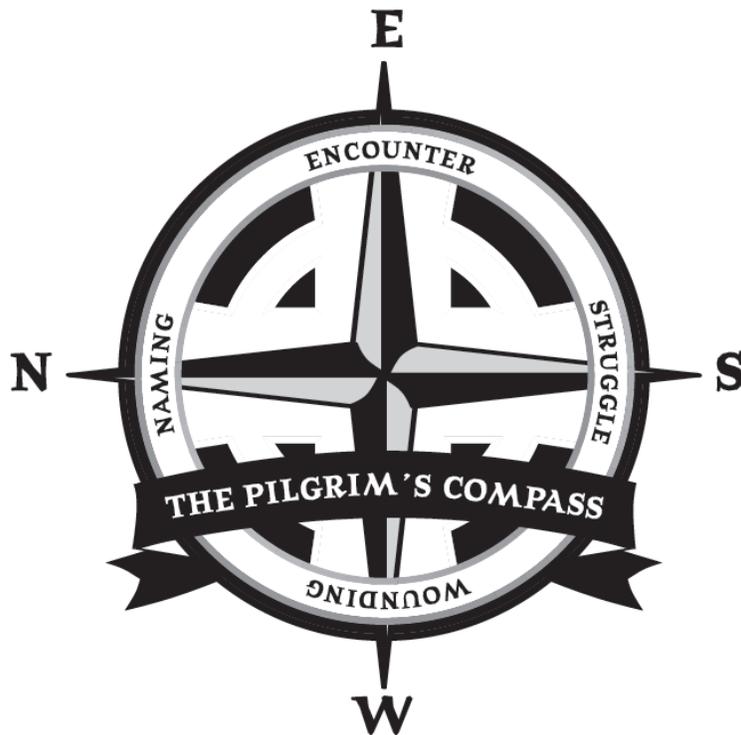


The Pilgrimage

A Pilgrim's Handbook

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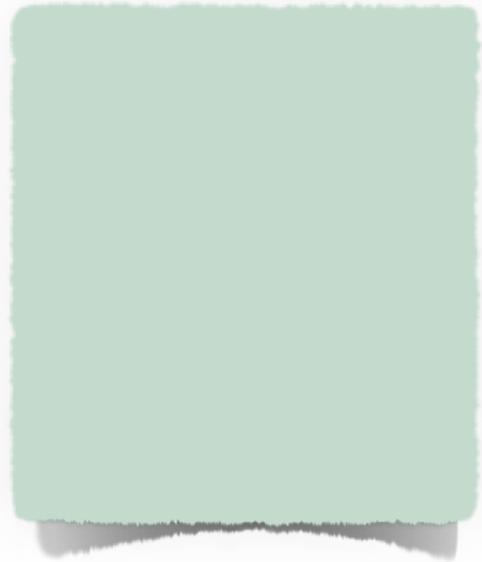
Introduction to The Pilgrimage

*“Do you know about God? Or do you know God?
There is a big difference!”¹*

These provocative words get to the heart of the struggle many feel about their faith. It is so much easier to know something *about* God than it is to *know* God. To know God means to invest time and emotional energy in developing *one’s relationship with God*. As with any relationship of significance, this is both a great challenge and a great treasure.

Our words often echo the words of the psalmist, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?”² We too thirst for God, and we long to see God’s face in our homes and workplaces, and in our church.

When you hear the word “pilgrimage,” you are likely thinking of travel to a sacred place or travel for a sacred purpose and we do mean that when we speak of pilgrimage. But we also mean a way of living one’s life before God when we speak of pilgrimage. It is both things; a sacred journey on which one is intentionally traveling (often to a specific destination); and a metaphor for the whole journey of our life before God. *The Pilgrimage* ministry guides pilgrims both on the journey of life before God and, as a part of the formative process, on a specific journey to a sacred place. However, the true “destination” this ministry seeks to help you find is a joyful and Spirit-led life of discipleship.



The Pilgrimage is an adult faith formation ministry which equips disciples of Jesus Christ to grow deeply in relationship with the living and present Lord. *The Pilgrimage* gives you the tools and teaches you the disciplines needed to grow as a disciple of Jesus. This is accomplished in several ways:

- 1) By providing first-class programs and teaching, which inspire you to

¹ *Calming the Restless Spirit: A Journey Toward God* - Ben Campbell Johnson, Upper Room Books, 1997.

² Psalm 42:2

invest in your relationship with God. In these courses you will have your knowledge of the many streams of Christian spiritual formation broadened, and your experience of a variety of formative disciplines deepened.

2) By providing a significant small-group ministry (Compass Groups) which surrounds those who become pilgrims with a community of on-going support, nurture, and encouragement.

3) By providing regular opportunities for those who have completed certain prerequisite “steps” to go on a travel pilgrimage as a group. The annual trips will be planned as alternating between domestic and international destinations.

The Pilgrimage is meant to supplement, and not replace, more traditional forms of adult Christian education (Sunday school for example). Those who commit to *The Pilgrimage* are making a commitment to a process of faith-formation which will demand more of them than more traditional forms of Christian education. *The Pilgrimage*, with its higher expectations of those who become pilgrims, promises a deeper transformation and a richer experience of faith.

Mission Statement for The Pilgrimage

For Christians hearing the call to go deeper —
The Pilgrimage creates a community and provides tools
and experiences through which we learn to hear the call of God
and respond in faith, journeying together with friends
on the path to a Spirit-led and joyful life.

Teaching/Learning Model

A Guide for Pilgrims and Instructors of *The Pilgrimage*

Basic Description of the Teaching/Learning Model of this Ministry:

The Pilgrimage uses a teaching/learning model derived partly from the work of the Catholic Educator Thomas Groome³ and also partly on the model developed by the Certificate in Spiritual Formation program at Columbia Theological Seminary under the direction of Rev. Dr. Julie Johnson and the Rev. Dr. Ben Campbell Johnson (no relation). The model of teaching/learning is carefully crafted to provide participants an opportunity to learn in modes in addition to didactic instruction, to grow as a community, and to promote the adoption of various spiritual disciplines consistent with Christian discipleship.

While *anyone* is welcome to come and participate in the program offerings of *The Pilgrimage*, to fully benefit from this teaching model more than simple presence in a class is required. That is, a **participant** can simply treat the course like an enhanced Sunday School experience, however to fully benefit from the deeper learning opportunities which we believe prepare someone for thinking about life before God *The Pilgrimage* requires a more significant and disciplined level of commitment. That deeper level of commitment — which takes the form of reading, reflecting, practicing, and reporting — makes the distinction between being a **participant** who comes to class, and being a **pilgrim** who is engaged in a process of faith-formation that is aimed at significant growth.

This pathway to a resilient and joyful discipleship is a gentle path. We follow in the lineage of Saint Benedict of Nursia the Prologue of whose Rule includes:
*“Therefore, we intend to establish a school for the Lord’s service. In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. . . as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.”*⁴

Finally, the teaching/learning model attempts to strike a balance between personal learning and communal learning. Some components ask the pilgrim to be alone with God or alone with a book and to reflect on that as an individual. Other components ask the pilgrim to recognize that they are traveling with fellow pilgrims who can broaden the experience with new insights and different perspectives. This aspect of our teaching/learning model is taken from Saint Benedict and the monastic communities which have thrived as “schools of the Lord’s service” for many centuries.

³ See his seminal work: Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis

⁴ St. Benedict, The Rule of Saint Benedict Timothy Fry O.S.B. editor. New York: Random House, 1981) pp. 5-6.

Generally speaking this model of teaching and learning includes the following three components: Academic; Communal; Shared Praxis.

1) **Academic. A sustained engagement with the topic/material under study.**

This usually takes the form of asking pilgrims to read a book or article in preparation for the course offering. We take care to select books we think are easily accessible, brief enough to be read with ease, and which offer provocative content which might prompt the pilgrim to think about the topic in a new way. For most courses in *The Pilgrimage* the pilgrims will have a list of books from which they can choose and read prior to or during the time of the course offering. A one-page reflection on the book that was read is turned in to the instructor, typically during the time the course is being offered. The instructor will read and remark on the paper but it is *not* graded. The idea is to support a pilgrim in having a sustained engagement with new material and to help in making connections of that material with the journey of faith. **[Due date:** *The book is most helpfully read prior to the course, and the book reflection-paper is given to the instructor during the course offering. It can be turned in as many as 30 days following the final class-date of the course.]*

2) **Communal. Participation in the small-group process.**

Most offerings in *The Pilgrimage* will have a small group component. This component of the learning is essential to our teaching model. While an *occasional* need to “make-up” a lesson by listening to the audio podcast is allowed, it is not a true substitute for full participation in the small-group component of the learning. If you know you are going to miss a small number of the lessons, speak with the instructor to see what arrangements can be made to have you listen to the podcast and to “process” the material in some other way. We know that schedules sometimes mean that making every class is a challenge, and we desire to be accommodating, but on the other hand, we also desire to provide a truly transformational experience through the courses in *The Pilgrimage*. We want pilgrims to fully commit to being present for the course classes as often as possible so that they can experience the material in community in the course.

Also, the Compass Group (small group component of the ministry) is meant to provide pilgrims with a place to ask questions and engage in dialogue with fellow pilgrims about the new things being learned and experienced.

3) **Shared Praxis.**⁵ **A long-term engagement in adopting a new discipline, or habit, in the wake of a course-offering and reporting on the experience of that new discipline.**

The Pilgrimage is not just about knowing new things. It is meant to move pilgrims to adopt new life-habits and spiritual disciplines which aid in growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Most courses in *The Pilgrimage* will ask pilgrims to adopt some new discipline or habit for 30-days following the end of the class and to turn in to the instructor a one-page reflection on the experience of engaging in that new habit or discipline. The instructor will read and remark on the paper, but it is *not* graded. The idea is to support a pilgrim in engaging a new discipline and to help in making connections of that discipline with the journey of faith. Some congregations replace this praxis-reflection paper with a “Day of Reflection” which invites pilgrims to meet for brief conversations of reflection after 30 days of praxis. **[Due date:** *The experience reflection-paper can be turned in as many as 60 days following the final class-date of the course.*]

⁵ *Praxis* is practicing a task, or spiritual discipline, and then engaging in an intentional conversation aimed at uncovering the potential of the task or discipline for aiding the pilgrim on the journey of faith. It is neither learning nor acting alone - but is a synthesis of both *doing and reflecting critically* on what has been done in order to deepen the experience and broaden the understanding.

Compass Groups

“I was intimidated by the idea of the compass group, at first. I didn’t particularly want to share details of my life and my Christian journey with others. I wanted to keep those experiences and thoughts to myself.”

“But we, as a group, have learned to trust each other and to care for one another. We have developed a deep Christian friendship and a respect for one another. We pray with and for one another, sharing our struggles and our triumphs. The compass group has become a tremendous, precious gift to me...an unexpected surprise.” — Sarah

The way you move from good intentions to actually progressing in the Christian disciplines of faith-formation is to become intentional, and to be held lovingly-accountable for the commitments which your new, more disciplined life of faith require. It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of the Compass Group to the process of *The Pilgrimage*. In *The Pilgrimage* we are all assigned to a Compass Group to help in this movement from good intentions to actual progress. While everyone who participates in a course of *The Pilgrimage* will have some experience with small group processing of the materials learned, *you will find the most challenging and the most rewarding parts of this ministry in a Compass Group.*

Your Compass Group is a small group of between four and seven Christian friends who will walk with you throughout your pilgrimage. Compass Groups (unlike the impromptu small groups of a particular class session) are long-term communities of support, nurture, encouragement, and prayer. You will become close with those in your Compass Group and will share with them the struggles as well as the triumphs of your journey.

In Compass Group you will pray together, you will “process” ideas and disciplines of faith-formation, and you will reflect on your life in the light of the metaphor of the Pilgrim’s Compass. Compass groups meet regularly and share leadership within the group.

“My compass group turned out to be ideal, in the sense that we are all very different personalities, in very different life situations, and yet we have found each other to be alike in special ways. We have become very good friends; comfortable and willing to share most anything with each other; knowing our innermost thoughts are safe with the group. God is definitely working in our lives and as we meet, share, and pray, we realize how blessed we are to have each other.” — Gen

The Compass groups are meant to be an experience of community. The purpose of the Compass Group community is to:

- 1) **Support** — provide the mechanism of loving accountability of one’s peers in order to support the new commitments and disciplines a pilgrim has adopted.
- 2) **Nurture** — The Compass groups are meant to be a community of nurture — where pilgrims are surrounded with care. The group also provides a community of loving Christian wisdom. We become soul-friends to one another in Compass Group.
- 3) **Encourage.** — “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” Compass Group members cheer one another on. They “bear one another’s burdens, and in this way fulfill the law of Christ.”⁶

The Compass Group experience is not a therapy-group experience. That is to say that it is not intended that Compass Group be a place where we come to “fix” one another. Compass Group *is* a supportive community where we are encouraged in the adoption and practice of new disciplines as disciples of Jesus, but the focus is on prayer and listening and holding one another lovingly-accountable to the process of spiritual growth and transformation which *The Pilgrimage* aims to facilitate. Cross-talk and advice-giving are generally discouraged in favor of deep listening both to the person speaking and to the still small voice of God speaking in the moment.

Make Compass a priority in your journey — the Compass Group is a critical aspect of the process which helps you fully experience the transformation which *The Pilgrimage* hopes to facilitate. Each Pilgrim has to take personal responsibility to make participation in the Compass Group a priority in his or her life. Try for 100% attendance and *if* you must miss a group gathering be sure to do what you can to connect outside the gathering itself (phone calls, or other forms of communication). If you are traveling you may be able to participate in the Compass Group via phone, Zoom, or Skype.

“I have found this to be a group in which we are comfortable to discuss our prayer life, our faith journey, our faith frustrations, and what’s going on in our day-to-day life. It is a joy to see the group acknowledge and support one of our own as they make small or big steps in the direction they want their personal faith to grow, especially when that step adds a sense of peace to one’s life. The Compass Group facilitates a depth to the small group relationships that I’ve always wanted out of small groups.” JOBY

⁶ Romans 12:15 and Galatians 6:2

Candle-Lighting

At the start of a Compass Group gathering we suggest the following brief liturgy to be used as a candle is lighted to remind us of the presence the Holy Spirit.

OPENING SENTENCES [Psa. 40:13]

O God, come to our assistance.

O Lord, hasten to help us.

LITANY FOR LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE [John 1:1-ff]

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

May the light of our Lord, Jesus Christ, enlighten our minds and the presence of his spirit enflame our souls that we might serve him faithfully now and always.

May we dwell in the Light of God's countenance forever.

Compass Group - Liturgy to Dismiss

When someone needs to leave the Compass Group — It is our hope that all pilgrims will remain in their Compass Group through completion of the first steps of *The Pilgrimage* and beyond. However, we recognize that when you are committing to a program that spans years of time that sometimes pilgrims will need to withdraw from their Compass Group for one reason or another. This withdrawal may be permanent or for a season.

In either circumstance we urge the Compass Group to surround the departing Pilgrim sending them away with a blessing. You may create your own blessing - but we provide the following as an example which you are welcome to use:

“May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of food and drink. May you be at peace with yourself, and may you love all others. May the Lord bless those who bless you and thwart those who curse you. We urge you as you take your leave to stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and thereby find rest for your soul. Follow the example of the good ones of old, and God will comfort you and help you. For now the paths of our journeys depart, but we pray that in God’s providence they may one day reunite. Until then journey on with our love and our blessing. You will always be welcome here — so depart in the peace of Christ.”⁷

⁷ Cobbled together from passages in Genesis 12 & 27, Jeremiah 6, Luke 2, and from the blessing of St. Columba

The Ministry Component

“But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.”⁸

Each of us has a role to play in the drama of God’s redemption of all creation. *The Pilgrimage* recognizes that God equips communities of faith to be the body of Christ by providing a wide variety of talents and gifts to those whom the Spirit has gathered.⁹ The community can only be a fully mature expression of that body when all the members of the Body are sharing the gifts entrusted to them. We are invited to reflect on the gifts we bring to the life of a community of faith as well as to a broken and fearful world and to ask, “What is required of me?” We presume that the gifts entrusted to our care are not *just for our benefit*, but have been given so that we may share them and so be a blessing to all others.¹⁰

As pilgrims take steps along the path of pilgrimage, it is expected that they will reflect deeply on their role within the church and broader community. What acts of compassion and generosity are they being called to continue? What new endeavors are they called to begin? How will they live out their vocation as children of God and as disciples of Jesus? In what tangible expressions of ministry will they be authentic servants of our servant Lord?

Acts of ministry come in many forms. A suggestive (but incomplete) list might be:

Singing in the choir	Playing an instrument	Serving on a church committee
Teaching Sunday School	Helping with youth	Caring for those in the nursery
Going on a mission trip	Serving at the food pantry	Faithfully serving one’s family

The ministry component of *The Pilgrimage* is meant to help pilgrims re-cast their experience of serving as an act of ministry that grows naturally from their gratitude to God and from the gifts and talents which God has entrusted to them.

⁸ James 1:22-25

⁹ see First Corinthians chapter 12.

¹⁰ see Genesis 12;1-4 where Abram is blessed so that through him all the world will have it’s blessing.

Travel Pilgrimage

For most pilgrims *The Pilgrimage* will principally be a ministry of helping you to grow in the experience of discipleship in the stream of daily living. The daily pilgrimage is a journey of your own unique search for a meaningful and rich relationship with God which happens in the ordinary places where life is lived.

One of the tools the ministry uses to intensify the process of transformation is travel pilgrimage. We are far from the first to use this process of making a physical and outward journey to aid in the exploration of our inner odyssey with God. In fact, people of nearly every faith have known the value of making a journey as a discipline of faith. Christians have been making pilgrimages since the early centuries of the faith.

Because this portion of the ministry is so complex, we require that you complete no fewer than four courses in *The Pilgrimage* before you are qualified to go on a travel pilgrimage. This ensures that those who make the travel pilgrimage are well-prepared to engage in an intentional year of discipleship preceding the travel and to journey in the company of others with a well-tuned attention to the presence of the Spirit.

Additionally, in the year before pilgrims go on travel-pilgrimage, there is typically one course offered which highlights people, places, theologies, and practices associated with the destination of the travel pilgrimage. Completion of that course is required of those going on the travel pilgrimage. This course can count both as one of your six aforementioned courses and also meet the requirement of the specific travel pilgrimage too.

Finally, the travel pilgrimage begins many months prior to actually setting off on our journey. All pilgrims who commit to a travel pilgrimage will meet regularly in the months prior to the travel. In these roughly 8 monthly gatherings pilgrims:

- † Grow in love and friendship with one another - forming an authentic Christian Community.
- † Have the aspects of pilgrimage as it has been classically experienced introduced - with the hope that pilgrims will spend about a month on each of these aspects pondering the significance of it for their own decision to make a travel pilgrimage.
- † Share books and other resources with one another as we prepare to go.

- † Pilgrims will be invited to join in the creation of the *Peregrination Primer*¹¹ for that year.
- † To remain aware of the many details which correspond with a group-journey of this nature.

¹¹ The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines “**peregrination**” as:

“1. A journey through life, especially viewed as a temporary precursor of eternal life in heaven. 2a. pilgrimage.

The word “**primer**” derives from another Latin word *primarium* which in modern English has several meanings:

“1. A prayer book or devotional manual for the laity.

2b. A small introductory book on any subject; something introducing or providing initial instruction in a particular subject practice; et cetera.”

This small book is meant to be both an introductory resource on a host of pilgrimage-related subjects, as well as a prayer book or devotional manual for pilgrims. In it you will find both basic information for the trip and information about the people and places we are journeying to encounter. Furthermore, you will find aids for your daily devotions, pages for journaling, and our common worship liturgies.

How You Progress in The Pilgrimage

Each pilgrim will make his or her way through a series of “steps” in this journey of faith.

This process includes:

- 1) Completion of the The Way of the Pilgrim.
- 2) Completion of four (or more) courses in *The Pilgrimage*.
- 3) Faithful participation in your Compass Group.
- 4) Participation in a travel pilgrimage, while not a requirement of *The Pilgrimage*, is a significant aspect of the ministry which brings many components of the ministry together in an intensified liminal experience.
- 5) Making a commitment to The Pilgrimage in the form of adopting commitments to:
 - † Be a person of prayer.
 - † Participation in the financial support of the ministry.
 - † Participation in courses and gathering as you are able.
 - † Making a travel pilgrimage as you are able.
- 5) The process of growing ever-deeper in your love of God and your neighbor is never fully finished and most pilgrims will remain in the ministry for many years beyond the completion of the steps outlined above.