

A photograph of a person walking on a sandy beach towards the ocean. In the foreground, several surfboards are lying on the sand. The background shows the ocean and a clear sky.

The Way of Pilgrimage

Closing Pilgrimage and Retreat

PURPOSE

The closing event for *The Way of Pilgrimage* gives participants an experience of pilgrimage into the sacred space of their own communities. It will also provide retreat time to reflect on the shared experiences of the previous six weeks (or longer, if your group has completed all five volumes), as well as time to process and debrief the pilgrimage itself.

Specific purpose and requests:

To walk in the world as pilgrims (not as tourists)

To experience familiar locations and sites as holy ground

To see the people and places around you through the eyes of Jesus and to see Jesus in them

Possible pilgrimage sites:

Your church grounds

The urban areas of your city or town

Local historical sites

ADVANCE PREPARATION

Preparing spiritually. The daily exercises and weekly meetings in *The Way of Pilgrimage* serve to prepare participants for the Closing Pilgrimage and Retreat by introducing important concepts, inviting prayer and deep listening, and practicing the disciplines that open persons to new experiences. Additionally, it will be important for everyone in the group to pray specifically for the pilgrimage, praying to have the perspective of a pilgrim (not a tourist). We want to emphasize being open to the movement of the Spirit on this pilgrimage. A certain spiritual detachment, or freedom from worry about how everything will turn out, facilitates this kind of openness.

Preparing the pilgrimage itself. See separate PDF document, “Planning a Pilgrimage,” also at www.companionsinchrist.org/leaders.

Preparing for preparation and debrief. Purchase or make a symbol for each pilgrim for the Closing Commissioning as described on p. 5. Make arrangements for dinner, breakfast, snacks, a portable lunch, meditative music, and a music player.

The logo for 'The Way of Pilgrimage' is set within an orange oval. The text 'The Way of Pilgrimage' is written in a white, sans-serif font. 'The' is smaller and positioned above 'Way'. 'Pilgrimage' is the largest word, positioned below 'Way'. The background of the entire page is a green and yellow abstract pattern with faint, handwritten-style text in the background.

The Way of Pilgrimage

CLOSING PILGRIMAGE AND RETREAT:

Pilgrimage as a Way of Life

Friday evening

6:00 Gather for dinner (pizza or other simple fare)

7:00 Opening worship

Invite silence for centering; meditative music optional

Light a candle and say words to the following effect:

We are gathered in the living presence of Christ once again. Our retreat and tomorrow's pilgrimage mark the end of this *Way of Pilgrimage* experience, but not the end of our being pilgrims on the way of Jesus Christ. We are not pilgrims alone but have been learning the profound value of companionship for the journey. Through the experiences of this weekend we will have a chance to reflect on where we have come by God's grace and ways we may be changing in response to our time together. Through this evening's retreat time we will prepare ourselves for tomorrow's pilgrimage in our city. Tomorrow we will reflect on our experiences and contemplate ways we might continue our spiritual journeys as pilgrims.

Sing or play a hymn or song. Suggestion: "Sanctuary" (*The United Methodist Hymnal* #451)

Read a Psalm of Ascent, Psalm 121, followed by silence

Offer a prayer of gratitude for what the time in *The Way of Pilgrimage* has meant, and ask that God's purpose be fulfilled in each person present.

7:15 Set a context.

During our *Way of Pilgrimage* group meetings, we began our time together by "Noticing"--first laying aside our baggage by writing a word or two on scrolls or tags and by noticing where God has seemed present in our lives. We will use this same pattern tonight. (*Pass basket of scrolls and pens and allow a few moments to complete them and collect them again in the basket.*)

Ask participants to review the notes they made in their journals and Participant's Books over the course of the program. To stimulate thinking you might ask the following questions:

What, if any, changes do you sense at work in you in these past few weeks?

What are you anxious about related to tomorrow's pilgrimage?

How have you begun to notice God's presence in your daily life?

When during these recent weeks did you find yourself experiencing a deeper awareness of God's presence?

Invite group members to share insights. Remind group members to listen respectfully and prayerfully to one another. As the leader, begin the sharing time with your own experiences this week.

Conclude by asking the group to identify any common themes they heard in the sharing time.

8:00 Overview of the pilgrimage site and plans for Saturday

Make sure everyone knows where to be, what to bring, and what time to gather in the morning.

8:15 Deeper Explorations

Set a context.

Together we have been anticipating a pilgrimage that will take place tomorrow. It will be a brief pilgrimage in our own city—through places we may have walked by before. Tomorrow we will walk as pilgrims and “pray with our feet.”

To prepare for our pilgrimage, we’ll think of it in four parts: preparation, encounter, reflection, and transformation. We can plan, pray, encounter, and even reflect, but none of these things guarantee transformation. Instead, transformation is a gift that we hope for and sometimes see only in hindsight.

As part of our preparation for tomorrow’s pilgrimage, let’s explore the wisdom of a New Testament story to see what it tells us about preparation, encounter, reflection, and transformation.

Read Luke 24:13-35 slowly for the group. Ask people to listen for instances of preparation, encounter, reflection, and transformation as the story is read. Then work together as a group to list on the board or newsprint what you heard related to each phase of this process of pilgrimage. The following ideas may stimulate discussion if needed.

Preparation — These disciples had been with Jesus for some time; they knew from firsthand experience about his teaching, his healing, and all the events of recent days including his trial and crucifixion; they had been preparing for this encounter for a long time, although they may not have realized it fully until looking back.

Encounter — The two disciples had a profound encounter with pain and hope over just the past week; make a list of the personal pains they must have felt and the suffering of others they witnessed; describe the hope they held; describe their encounter with the stranger on the road in the midst of their deep suffering and grief.

Reflection — They recounted to the stranger what they had seen and heard; they reflected with the stranger as he told them biblical stories and shed new light on them; the disciples reflected with each other; they broke bread together and in that act their eyes were opened; they noticed their feelings (burning hearts) when they looked back at the walk with the stranger on the Emmaus road.

Transformation — Note what seemed to be the key to the disciples’ transformation: encountering and recognizing the living Christ; also note what happened when they experienced a change of feeling, attitude, and understanding: they got up and ran back to the city—the place of pain and suffering—with renewed hope, and there they encountered the risen Christ again.

Ask the following:

What can we learn from this New Testament story for our pilgrimage tomorrow? How can we look for the presence of Jesus on our pilgrimage?

Spend a few moments drawing connections to the anticipated pilgrimage. Use the following questions to guide discussion:

How have our lives and the last several weeks been preparing us for tomorrow?

How might our encounters with strangers along the way turn out to be encounters with Christ?

How can we pay attention to the places we will pass and the people we will meet?

Invite participants to a time of intercessory prayer for the group, individuals in the group, the people you will meet tomorrow, and for eyes to notice what makes this pilgrimage important.

9:00 Evening prayers

Select song, scripture, prayer, and blessing; or use an evening prayer service from your tradition

9:15 Sending forth

Saturday morning

8:00 Morning prayers (breakfast snacks and beverages may be offered)

Silence, scripture, prayer, song, blessing; or use a morning prayer service from your tradition

8:30 Travel to the beginning of the pilgrimage.

9:00 Walk the pilgrimage path you have pre-planned. (See “Planning a Pilgrimage” at www.companionsinchrist.org/leaders.)

12:00 Shared lunch at the pilgrimage ending point (outside, if possible.)

1:00 Return travel to the retreat site

1:30 Individual reflection and journaling time

When the group returns to the retreat site, invite members to spend time in personal reflection and writing in their journals. Ask them to record what they noticed as they attended to the place, the people, and the circumstances of the pilgrimage. Ask them also to record what they noticed about their own reactions, feelings, and inner experiences while they were on pilgrimage. And finally, ask them to write down what they noticed about God’s presence, promptings, or nudges while they were there. In other words, ask them to listen deeply to themselves and to God’s Spirit.

2:15 Group reflection

Call participants back to the whole group and debrief your experiences together.

Light the candle and offer a prayer for open hearts and minds.

Set a context for reflection.

In studying *The Way of Pilgrimage*, we learned about pilgrims of old who traveled long distances to find something of great value to them. Today, we have joined these pilgrims by becoming pilgrims ourselves. We walked; we opened our eyes; we looked for God. Without words, we let our feet do the praying for us. Our bodies prayed by moving step-by-step in God’s world.

Say in your own words:

As we have discussed over the past several weeks, pilgrimage does not have to be a one-time, special event. The way of the pilgrim can be the daily way of life for a Christ-follower. Consider for a few moments what such a commitment to pilgrimage might mean for your life.

Allow a time of silent reflection.

Close the group reflection time with a period of prayer in which participants can pray aloud as the Spirit leads.
Break (10 minutes)

3:10 Letter writing to other youth in our church.

Set a context.

Invite the group to enter into a faith sharing exercise, first as individuals and then as a group.

Individual work (15 minutes) — Provide blank paper for everyone. Say in your own words:

You have been on a journey, on the way of pilgrimage, with several other pilgrims for a number of weeks now. Imagine writing a letter to the other youth in our church who have not been through *The Way of Pilgrimage* yet. It begins, “I want to share with you what I’ve heard, seen with my own eyes, looked at, and discovered for myself concerning the real life of faith during this journey on the way of pilgrimage.” What would the letter include? What would you say?

What did you learn, experience, or discover that could make a difference for you, our friends, the church, or the world?

Group work (20 minutes) — As a group, go around the circle and invite everyone to share at least one response to the questions. Then challenge the group to write a faith-sharing letter to the youth that have not participated in *The Way of Pilgrimage* that communicates a gift and a challenge based on the group’s experience.

Silently meditate on these questions for one minute:

What has blessed us that would bless others as well?

What would deepen or broaden the fellowship we have in Christ?

What would I find joy in sharing, and with whom?

Lead the group to write a letter that expresses the voice of the group.

Ask someone to act as scribe and capture the key shared points of the group’s insights.

Decide whom you are addressing.

Put the thoughts together in a letter format.

Read the letter aloud to the group, improve it, and celebrate it.

Decide where you want to read or publish it as an act of faith sharing. Be ready to offer leadership for new *Way of Pilgrimage* groups in your church.

3:45 Closing worship and commissioning

A Litany for Pilgrim People

With readings from *The Message* (Isaiah 43:1-4) and New International Version (Psalm 84:1-2, 4-5) and responsive reading based on Ephesians 3:16-21

Leader: Listen to the prophet Isaiah, speaking God’s heart for the people.

But now, God’s Message,

the God who made you in the first place, Jacob,

the One who got you started, Israel:

“Don’t be afraid, I’ve redeemed you.

I’ve called your name. You’re mine.

When you’re in over your head, I’ll be there with you.

When you’re in rough waters, you will not go down.

When you’re between a rock and a hard place,

it won’t be a dead end—

Because I am God, your personal God,
 The Holy of Israel, your Savior.
 I paid a huge price for you:
 all of Egypt, with rich Cush and Seba thrown in!
 That's how much you mean to me!
 That's how much I love you!
 I'd sell off the whole world to get you back,
 trade the creation just for you."

Pause for a few moments of silence.

All: You are our God, our Abba and our Redeemer. You have called us. You know us by name. You long for us, and we belong to you.

Leader: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty!

All: "My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Leader: "Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

All: "Blessed are those whose strength is in you," whose hearts are set on the pilgrim's way.

Leader: Lord, we are your pilgrim people.

All: And we are called to follow Jesus, our companion, our guide, and our way.

Leader: Yes, we are a pilgrim people trying to find our way back home.

All: Home, to our God, our Creator and Keeper.

Leader: We know our hearts will always be restless and never satisfied

All: Until they find their home in you, Lord.

Leader: So we commit our way to you, Lord God.

All: We commit our hearts, our minds, our souls, and our lives to following you and the pilgrimage before us.

Leader: Remind us that it is in you, our abiding presence, that we live, we move, we breathe, and we have our being.

Pause for a few moments of silence.

Leader: May your Word continue to guide us along the pilgrim's path;

All: And may prayer open before us the gates of heaven so that we might live in communion with you.

Leader: Thank you for blessing us with companions on this journey, those we see and those we see no more.

All: Let them be a help on our pilgrimage through this world.

At the end, have each pilgrim come forward to receive a symbol of pilgrimage to carry with them (e.g. prayer ring, keychain with feet or a cross, a pilgrimage water bottle, a pilgrim satchel.) Say: "[Name], from this day forward, you are a pilgrim – a follower of Christ. Go forth as God's beloved traveler."

4:15 Sending forth

When all have received a symbol and blessing, gather in a circle and pray the closing body prayer from Volume 1:

Placing both hands on top of the head, pray out loud:

God be in my head and in my understanding.

Placing both hands over the eyes, pray out loud:

God be in my eyes and in my seeing.

Placing both hands over the ears, pray out loud:

God be in my ears and in my hearing.

Placing both hands over the mouth, pray out loud:

God be in my mouth and in my speaking.

Placing both hands over the heart, pray out loud:

God be in my heart and in my feeling.

Placing both hands on top of the thighs, pray out loud:

God be in my legs and in my moving.

Placing open hands one on top of the other in front of the body, pray out loud:

God be in my hands and in my touching.

Placing both arms at the side of the body, hands open and turning outward, offering our life to God, pray out loud:

God be in my life and in my journeying.

Closing Pilgrimage and Retreat adapted by Kara Lassen Oliver from Closing Pilgrimage and Retreat (written by Eileen Campbell-Reed) in *The Way of Transforming Discipleship* (Upper Room Books, 2005).

“A Litany for Pilgrim People” by Sally Chambers from *The Way of Pilgrimage Leader’s Guide*, pp. 175-76