Zumba, or something else that encourages aerobic exercise.

Week 6

Visitors along the road:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Galatians 5:22-23.

When we think of visitors along the road, the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 naturally comes to mind. We can all somehow relate to that story. The Good Samaritan stopped to help the hurting person while others ignored the hurting person. How often can we say that we have walked past a hurting person? How often have we helped a hurting person? The person may not even be a stranger. The excuses are many. To help the hurting person means stepping out of our comfort zone, rearranging plans and yes, showing and living the fruits of the Spirit which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This week as you walk you may not see a physically hurting person but ask God to help you see others as He sees them. If we are willing, He will show us the hurting of this world and fill us with His compassion and love.

Questions to ponder:

Have you ever unexpectedly and spontaneously helped a stranger?

How did you feel?

Think about hurting people you know. As you walk this week pray for those hurting ones. Does God want you to take some action?

Health Tip

Don't forget to drink plenty of water as you exercise. Even though the weather is cooler, you still sweat when you exercise, although it may not be as noticeable. You should be drinking/eating about 9 (Women) to 13 (Men) eight-ounce glasses of liquids normally. Add about 1.5 to 2.5 cup more for an hour of exercise but of course, longer periods of exercise, you will need more fluid. Water is the best source of fluid but for longer durations of exercise, something like Gatorade may be helpful in restoring the electrolytes you will lose by sweating profusely. Avoid caffeine when exercising since it increases urination, and you are trying to re-hydrate from sweating! And remember many beverages and foods contain significant amounts of fluids. Gelatin and yoghurt are primarily fluid. Watermelon has 92% water but it also 6% sugar. So, consider for any option besides water, how many additional calories you will be consuming if you drink the fluid!

Week 7

What kind of walker am I?

“Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name,
Praise the Lord, O my soul,
And forget not all his benefits –
Who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,
Who satisfies your desires with good things
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. Psalm 103:1-3, 5

When was the last time you walked with a spring in your step? Was there a reason for that feeling of joyous abandon while you walked? Perhaps you just received an “A” on a difficult exam or maybe it was news of a baby’s birth, or maybe your soccer team won the championship, or you were offered a much-needed job. While you walk this week, dwell on the verses from Psalm 103. We have many reasons to rejoice and praise God. He forgives all our sins and heals our diseases. He satisfies our desires with good things so that our youth is renewed, and our energy increased. Now that is something to rejoice about!

Questions to ponder:

What are some of the benefits of following God?

Think of some good things God has given to you...the things that made you walk with a spring in your step.

What desires has He satisfied?

Think about your deepest desires. Do you think they are in line with God’s will?

Health Tip:

One way to make exercise or prayer is to make it a part of your daily routine. When would be the best time for you in your daily schedule? Would it be around 9:00 am when the kids have all left for school? Could you walk during your lunch time at work for 30 minutes? Do you want to have a family prayer session right after dinner or just before the children go to bed? Routines can be helpful in that if you do something for a few weeks, it becomes habit and that increases the likelihood that you will continue the behavior. However, routines can sometimes become a rut. Then you are likely to feel bored with the exercising and are more likely to cease exercising or praying. So be sure to vary what you do in your exercise or prayer time! And don’t forget, you can combine the two!

Week 8

Satisfaction and Keeping On

“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus“.

Philippians 3:13-14

We're at the end of our walk to Jerusalem. Are you weary or are you physically more alive and spiritually more attuned? Hopefully, this has been a journey of physical and spiritual renewal. Hopefully, you've satisfied your soul with spiritual food and living water. Hopefully, the increased exercise has renewed and revitalized the body God has given you and you are able to have more energy for His vital work on earth. Serving God and being good stewards of our physical body requires perseverance and commitment. It helps if we keep our eyes on the prize and run this race to win.

Questions to ponder:

How much energy and commitment am I putting into the spiritual race that Paul speaks of in Philippians?

Am I more likely to strive for excellence in my secular life or my spiritual life?

How can I keep on striving for excellence in my physical & spiritual life?

Do I need to rearrange priorities?

Do I need to eliminate some activities?

Health Tip:

If you find you have trouble getting motivated to exercise, consider finding an exercise buddy! Very often when you have someone to work out with, you are more apt to do it because you don't want to let your buddy down. Look for people in your neighborhood who you see out walking and ask if you can join in. Or talk with someone you see at the gym to see if that person may wish to join with you in your workouts. Or make it fun for you. I always walk with my Walkman after so I can listen to audiobooks I have finished praying and meditating and the time really flies that way.

One the next page you will find the slips for reporting your miles. You can print 4 of them, cut them into 4 slips and use for each report. You can email your report to kscharer@bellsouth.net with spring walk in the subject line and the number of miles you accumulated for the week. If you wish to get a weekly reminder, just include that information on your first email. When you receive an email from your tour director on Sunday or Monday morning, just add your miles and return the email.

<p>Report your miles for our virtual Pilgrimage</p> <p>Week # _____</p> <p>First Name _____</p> <p>Last Name _____</p> <p>E-Mail address _____</p> <p>20 minutes of moderately intense activity is equal to 1 mile for our virtual walk.</p> <p>I walked _____ miles this week.</p> <p>Drop this form in the box in Gillen Hall or e-mail your miles to kscharer@bellsouth.net</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Check this box for a weekly email reminder to report your miles</p>	<p>Report your miles for our virtual Pilgrimage</p> <p>Week # _____</p> <p>First Name _____</p> <p>Last Name _____</p> <p>E-Mail address _____</p> <p>20 minutes of moderately intense activity is equal to 1 mile for our virtual walk.</p> <p>I walked _____ miles this week.</p> <p>Drop this form in the box in Gillen Hall or e-mail your miles to kscharer@bellsouth.net</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Check this box for a weekly email reminder to report your miles</p>
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