

SAMPLE ACTIVITY

Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims

In January, many pro-life pilgrims travel to Washington, D.C. for the annual March for Life. You may have a group of pilgrims from your parish or school traveling to this national event. While not everyone is able to travel to the nation's capital, countless local marches and rallies are hosted in cities and dioceses around the country.

Even if your parish does have a group of pilgrims going to the March for Life, you can also research local events so other members of your community can participate in your local area. You may want to consider helping to organize a group to go together. This activity utilizes the *Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims* to send off those in your parish, school, or faith community. Another order for blessing is also available to offer upon their return. A priest or deacon will need to offer the blessing. If the celebration of Mass is preferred as the beginning or end of a pilgrimage, it may be concluded with a blessing of the pilgrims taken from the order of blessings mentioned above.

The *Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims* can be found at respectlife.org/action-guides.

Materials

- ◆ Copies of the *Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims Before Their Journey*
- ◆ (Optional) Copies of the *Order of Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims as They Return from Their Journey*

Directions

1. Find out whether there is a group of pilgrims from your parish, school, or diocese traveling either to the March for Life in D.C. or to another rally or march. If not, check with your diocese to see if any local marches or rallies are being offered.
2. Based on what you discover, decide whether you would like to organize a group from your parish or school to participate in a local event. If so, you can plan to meet at the parish or school before your departure and perhaps coordinate a carpool.
3. Whether you have a group of pilgrims traveling to Washington, D.C., or to a local march or rally, you can choose to offer the *Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims* as part of an already scheduled event, or you can offer it at a separate time, prior to their departure.

If the departure happens to occur near a regularly scheduled Mass, Holy Hour, or parish event, look into the possibility of connecting the two events to have greater community participation. You may want to include the blessing within the Sunday Mass the prior weekend. Following the Prayer after Communion, the presider invites all the pilgrims to stand, says the prayer of blessing, and then concludes the Mass with the final blessing for the entire assembly. In a school setting, perhaps the entire school can gather at the end of a school day to pray for the pilgrims together. It can be very powerful to include the larger community in this prayerful sendoff.

You might also consider inviting parishioners or fellow students to write down words of prayerful support or prayer intentions for the pilgrims to take with them on their journey. You could set up a table with slips of paper and writing utensils, along with a basket where they could be collected.

Depending on your unique situation, it may be more convenient to celebrate the order for blessing immediately prior to the pilgrims' departure as its own separate event. In this case, make an effort to invite families, friends, and the parish or school community to participate so the pilgrims can still have the prayerful support of their community. Ask a priest or deacon to celebrate the order for blessing before pilgrims board their buses or break up into carpools.



Your parish, school, or community may have multiple pilgrimage groups participating in different ways. Perhaps a group of students is traveling to Washington, D.C., and another group is participating in a local event. You can celebrate the order for blessing separately for these groups, or find a time to bring them all together for the celebration.

The schedule of your priest or deacon may determine how and when the order for blessing is celebrated. When asking for his participation, try to offer multiple options, and be as flexible as possible.

4. Once the time and place for the order for blessing has been determined, choose someone to serve as a lector during the celebration. Perhaps you would like to serve in this capacity. Once the lector has been determined, inform the priest or deacon who has been appointed. He may want to offer him or her further instructions or preparations.
5. An order for blessing is also available to celebrate the return of pro-life pilgrims. If possible, ask your priest or deacon to celebrate this additional order for blessing when your pilgrimage group(s) return(s) home. This is a beautiful way to welcome them home after a powerful experience.

One Step Further

To take this activity one step further, consider hosting a simple sharing session in which pilgrims can share and reflect on their experiences with the community. You may want to host this immediately upon returning from the pilgrimage, following the *Order for the Blessing of Pro-Life Pilgrims as They Return from Their Journey*.

For example, you might want to offer light refreshments and a quick sharing session with those who attended a local rally or march. If the pilgrimage group is coming back from Washington, D.C., and has had a long or even overnight bus ride, plan the sharing session a day or two later, so pilgrims have time to recover and catch up on sleep.

Depending on the time of day, consider offering light refreshments such as coffee and donuts, sodas and snacks, simple sandwiches, or cheese and crackers. If you would like to share a more substantial meal, consider making it potluck. Invite the pilgrims, their families, and the larger community. Open the gathering with a simple prayer, and then allow for “open-mic” time for those who participated to share their experiences and how they were impacted. *What struck them the most? What kind of lasting impression has the pilgrimage left on them? How has it made them think about the gift of life and various attacks on it?*

Once everyone has had their turn, close the gathering with another brief prayer.

