



Volunteering in Santiago de Compostela

Santiago de Compostela, Spain
sabato, 14-Set-19

Clare, from Runcorn, UK, is the Parish Youth Minister for the Parishes of St. Maximilian Kolbe, Runcorn and St. Michael and All Angels, Woodchurch. She spent two weeks in Santiago de Compostela volunteering with the FCJ project Camino Companions, which welcomes English-speaking pilgrims in the International Pilgrims Reception Office of the Santiago Cathedral. This is taken from [Clare's blog](#).

This summer after a week of relaxation I was off to one of my favourite places in the world – Santiago de Compostela. Normally that would mean I was off on a walk, but not this year. This year I was going to go and work in the [Pilgrims office](#) with the English Chaplaincy Team – [Camino Companions](#), which was set up by the Faithful Companions of Jesus five years ago. I spent two amazing weeks greeting pilgrims, hearing their stories and helping them to reflect upon their time on the Camino. I heard so many stories of kindness from strangers and many reasons as to why people were walking.

Each morning started with Mass, at which each day Fr. Manny invited the pilgrims to share their prayers if they wanted to, light a candle and pray silently or light a candle and speak a prayer. This was always welcomed by the pilgrims and I heard and saw some of the most beautiful prayers expressed for personal intentions, for the needs of other pilgrims and for the needs of the world. A very emotional moment each day.

After Mass, all were invited to come for a cup of tea/coffee and a chat, those that came were invited to share a highlight of their Camino – these were so varied, from the kindness of strangers to the beauty of creation around them and so much more. One response often triggered memories for others. Some highlights were more personal and related to peoples reasons for walking – maybe in memory of a loved one or to try and find answers to big questions. But it was all shared in a safe place and people were so honest with us and not afraid to shed the odd tear or two. As Fr. Manny said our tears are like prayers when we don't know what to say.

The afternoons were spent downstairs where the pilgrims were waiting for their certificates, and as a new system had just been put in place to receive the certificates, we spent a lot of time explaining it to the pilgrims. Although some took us up on our offer of a cup of tea or coffee while we waited.

It truly was one of the best times of my life and I spent two weeks working with Sr. Alicia (FCJ), Fr. Manny, Connie and Michael.

Evenings were free time so Connie and I made the most of it.



Clare in front of the Cathedral at Santiago de Compostela

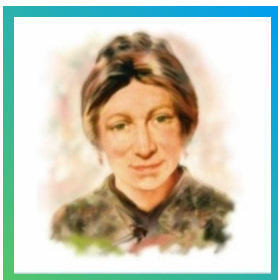
We saw concerts advertised so we went along to a folk concert one night and a jazz concert a couple of nights later – jazz normally isn't my thing but I have to say it was certainly not what I was expecting! On our Sunday off we did a bus tour to Finisterre and Muxia – The End of the World – where some pilgrims continue on to after Santiago. Together we had an amazing time volunteering and on my last night, there were tears as we said goodbye, we didn't want our time there to end! But it won't be for long hopefully there will be a trip to Ireland for me!



Clare and Connie, two of the volunteers with Camino Companions serving English-speaking pilgrims at Santiago.



So that was my August, relaxation, work and volunteering! It wasn't long until I was back to work when I got home – about 40 hours after getting home I was leading a Confirmation group in Runcorn! The rest of September is looking full-on too! So I best get back to it!



“ La Società non è opera mia, è opera di Dio e Dio saprà come sostenerla se tale è la Sua volontà ”

Marie Madeleine d'Houët

Fedeli Compagne di Gesù

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