



Dear Friends,

“As we mark Veteran’s Day on November 11, I would like to share some reflections of one of our Pilgrimage leaders, Lieutenant Colonel, Mr. Richard Trietley (Retired), U.S. Army.”

Afghanistan to Assisi: My “Good Journey” to Peace

I understood very little about the man, St. Francis of Assisi, for most of my life. While I had heard the name and the stories of his unique relationships with animals and nature, I did not comprehend the profound impact of his life as a privileged youth, soldier, prisoner of war, wounded veteran, peace-maker, and servant of God. This simple yet complex man became a “shining light,” a source of personal healing and redemption.

My twenty-two year, active-duty army career began in 1986 as an Infantry officer. My service took my family and me to Ft. Bragg, NC, Ft. Wainwright, AK, Ft. Benning, GA, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, and other locations. While serving at Ft. Bragg, NC, with the 82d Airborne Division, the tragic events of 9/11 occurred. These events set in motion my eventual combat deployment to Afghanistan in 2003. As the second-in-command of over 3,200 paratroopers, the deployment was challenging, rewarding, and exciting. I attribute my faith, constant prayers, desire to make it home to my family, and an unwavering commitment to our mission as the reasons that I persevered. However, like many veterans, combat took a mental toll on me, which I did not understand or accept until many years later.



Umbria Valley

For nearly fifteen years, I experienced vivid and sometimes troubling dreams, anxiety, hypervigilance (“head on a swivel”), lack of patience, and other effects associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I was able to function at a high level, and my relationships did not suffer. However, I did not feel right. I convinced myself to “suck it up;” Airborne Rangers never complain or make excuses. So, I continued to deny the truth and avoided seeking help.

As providence would have it, I had the opportunity to go on the Rome and Assisi Veterans’ Pilgrimage through the Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs in 2013. It was a life-changing experience to walk in St. Francis’s footsteps, learn of his life journey, touch the same space that he did over 700 years ago, and begin the process of “letting go” of the guilt that I carried. Fellow veterans with shared experiences and challenges were present with me. It was also on this pilgrimage that I met Fr. Conrad Targonski, a retired military chaplain who led the pilgrimage. Fr. Conrad and I forged a friendship that continues today. I like to say that Afghanistan took me to Assisi, and Assisi took me on a journey to forgiveness, healing, and redemption. I returned from the pilgrimage with a new outlook and hope for the future.



Assisi Sunset



Veteran Pilgrims from Viterbo University

Fast forward four more years to a new opportunity in my higher education career as providence surfaced once again. I was recruited to serve at another Catholic, Franciscan university in the Midwest. The university chaplain at this school was none other than Fr. Conrad. I accepted the position, and with Fr. Conrad’s assistance, I finally sought the help that I had avoided for so many years. Fr. Conrad and I also partnered to recruit more veterans for the Veterans of the Military Pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi.

Additionally, Fr. John Cella of the Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs provided me with the opportunity to serve as the liaison for the Veterans Pilgrimage. Our goal remains to serve our nation’s veterans by providing opportunities for healing, redemption, and camaraderie with fellow veterans through the veteran’s pilgrimage experience. We have expanded to two veteran pilgrimages per year. We actively recruit veterans from the Korean War to the present-day to join us in Assisi and Rome.

I went back to Assisi and Rome in 2018, accompanied by my wife of thirty-one years, Michele. The opportunity to share this experience with her and finally tell my personal story to the other veterans and spouses in attendance was meaningful and therapeutic. Service as a pilgrimage leader is the next step in my personal “good journey” as I will help lead one of this year’s veteran pilgrimages.



*Rick and Michele Trietley
at Poggio Bustone*

I humbly ask that you consider assisting other veterans in attending this life-changing pilgrimage event through your generous support and sponsorship. Many veterans do not have the financial resources to make the pilgrimage a reality. With your assistance, we can overcome this financial obstacle. Thank you for considering this request – I am profoundly grateful for all of your generosity,
- Rick Trietley.

Please send us the name of a special veteran or loved one you’d like us to pray for. We will include them in our daily Masses and personal prayers.

We thank Rick for his service to our country as well as his willingness to help serve as a Pilgrimage leader for the Veterans Pilgrimage, sponsored by the Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs.

Thank you for your continued support. We appreciate your generosity.



Peace and All Good!

James G. Gannon, OFM
Provincial Minister



*Frank Morales and
Rick Trietley in Rome*



Francis as Soldier

