

Pilgrimage

Janet Ingram, Education and Pilgrimage Officer at St David's Cathedral, Wales introduces some ideas to explore pilgrimage.

What is pilgrimage?

Today there is a growing interest in pilgrimage among people of all faiths and none. A pilgrimage has been described as a 'journey with a purpose'. Pilgrimage has a long history and you may be familiar with the idea from Chaucer (*The Canterbury Tales*) or Bunyan (*The Pilgrim's Progress*). Perhaps you've visited a famous UK pilgrimage site such as Canterbury, Iona, Lindisfarne or St Davids or gone further afield and been one of the 400,000 people who walk or cycle the Camino to Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain each year.

What does pilgrimage involve?

- Usually, there is physically challenging journey to a specific destination, perhaps to a 'thin place' where there is a tangible sense of God's presence. The journey can involve 'time out' from normal life, a chance for refreshment and renewal, alone or in the company of others.
- 'Pilgrimage' can also be used to describe one's journey through life – for Christians this can describe an inner spiritual journey which leads to an encounter or re-encounter with God.

In this resource, we will explore some of these aspects of pilgrimage and encourage you to plan a pilgrimage in your local area (even within your church building!) or further afield.

Somewhere to start

You will need: photos of places of pilgrimage (sacred and secular).

- Share the photos of places of 'pilgrimage' – these include traditional religious and holy sites (e.g. Canterbury, Rome, Jerusalem, Iona) as well as those that are more secular and modern that we may not associate with traditional pilgrimage. (e.g. Platform 9¾ at King's Cross station, a football stadium).
- Ask people to pick out a place they have been to or would like to go and talk (briefly) about why they wanted to or would like to go there.
- Are people surprised by any of the images? Why?
- Are there places of pilgrimage people would like to add?

Bless to us, O God, the earth beneath our feet.
Bless to us, O God, the path on which we walk.
Bless to us, O God, the people whom we meet.

Amen.



Something from the Bible

Throughout the Bible, we see God's pilgrim people called individually and collectively to set out on journeys with purpose, learning more about God and themselves along the way.

In the Old Testament, we read about the calling of Abraham and Sarah to leave their home in Ur and travel to the Promised Land, Canaan (Genesis 12:1). In Exodus, we see the people of God led out of Egypt and also called to a new land, a journey that involved wandering through the wilderness with many a setback and meander on the way. In the Psalms, the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-134) are thought to have been sung by worshippers as they travelled to the Temple in Jerusalem.

There's a shift of emphasis in the New Testament away from physical places of worship such as Jerusalem and the Temple and towards the person of Jesus Christ as a focus. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus are on a journey – they are going away from Jerusalem, but are seeking answers as to why Jesus, who they believed was the promised Messiah who would save his people, was crucified. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Christians are described as 'pilgrims and strangers' on earth, on a journey to their true homeland in heaven (Hebrews 11:11-13).

See [WEB](#) for ideas on how to present some of these passages.

Explore... Pilgrimage

Plan a local pilgrimage

W A

- Work together to plan a pilgrimage to a local holy site, further afield or, if travel is not possible, within your own church building or grounds.
- Consider the following questions:
 - Where you would like to go – perhaps allow people to vote!
 - Where will you set off from?
 - How you will get there – on foot, on public transport?
 - What places of significance might you stop at on the way (established pilgrimage routes often have suggested itineraries that you could adapt).
 - How long will it take?

Key to Spiritual styles: **W**ord, **E**motion, **S**ymbol, **A**ction
Find more in rootsforchurches.com/spiritual-styles-intro



- Then think about the practical preparations you need to make: what will you take? How fit do you need to be? Do you need to get into training for it?
- Also consider the spiritual preparation you need to make – the Pilgrim Ways website has some suggested prayers and readings [WEB](#).

Setting off on the journey

W E S

You will need: scallop shell cards [WEB](#); small stones or other natural objects, holding crosses.



- The scallop shell has become the 'badge' of the pilgrim, indicating someone who is on a pilgrimage or has been on one.
- As people prepare to set out on pilgrimage (even if you are just doing this in your church building), hand out the scallop shell cards and invite everyone to think about their 'intention' or desire for the pilgrimage. Why are they undertaking this journey? What are their hopes for the pilgrimage, e.g. some time out, a special blessing or revelation from God, answers to difficult questions or guidance for particular situations?
- Invite everyone to write this intention or reason for the pilgrimage on their scallop shell card and to keep it with them on the journey.
- Many pilgrims also carry a small special object with them on pilgrimage. Invite people to find an object to take with them on the journey or to choose from the selection you have brought along.
- The Pilgrim Ways website has some prayers for those setting off on pilgrimage [WEB](#) or use **A prayer for the journey** (see bottom right).

The long and winding road – keep going

W E S

You will need: pilgrim 'scrip' shapes [WEB](#) or small scraps of hessian, string or twine, strong glue or stapler.

- A pilgrimage inevitably involves some challenges – these might be physical, such as fatigue or blisters, or emotional and spiritual – such as feeling despondent and not wanting to go on!
- Ask people what helps them to keep going when they feel like giving up – refreshment? Rest? Scripture verses? Or an encouraging word from a friend?
- Pilgrims of old are sometimes pictured with a 'scrip' – a kind of satchel in which they kept all the essentials for the journey. Hand out the 'scrip' shapes (or ask people to draw one) or, if

you are feeling creative, invite people to make a small one from the squares of hessian (which they can glue or staple together, attaching some twine or string to make a handle) and string. Ask people to write down on the scrip shapes what they would need to keep them going on a pilgrimage, with the option to add this to the hessian 'scrip' they have made.

See [WEB](#) for a simple weaving activity: **Companions on the way**.

Arriving at the final destination

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You will need: floor or finger labyrinth.

- Someone might walk out to meet you and welcome you to your chosen place of pilgrimage.
- On entering the destination, take a moment to sit still and be quiet to reflect on the journey you have made, the ups and downs, physically, emotionally and spiritually.
- Or walk a labyrinth, reflecting on the journey and intention you made as you walk into the centre of the labyrinth. Lay down your object and notice your thoughts and feelings as you offer some personal prayers. As you turn to walk out of the labyrinth, take with you all the experiences you have had.
- Find a significant place to lay down any objects associated with your 'intentions' and take time to say some personal prayers. Read a poem or a prayer to mark your arrival [WEB](#).
- The arrival at the destination isn't really an end to the pilgrimage as you will make a return journey home, so collect something to remind you of the destination and the journey you have made.

Somewhere to finish

You will need: arrow shapes [WEB](#).

The yellow waymarker arrow, used on the Camino de Santiago and other pilgrimage routes, has become an emblem of pilgrimage for some. Hand out the arrow shapes or ask people to draw one.



Use the following prompt and questions:

- Revisit your original intention or desire, as recorded on a scallop shell card. Was your intention fulfilled or did it change along the way?
- Ask yourself the following questions:
 - What have I learnt from the experience of pilgrimage?
 - How have I changed?
 - What am I most grateful for? What aspect did I find the most challenging?
 - What will I take forward from this experience into the future?

A prayer for the journey

Lord God, bless the journey I have made with continued memories of the people I have met, the places I have visited and the thoughts I have gathered about my closer journey with you. **Amen.**

