

key elements of pilgrimage

what is pilgrimage

Ancient and new, pilgrimage echoes the desire to journey into a deeper relationship with God.

To leave one's home

Leaving home isn't just about the physical journey, but also leaving the comfort and ease of perceptions to set out in faith, with open hearts.



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About

Key Elements of Pilgrimage pulls together both academic research and reflections on pilgrimage, from its journey of faith to the practicalities of planning. Each element and reflection better informs our approach in providing young pilgrims with openness to pilgrimage, ancient and new, on their personal journey with Jesus Christ.

“Whether travelling across the town, or across the globe, all young people journeying to WYD are treading an ancient and sacred path like generations of pilgrims through the centuries. Since the earliest times, Christians have been a pilgrim people, aware of their outward journey through time and space is concurrent with an inner journey that has an eternal destination.”

Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry

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Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place,
LORD Almighty!

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

Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young—
a place near your altar,
LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

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

**Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.**

As they pass through the Valley of Baka,
they make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.

Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty;
listen to me, God of Jacob.
Look on our shield, O God;
look with favor on your anointed one.

Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;
I would rather be a doorkeeper
in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favour and honour;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless.
LORD Almighty,

We are but travellers here

Mary
OF THE CROSS
Mackillop



To leave one's home

Dr Dan Fleming
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Background

In preparations for World Youth Days discussions regarding the difference between pilgrimage and religious tourism naturally arise. These conversations also relate to scholarly debates on the same theme, with some scholars asserting that there is no discernible difference between a pilgrimage and a religious tour (or any other holiday, by extension). This is not a universal viewpoint – anthropologists from the universities of Missouri and Indiana note strongly for a differentiation, on the grounds that pilgrimages – as distinct from tourism – involve an essential element of sacrifice (understood broadly to include sacrifice of comfort, well-being, time, expectations, and so on)¹. We agree with this analysis, but wish to provide reflections more deeply grounded in our Christian tradition.

A pilgrimage is a journey out from one's home for which one is prepared. It is filled with prayer and worship as essential components and has, as its ultimate goal to inspire, transform and encounter deeper union with God and others.

The key image we present in this article is that of 'leaving home' from what is known and familiar to us, which has its foundation in the Old and New Testaments, and is a core theme in Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologies. Our suggestion is that this image, combined with some discussion of the features noted above, provides a framework for the preparation and leadership of pilgrimages in a manner that differentiates them from holidays or religious tours.

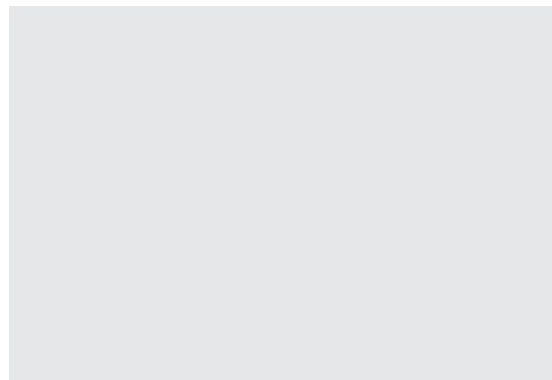


To leave one's home

One of the fascinating features of the Old and New Testaments is the focus on figures who are constantly on the move. Jesus calls his disciples to “follow him” (e.g. Matthew 4:19) on His journey, which knows no place as home but instead keeps moving. Mary’s pilgrimage took her to the most holy of places; Calvary, the site of her Son’s sacrifice and death; and the Upper Room, where she and the early church received the Holy Spirit. Mary’s journey was not far in distance, if we were merely counting kilometres. It is a huge distance psychologically and spiritually. Mary’s life of faith is a pilgrimage of constant surprises, of sorrow, of surrender and of joy. She persevered and remained steadfast in psychological and spiritual union with Jesus, her Son². St Paul leaves the home of his Jewish faith and travels through the Roman Empire to preach the Gospel. Moses leads the Israelites out of their home in Egypt, where they are slaves to the established rulers into a promised land (which Moses himself never reaches). And, right at the beginning of the Old Testament, we meet Abraham, who is called by God out of his homeland and is later identified as ‘the wanderer’ (Deuteronomy 26:5).

Homes are sacred places to each of us, and we can build a home in more ways than one. In the most obvious sense, we may think of a kind of home that the famous Australian film *The Castle* refers: a safe and comfortable physical location where a family is raised and memories are made, and a residence for rest and recreation. More broadly, as Australians, we might think of our own country as “home” as we experience levels of comfort and safety. In these cases many of us enjoy leaving our homes, but normally with the hope of returning and finding it as we left it.

The idea of home can be extended to our worldview, which is understood as the way in which we understand the world; our meaning we find in life, our sense of purpose, and our value set³. This home worldview tends to be safe and comfortable and can change gradually over time as we grow and develop through life’s journey. That does not preclude us from adventuring out and considering other viewpoints, but normally when we do so – again – we do so with the hope of returning to our known home and how we left it. Many become aware of this home worldview when something threatens it – some experience might tell us we do not have the whole picture, or someone might argue convincingly against how we see things. In such cases it is common for us to protect our home and what we know and so we rally against those things, which challenge it.



The same can also be said of our spiritual journey. Many of us have a spiritual ‘home’ which provides us with great comfort in our spiritual life. It is here that we rest in God, which is an important and essential aspect of our tradition. Typically this spiritual home has a particular understanding of God and the manner in which we relate to Him, as well as an understanding of how it is that our faith tradition, rituals, and actions build up or compromise this relationship with God.

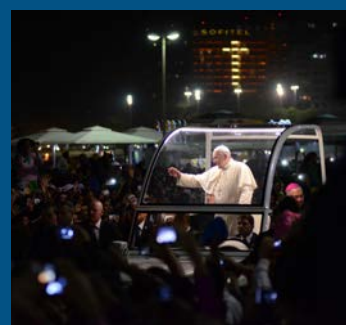
Each of these concepts of home is valid and a valuable part of the human experience. To lose any would be perilous to us, and sadly we know all too well what happens when someone loses a home – be it in the literal sense, or in the sense of losing spiritual peace. Nonetheless, in the Christian life we are called to hold together this desire for home and the fact that we believe in a God who is constantly inviting and challenging us to leave home and embark on a journey in closer relationship with Him, which is always a journey beyond the known “home” and into something new and transformational. This fulfils the very nature of God who is, by definition, awesome and beyond what we can hold within the four walls of any physical house.

A religious tour or holiday would normally not include within its scope the idea that participants are ‘leaving home’ in the sense described above. Instead, those who attend will expect to return to more or less the same home which they left, of course, with some memorabilia to hang on the walls as well as stories and memories to share.

A World Youth Day pilgrim will ‘leave home’ as part of the temporal passage and in the anticipation that what we considered ‘home’ will be transformed through journey, as it was for Abraham, Moses, St Paul, Mary and Jesus and each disciple who followed him. This, therefore, marks a rite of passage within the context of one’s journey of faith.

Preparing to leave one’s home

It is not easy to leave home, either in the literal sense or in the other senses described above. Notwithstanding our sense for adventure, humans are by nature habitual creatures, and tend not to like home disturbed. In fact, our human condition can see us react aggressively – slamming the door shut on outside influences. Or we can simply shut the door and ignore the outside; such is the reality of so many young people in our culture today. Hence, for those who are called to great responsibility by leading a pilgrimage, there is an obligation





to prepare and lead in the best manner and facilitate transformation as our pilgrims leave home and embark on this privileged journey.

Below are some key features of what such preparation should attend to facilitate openness to leaving home on the levels of relationship and understanding (we will come to spiritual preparation of pilgrims later):

- Cultivate a trusting relationship – people are more likely to feel safe and able to leave home if they trust those who are leading them.
- Provide understanding of the nature of a pilgrimage – pilgrims are less likely to understand their time on pilgrimage as a holiday or a religious tour if they understand something of the history of pilgrimage and its essential features.
- Encourage openness – this is an essential disposition for pilgrims. If they wish to reap the benefits of a pilgrimage, they will need to be open to others.
- Be honest – pilgrimages are often difficult journeys. Don't hide that from pilgrims.
- Share stories – we tend to learn through stories – share stories of the experiences of others, and highlight how they represent 'leaving home'.

Prayer at the centre

At the heart of pilgrimage is the hope that it brings us closer to God. Within this context, prayer forms an essential component of the journey. Many pilgrims will enter their World Youth Day journey with a 'home' understanding of prayer, which may need to be enriched before and during the pilgrimage to help ensure that they grow and develop a rich prayer life whilst on pilgrimage.

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray and so we should not be shy in teaching pilgrims about conversation with God through prayer. Some examples might include:

- Styles of personal prayer
- Styles of communal prayer
- Understanding the Church's liturgy
- Christian meditation



The ultimate goal

Faith is an abundant gift from God, as leaders, we can provide the fertile ground, but we cannot force it. We would do well to remember that the pilgrimage is not an end in itself, but a remarkable framework within which pilgrims may seek after the ultimate goal in their life, union with God and the establishment of the Kingdom of God (see Matthew 6:33). Core in this is a recognition of the radical need for God, a need which is only fulfilled through union with God, our journey towards which is the ultimate pilgrimage.

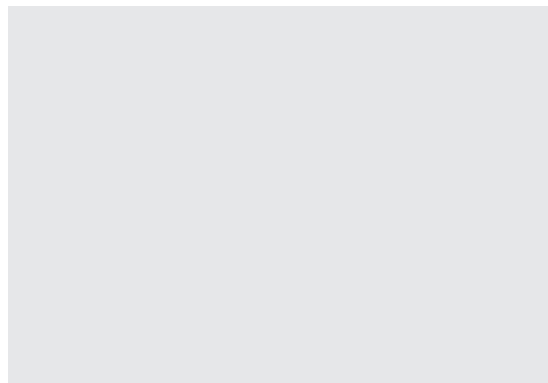
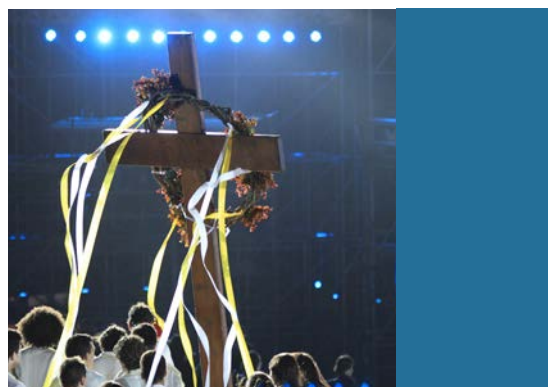
Practicalities

Having set broad outlines for what constitutes a pilgrimage, it is now possible to look more closely at some of the practicalities that are involved. By this we do not mean the logistics of travel, but rather some of the concrete experiences and steps of preparation that are necessary to assist in attaining the goals outlined above.

Setting a focus

The nature of the ultimate goal is that it can be reached through many pathways. To help focus pilgrims who are journeying to World Youth Day, a theme is always provided. Furthermore, themes will emerge for individual groups as they prepare for pilgrimage. As cited by Dr David Ranson in his extensive notes on pilgrimage, Dintman and Landis indicate⁴ that ancient pilgrims were often seeking healing, penance or an answer to prayer. Pilgrims may be drawn to their journey to seek physical or spiritual healing for themselves or a loved one, and their experiences will always inform the way in which they journey through the pilgrimage.

As such, and as Ranson notes, “Pilgrims are not static, but active and dynamic. The pilgrim journey by definition involves movement from one place to another. . . this movement may be physically challenging . . . this movement may be personally challenging . . . this movement may be disorienting and humbling, as we enter a place we have not been and must trust on others to guide and assist us. In the journey, pilgrims are removed from the distractions of everyday life, possessions and relationships and go to a new spiritual and physical place of encounter. The sacrifice and pain of the journey embody the pilgrim’s longing for spiritual renewal.”⁵





Openness

It is crucial that pilgrims be encouraged to be open to new experiences. Pilgrims need to be alert to an unknown. As those of us who have led pilgrimages before know, things will never turn out precisely as planned – but often the challenges and inconveniences act as vehicles for growth. Pilgrims should be encouraged to be present to each person they encounter, especially those who are poor or vulnerable, and remember that they have an opportunity to show love and compassion to those who they meet, and receive what gifts they have to offer too. At its best, pilgrimage entails communion of people willing to care for one another. Pilgrimages lead us to places of sacred and historical importance where we remember events and ideas that have impacted upon our lives and tradition. Being open to transformation, and leaving home.

Pilgrims move with the goal of being inspired and transformed in their daily life. They leave home intentionally so that they may make a home in the One who promises fulfillment and rest. As Virgil Elizondo in the book *Pilgrimage* says “... pilgrimage sites are not ends in themselves, but often serve as thresholds into new stages of life. One does not go as a pilgrim to stay, but to pass through a privileged experience that will change in us in unsuspected and uncontrolled ways so that we return to ordinary life in a completely new way. One breaks through limitations to experience a bit more of the ultimate and unlimited experience.”⁶

May this ministry and our work for WYD pilgrims provide opportunities for people to experience pilgrimages.

ENDNOTES

¹ Craig T. Palmer, Ryan O. Begley, and Kathryn Coe, ‘In defense of differentiating pilgrimage from tourism’ *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology*, 2, no 1. (2012) pp. 71-85.

² Chris O’Donnell, “Mary Mother of God”, The Columba Press, 2012.

³ The themes explored below are analysed in more detail in the following: Fleming, D. & Lovat, T. ‘Learning as Leaving Home: Fear, Empathy and Hospitality in the Theology and Religion Classroom’ in *Teaching Theology & Religion* 18, 3 207-223. (2015).

⁴ Anna Dintman, and David Landis, *Hiking the Jesus Trail and other Biblical Walks in the Galilee* (Harleysville, PA: Village to Village Press, 2010), 25-27.

⁵ We are grateful to Dr David Ranson for providing his own lecture notes to help in the preparation of this document.

⁶ Virgil Elizondo, “Pilgrimage: An enduring ritual of humanity,” in *Pilgrimage* edited by Virgil Elizondo and Sean Freyne, *Concilium* 1996/4 (London: SCM Press/Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), ix.



WHAT IS PILGRIMAGE

“Pilgrimage is a privileged means of bringing together many of the eight elements of youth ministry . The journey undertaken by a pilgrim is not only an external (or physical) journey; it usually involves a deeper, internal (or spiritual) journey. It's usually undertaken freely and with "defensive barriers down", and its not only the destination that's important, but the journey itself. The traveling companions, often unchosen, may themselves present challenges as well as opportunities for story telling. One may return home a changed person!”¹

Christians are those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus is the pilgrim who leads us to the Father's house. Both Jesus and the apostles after Pentecost were pilgrims proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom.



A pilgrim is a seeker, longing for something more, yet unknown. A pilgrim is brave, taking a leap of faith, setting out on the unknown, and trusting in adventure and possibility. A pilgrim is unique, bringing their own baggage and struggles to process along the journey.

A pilgrim is a child of God, called and named, journeying toward a deeper relationship with their creator.

A pilgrimage differs from a tour in a few important ways. A pilgrimage is a spiritual journey to which the pilgrim responds “yes” to God's invitation. However this response is more or less intentional depending on the individual's faith journey.

Pilgrimage, like any travel can open pilgrims to an experience of new cultures, places, countries but also community. A pilgrim will encounter the face of Christ in new and in unimaginable situations and faces.



A World Youth Day pilgrimage

brings together a unique collection of people to journey together in faith, understanding that “the good news of Jesus Christ is realised when it is lived out in relationships and community”

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It is undertaken for many different reasons but all with a similar goal or desire affirmed consciously or sometimes unconsciously to know God in their lives in a new or more profound way. Psalm 84 speaks of this desire clearly, however some young pilgrims would only be able to articulate this desire in hindsight, as their pilgrimage journey matures and they become more open to the experience and encounters of God in their companions and the sacred places they visit.

Following Vatican II, a strong image of the Church was that of the pilgrim people of God on a missionary journey to sharing the good news. This image of the pilgrim people also acknowledges each person’s pilgrim journey to the Father through the encounter of his son Jesus Christ.

A pilgrim, not only learns about themselves, but themselves in the context of a broader humanity. This is particularly the case for a World Youth Day (WYD) pilgrimage, when pilgrims encounter people from all over the world and even though they may come from vastly different circumstances they share a common faith. This privileged encounter cannot help but subtly place them differently in the world, understanding in a new and profound way that they are not alone.



“WYD is about intimate encounters. This might seem strange, given that a dominant feature of WYD is the colossal crowds, but all the massive dimensions and displays of the Church point to one reality – we are the Body of Christ. And every part of the Body of Christ has a purpose and a place (1 Cor 12:27). Every young person is loved by God, who has a plan for each and everyone of them.”²



CHARACTERISTICS OF PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage is one of the oldest and most widespread forms of human activity there is. The practice of going on pilgrimage is seen in all major world religions - Buddhism, Christianity (particularly Catholicism), Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism.

“For thousands of years, indigenous Australian made annual pilgrimage or “walkabout” travelling long distances retelling their dreaming stories in song and ritual, visiting sacred places. The elders passed on their culture and beliefs to others members of the community sharing the significance of land and their relationship to it and to one another”.³

The practice has been transferred into the cultural or secular sphere too with the emergence of different types of pilgrimage, such as those centred on the cultural sphere with pilgrimages to ANZAC cove, the Kokada trail and other battlefields even to places such as Disneyland or Broadway, or migrants visiting their homeland have taken on a sort of spiritual journey or characteristics of a pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage can be seen to have a number of key characteristics that define it and differentiate from other forms of travel and touring. While these elements maybe found in other activities, it is their combination that make pilgrimage so unique.

These characteristics include a physical journey, a sacred place, search for meaning, openness to transformation, and simple rituals including walking, praying and sometimes fasting.

Journey

A journey is under taken not just metaphorically, but physically. The going away, or removing oneself, from the every day is an essential element of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage includes stepping out into the unknown, freeing oneself of regular routines.

Sacred

A journey must have a destination, the physical journey is to a place of sacred significance whether it be a popular pilgrimage site such as Santiago de Compostela, a little know hermitage or city hosting World Youth Day, it is a place imbued with meaning for the pilgrim.

Meaning

The search for meaning is rooted deep within each of us and it is at the heart of the desire for pilgrimage. Courageously setting aside time amidst the fast pace of life to give priority to this desire is very personal and unique a time to discern God’s plan for their life.

Openness

Openness to transformation is a key characteristic of pilgrimage, however not all pilgrims will set out with it nor discover it along the way. Nevertheless the transformative power of pilgrimage will depend on the individual and their openness to the Holy Spirit working in their lives. Most pilgrims desire to encounter along their journey something outside their ordinary lives, to be renewed, this is essentially being open to transformation.

Incarnational

Pilgrimage is incarnational, undertaken with others, it is a physical full body experience. A long journey can be very tiring and challenging on mind, body and spirit. Pilgrimage requires different routines from our normal lives; long days, long distances, new ways of praying, and perhaps new foods. It can be a “wilderness time” where a pilgrim is tested to the limits of their capacity. This incarnational characteristic of pilgrimage is perhaps best lived out through the interactions with fellow pilgrims journeying together taking in the challenges and the joyful encounters.

“Different from a wanderer whose steps have no established final destination, a pilgrim always has a destination, even if at times he is not explicitly aware of it. And this destination is none other than the encounter with God through Christ in whom all our aspirations find their response”...

Lord Jesus Christ, pilgrim of Emmaus, you make yourself close to us for love, even if, at times, discouragement and sadness prevent us from discovering your presence. You are the flame that



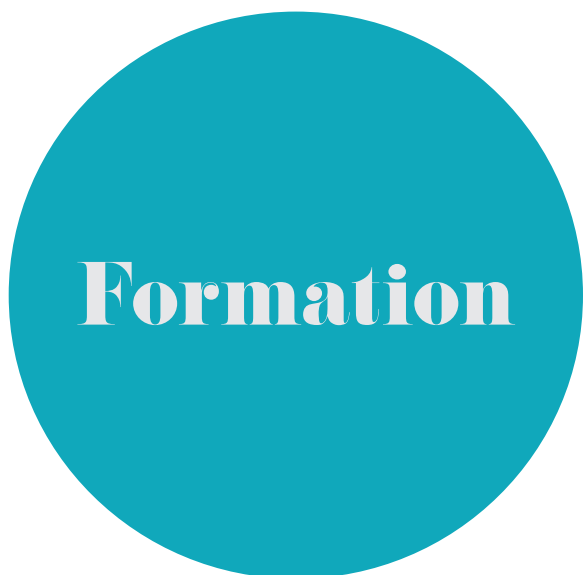
revives our faith. You are the light that purifies our hope. You are the force that stirs our charity. Teach us to recognize you in the Word, in the house and on the Table where the Bread of Life is shared, in generous service to our suffering neighbor. And when evening falls, Lord, help us to say: “Stay with us”. Amen.”

Pope Benedict XVI

*Homily on the Solemnity of
Corpus Christi, May 22, 2008*

All these characteristics inform a pilgrim, or leader, in how to prepare for a pilgrimage, not only regarding formation and practical preparation for the journey ahead but in providing insight to the pilgrim returning home. When a pilgrim enters fully into the pilgrimage, embraces the journey, they may require assistance transitioning back into their everyday lives. Providing links to sustaining communities in which pilgrims can to continue their journey at home, is a significant aspect for all leaders of pilgrimages.







Considerations for a WYD Pilgrimage

Planning and preparing for a WYD pilgrimage requires more than itinerary building and filling our quota of pilgrims. A clear vision and goal for undertaking such an initiative in the first place is essential. For the goals of any spiritual pilgrimage to be achieved, a number of practical requirements must be addressed. These requirements are many and varied and may change depending upon the nature of the pilgrimage, age of the pilgrims involved, and the specific context of a pilgrimage at any point in time.

“The word “pilgrim,” derived from the Latin peregrinum, conveys the idea of wandering over a distance, but it is not just aimless wandering. It is a journey with a purpose, and that purpose is to honor God.”⁴



Pilgrim

“Pilgrimage provides a rare opportunity, outside our normal environment, creating a prolonged period for deep reflection on our spiritual journey. It is a unique opportunity for potential growth and development. To take advantage of this precious time pilgrims are encouraged to discard technology that can often be the source of distraction in preference for simplicity and an openness to try new things. “While WYD is about enormous crowds and big impressive events, it is also about the individual soul who is lost and searching and to whom God is patiently waiting to draw near”.⁵

Community

A World Youth Day pilgrimage is undertaken as a community, as a group. “It is through loving relationships, lived out truthfully and authentically, that we discover ourselves and the mystery of others in God” Fellow pilgrims are a unique source of encounter and can be the face of Christ for each other throughout the pilgrimage.

Group structures, such as small groups for sharing, communal prayer and sacraments, built into the daily routine of pilgrimage, promote and advance the communal nature of a pilgrimage. In this community environment individuals are nurtured and called to share their gifts in an atmosphere that promotes supportive relationships.

Leaders and chaplains form an important role in the pilgrimage community as mentor and guide in this gentle apprenticeship of faith. World Youth Day has been described as “an immersion experience into a contemporary, perhaps even emerging, Catholic culture, which amongst other things, emphasizes a strong and distinctive Catholic identity”.⁶





Preparation

A significant focus during the preparation phase, must be placed on identifying the goals of the pilgrimage, and then undertaking planning to accomplish these goals. This focus provides a strong foundation for the unique pilgrimage experience that is World Youth Day, where the scale of the event, and the associated 'potential' fruits must be given every opportunity to flourish.

Structures that are put in place to achieve goals will vary between the pre-WYD pilgrimage, the WYD week itself, and any post-WYD retreat experience. There are, however, a number of common goals that each phase of the pilgrimage will hope to achieve.

Regardless of the pilgrimage phase, structures must be put in place to develop a pilgrim's:

- Personal spirituality
- Sense of personal identity
- Sense of community
- Opportunity for personal, small group and large group reflection

Logistical decisions should be framed by the following:

- Maximise spiritual impact and minimise logistical distractions
- Ensure adequate time for prayer and reflection at spiritual sites in addition to regular tour/visit time allocations
- Determine with PC what are the key or significant sites requiring extended time for prayer
- Ensure logistical decisions reflect spiritual priorities i.e. where and when to have daily mass, or extended time at significant sites
- Ensure pilgrim wellbeing needs are met to facilitate full participation in all aspects of itinerary

Logistical distractions include, but not limited to:

- Rushed program with too many activities
- lack of time for adequate breaks, food or reflection
- booking confirmations
- complicated transfers
- adequate accommodation & rooming allocations

While not all of the above can be resolved, good planning will minimise or mitigate any negative impact on pilgrims.



Formation

An important element of preparation for a World Youth Day pilgrimage, not only to share practical tips and information regarding preparation for travel overseas but also the important work of cultural expectations, and laying the foundations of community.

The number and type of formation sessions from group to group can vary widely taking into account: age, geographical accessibility and time. Ideally pilgrims will have been able to meet each other and are not setting out not knowing anyone else on their pilgrimage. However formation programs have been successfully undertaken remotely using Skype and video conferencing, with pilgrims only meeting for the first time in person at the airport.

Formation material, whatever form it takes, should consider exploring opportunities for prayer, personal and group reflection as well as initiation into an understanding of WYD itself and the context of their particular pilgrimage, its themes and focus.



Pre Pilgrimage ⁸

In recent WYD pilgrimages, the pre-WYD pilgrimage has given pilgrims the opportunity to engage in outreach initiatives that enable them to give witness to their faith, often in communities that are far removed from those where the pilgrims have come from. Such experiences have proven to be invaluable evangelisation opportunities for both the pilgrims and the communities in which they serve.

The pre-WYD pilgrimage often provides the pilgrim with the opportunity to encounter a wider faith experience. Such encounters may involve visiting sites of religious significance and meeting communities or individuals from the various cultures. A focus on Eucharistic celebrations during these days, within the culture in which we have been immersed, help bring such experiences to their fulfillment. These experiences can often be enriched by religious customs that are perhaps foreign to the usual expression of faith that the pilgrims have been exposed to in their own country or diocese.

Effective pre-WYD pilgrimages provide ample opportunity for authentic and timely reflection on the encounters that they participate in. While the pilgrimage experiences in isolation can be truly memorable and life-giving opportunities, they achieve their ultimate realisation when done so in an environment that fosters personal and group daily reflection, again most often accompanied by the celebration of the Eucharist.

At all times, pre-WYD pilgrimage design should be focused on providing these authentic opportunities. Accommodation and meals during these days need not be extravagant, particularly if such luxuries are at the expense of deeper spiritual engagement. Practically speaking this means that timely, convenient meals/catering should be given priority. Particularly in the case of groups participating in mission work, meals (perhaps with the exception of lunches) should be easily accessible through accommodation sites should itineraries have pilgrims at their accommodation at such times. If possible consideration should be given to encouraging lunches to be purchased individually by pilgrims in public areas that provide both independence and the opportunity to be exposed to the local foods and culture of that place.





World Youth Day Week

This week provides pilgrims with the unique opportunity to encounter the Universal Church. In general, the majority of the events of the week are conducted in accordance with a predetermined program. Days usually commence with Catechesis, followed by Mass. “The catechesis process relates the Gospel to the questions in the minds and yearning in the hearts of young people”⁹ In the afternoon pilgrims have the opportunity to engage with a variety of events or programs associated with the WYD week or the host city specifically.

For groups who have been on pilgrimage together for a period of time before arriving in the WYD host city, entering into the WYD Weeks activities can be a significant cultural shock. The small community, and the intimacy that has been achieved over the previous period can feel like a sharp contrast to the busy, often loud and crowded WYD week experiences. It is important to brief pilgrims well through this transition into a new and confronting environment.

Good pilgrimage planning, including building flexibility into the program, will help with this transition. Giving young people some time out, if possible a full day to orient themselves before the WYD activities commence can help reduce the risk of culture shock.

It is often the community and friendships that have formed in the lead up to the WYD week that fortify the young people’s resilience to fully experience this new wave of encounter with the young Church of the world.

During the WYD week, it is important to consider maintaining community practices developed in the early period of the pilgrimage i.e. gathering for daily prayer; this also facilitates a casual opportunity for leaders to pastorally check in with pilgrims.

Critically, it is essential that a space/room is identified for pilgrims and their leaders to reflect in a quiet, personal and reverent environment as often as practical, ideally in a location in close proximity to the accommodation.

“The staging of the WYD event itself with immense practicalities involved can be likened to an earthenware vessel St Paul describes in Second Corinthians (2Cor 4:7).

It is made of clay and not worth much, but it holds a treasure of immeasurable value.”¹⁰



Post WYD Retreat

The post WYD retreat has become an essential part of the WYD pilgrimage planning and experience. It has long been identified that pilgrims coming home from WYD struggle to re-enter their previous lives and find a way to integrate their pilgrimage into the way they carry out their lives without compartmentalising the experience.

Just like Peter on Mt Tabor wanting to pitch tents and stay secure within this new understanding, we know that eventually no matter how transformational an experience is, it still must be transitioned into our day to day. Each pilgrim is challenged with a new way of being himself or herself, being true to their encounter whilst being reacquainted with family and friends with whom they need to recount and witness a new version of themselves.

The post-WYD retreat gives pilgrims the opportunity to reflect on the experience that they have participated in over the preceding weeks, with a view to considering how their experience will assist them upon their return home in the hope that they will continue to live a life of faith. The reflection activities, while coordinated by group leaders, will reasonably require enough space for pilgrims to engage in personal, small group, and large group reflections. Ideally retreat locations should be considered in areas where pilgrims can acknowledge natural beauty, which is conducive to effective retreat experiences.

Recreational time is an important element of a post WYD retreat; its importance should not be underestimated. Young people often need a little time for the work of the Holy Spirit to process their experiences in the background while they have fun and let their hair down before they can articulate what is going on for them.

Accommodation suitability is crucial here. In addition to the space required for such reflective activities, there must also be facilities to provide all meals for pilgrims that do not require them to take exorbitant amounts of time from their daily schedule in order to stay well nourished and energised. Crucial to the provision of suitable accommodation, is the availability of churches that provide for daily Masses, that can be booked well in advance and celebrated by priests from each group. Importantly, this accommodation will provide access to office and printing facilities, digital projectors, and have provisions built in for inclement weather conditions.

ENDNOTES

What is Pilgrimage

¹ Called Together. Making the Difference (A Framework Document for Youth Ministry in Ireland)

² Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry <http://youth.catholic.org.au/anointed-and-sent/eight-focus-areas/community-life>

Characteristics of Pilgrimage

³ Pilgrimage; The Journey within and beyond. Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, WYD 2008 Secretariat

Considerations for a WYD Pilgrimage

⁴ Eleonore Villarrubia, Catholic Pilgrimage, a Spiritual Journey <http://catholicism.org/catholic-pilgrimage-a-spiritual-journey.html>

⁵ Selina Hasham, "The World Youth Day Gift: An Earthenware Vessel for Our Times" in Australian Catholic Youth Ministry: Theological and Pastoral Foundations for Faithful Ministry, ed. Christian Fini and Christopher Ryan (Mulgrave, Vic.: Garratt 2014) 343.

⁶ Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry <http://youth.catholic.org.au/anointed-and-sent/eight-focus-areas/community-life>

⁷ Richard Rymarz, WYD as a Catholic Immersion Experience <http://www.secondspring.co.uk/young/rymarz.htm>

⁸ Pre Pilgrimage is an inadequate term often used to describe the portion of the pilgrimage itinerary that proceeds the World Youth Day week activities, and does not refer to activities prior to departure.

⁹ Anointed and Sent: An Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry <http://youth.catholic.org.au/anointed-and-sent/eight-focus-areas/catchesis>

¹⁰ Selina Hasham, "The World Youth Day Gift: An Earthenware Vessel for Our Times"



Further Reading

Selina Hasham, "The World Youth Day Gift: An Earthenware Vessel for Our Times" in Australian Catholic Youth Ministry: Theological and Pastoral Foundations for Faithful Ministry, ed. Christian Fini and Christopher Ryan (Mulgrave, Vic.: Garratt 2014)

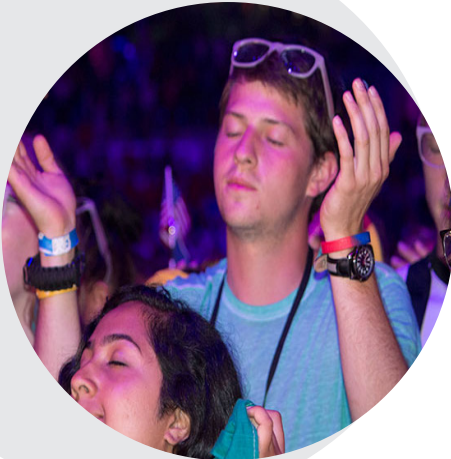
Bishop Anthony Fisher OP, **Effects of World Youth Days and Australian Catholic Youth Festivals**, Catholic Diocese of Parramatta, 2014.

Anthony Cleary, **World Youth Day: What difference does it make?**, Pointers: Bulletin of the Christian Research Association, Volume 23 Issue 4 (Dec 2013)

Learn more about the history of World Youth Days <http://wyd.org.au/resources/world-youth-day/pilgrimage>

WYD

World Youth Day



WYD TESTIMONIES

The greatest awakening of my World Youth Day pilgrimage took place when I got back home

By Ashleigh Green*

I'll never forget standing in a crowd of 2.5 million young people who were shouting "Papa Francesco!" in unison. I'll never forget the moment Pope Francis asked us all to join hands and build "bridges of peace". I was overcome by the beauty, emotion and peace that I felt in that moment.

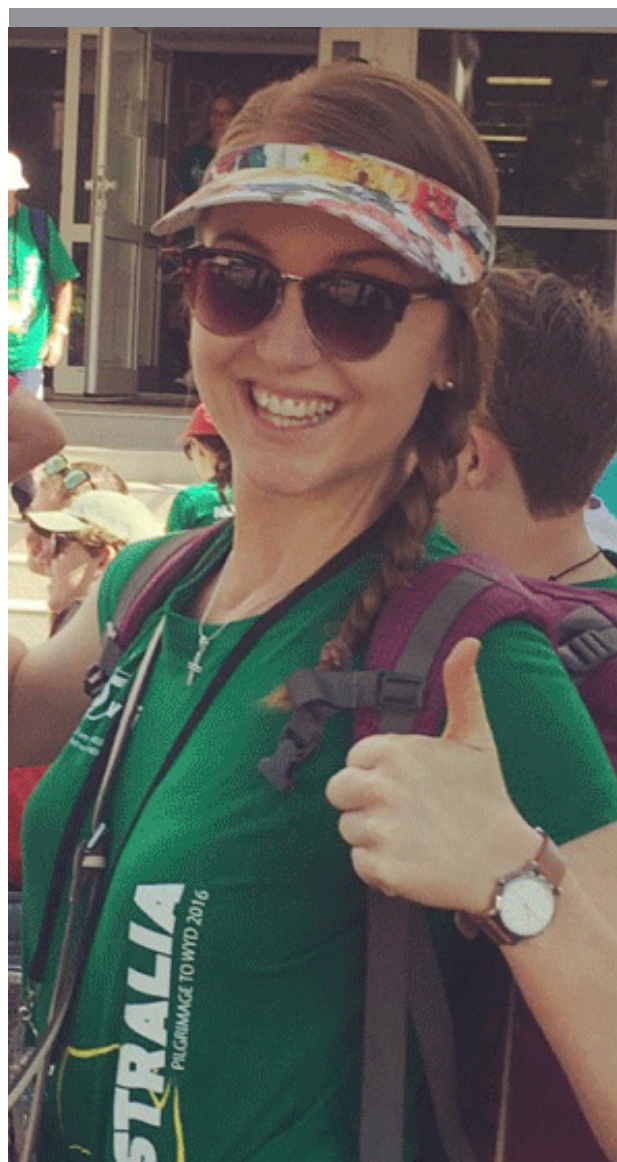
And then the Pope looked out at us, a sea of faces in a Polish field, and he told us not to be couch potatoes when we got back home.

"Dear young people," he said, "we didn't come into this world to 'vegetate', to take it easy, to make our lives a comfortable sofa to fall asleep on. No, we came for another reason: to leave a mark."

Wait, so it wasn't all about this moment? I was feeling rather energised and optimistic as I stood there surrounded by millions of people who were on fire for God. All around me were people radiating this profound sense of peace and joy. I could be joyful, given the right conditions!

The greatest awakening of my World Youth Day pilgrimage took place when I got back home. Suddenly, I was challenged to grapple with what mercy looks like when life is ordinary again, and what "leaving a mark" looks like when that comfortable sofa is so enticing. The most important part of my pilgrimage was my return.

Pilgrimage has entered popular culture in the likes of films and books such as *Eat, Pray, Love* and, more recently, *Wild*, the story of a



divorcee who leaves her home town to hike 1,100 miles along the Pacific Crest Trail. It is no wonder, given our fast-paced, frantic lifestyles that these journeys are so alluring. The number of Australians walking the Camino de Santiago – an ancient pilgrim walk through Spain – has increased by 800 per cent since 2004.

Popular culture feeds the idea that pilgrimage comes hand-in-hand with a single, profound moment of awakening. Suddenly, life makes sense and the missing puzzle pieces appear.

The awakening usually occurs during the most cumbersome, challenging part of the journey and life, after that moment, is supposed to be different. The awakening is the pinnacle. What we aren't prepared for is the return.

In a recent interview on The RobCast, Alexander Shaia offered a thought-provoking reflection on pilgrimage: "The literature talks about how to have an ecstatic, transformational experience," he said. "But there's not much on what to do when you get home from your pilgrimage when you're surrounded by people who haven't shared your experience and it's lonely." Shaia argues that pilgrimage is less about one, significant moment of awakening, than it is about experiences of opening and the receiving of new energy.

When I returned home after World Youth Day I certainly felt changed, but I couldn't tell you precisely which aspects of my life would be different. I wondered whether I'd got it all wrong.

Within four days of my return I found myself in Tamworth for a three-month social work placement in community mental health. It was a swift transition from the hustle and bustle of a city bursting with 2.5 million young, passionate Catholics to a town where I didn't know a soul. I missed being in a constant state of awe and inspiration. I missed waking up to joyful faces and to full days of activity.

Instead, I found myself entering the homes of people living with debilitating mental illnesses for whom joy is often non-existent. I entered the homes of people who were living in squalor with the remains of two-minute noodles and old cigarette butts lining their carpets. Many of these people had complex histories of abuse

and were the subjects of rumours that spread like wildfire throughout country towns.

My encounters were emotionally heavy, and I caught myself wishing I was back in Poland on pilgrimage. It took me some time to realise that my pilgrimage was not simply a happy, inspiring memory to fall back on when life becomes mundane again.

At World Youth Day, Pope Francis spoke frequently about the theme of mercy. "The Lord once more asks you to be in the forefront of serving others," he said. "He wants to make you a concrete response to the needs and sufferings of humanity. He wants you to be signs of merciful love for our time!"

My return was the pinnacle of my pilgrimage. Merciful love was a beautiful concept to grapple with while on pilgrimage. But when the crowds were gone and the chanting had stopped, merciful love became something real and tangible.

Perhaps, pilgrimage is less about searching for colourful moments of awakening than it is about opening ourselves to a new energy... And then, when life is ordinary and messy again, listening with the ear of our hearts for the silent whispers and gentle, quiet awakenings.

* Ashleigh Green is currently studying a Master of Social Work at the Australian Catholic University. She previously worked at the Columban Mission Institute and has a background in interfaith dialogue, where she hosted and participated in projects that break down barriers between people of different faiths.

Source: FAITH IN THE ORDINARY, The Good Oil, September 20, 2016
<http://www.goodsams.org.au/good-oil/pilgrimage-opening-ourselves-to-a-new-energy>



WYD16 Student Testimony

By Thomas Whitley, Xavier College, Victoria.

What the hell am I doing here? At WYD I mean. I've gotta get up early, at 6:00, so I can get my breakfast bag before they all run out. I know we're gonna spend the whole day walking, occasionally taking some ridiculously packed tram, then walking some more. I'm running out of cash, so at some point I know I gotta get to an ATM. All the people, all 2.5 million of them, are so frenzied, so excited and buzzing! You really have no idea!

However, hiding in all the chaotic excitement, are moments of tranquillity. When I can find them, I often step back, and ask myself why am I here? I told a priest of back home I'd be coming here to celebrate the communion of Christ. I told my friends I'd throw myself into the festivities, and meet new people. I told Fr Middleton that I'd come here in order build a closer relationship with God. But, I think I was lying. To be honest, I really don't I know why I'm here.

Now, just if you don't recognise me, if you've ever attended at school mass at Xavier, I'm usually the guy robed in white, kinda standing awkwardly to the side and donging the gong. Now, you're probably thinking that it's such a trust that guy went on the church camp. The regular god-loving, bible-preaching, church-going altar serving type of guy right? Well, if you think that, you're wrong. While my life certainly hasn't been the hardest, it sure hasn't been a smooth ride. Stuff happens that kinda throws you off the road, some of you I'm sure know of what I'm talking about. And, when you find yourself trapped in these crucibles of grief, you start losing faith.

You find yourself thinking about new, overwhelming ideas. What does God do when he sees a family die of starvation? Does he turn a blind eye to the girl who is raped by a brute? How can he let something like a brain tumour ruthlessly corrupt someone, someone like Mum, until there is nothing left in her? I could never find the answers to these questions, so in the end I stopped searching. I thought, perhaps it was all just a lie.



Why am I here? I think I'm lost. But something happened today, just while we journeying around Krakow, that was peculiar. I kinda felt something, you know? It's a little hard to explain, but it was like a sudden impulse of joy. And I didn't feel it in a Mass like I was told I would, nor in the prayer or reflection. I felt it when I saw a young man help an elderly lady carry her bags; when a women offered the last of her water to a thirst-stricken young girl; when a Polish guy carried a disabled kid about 3 k's to a medical tent. These moments where nameless people showed genuine selflessness and care to strangers; where the essence of what it is to be human was displayed, that's when I felt something. I saw this spirit of love and compassion in the people.

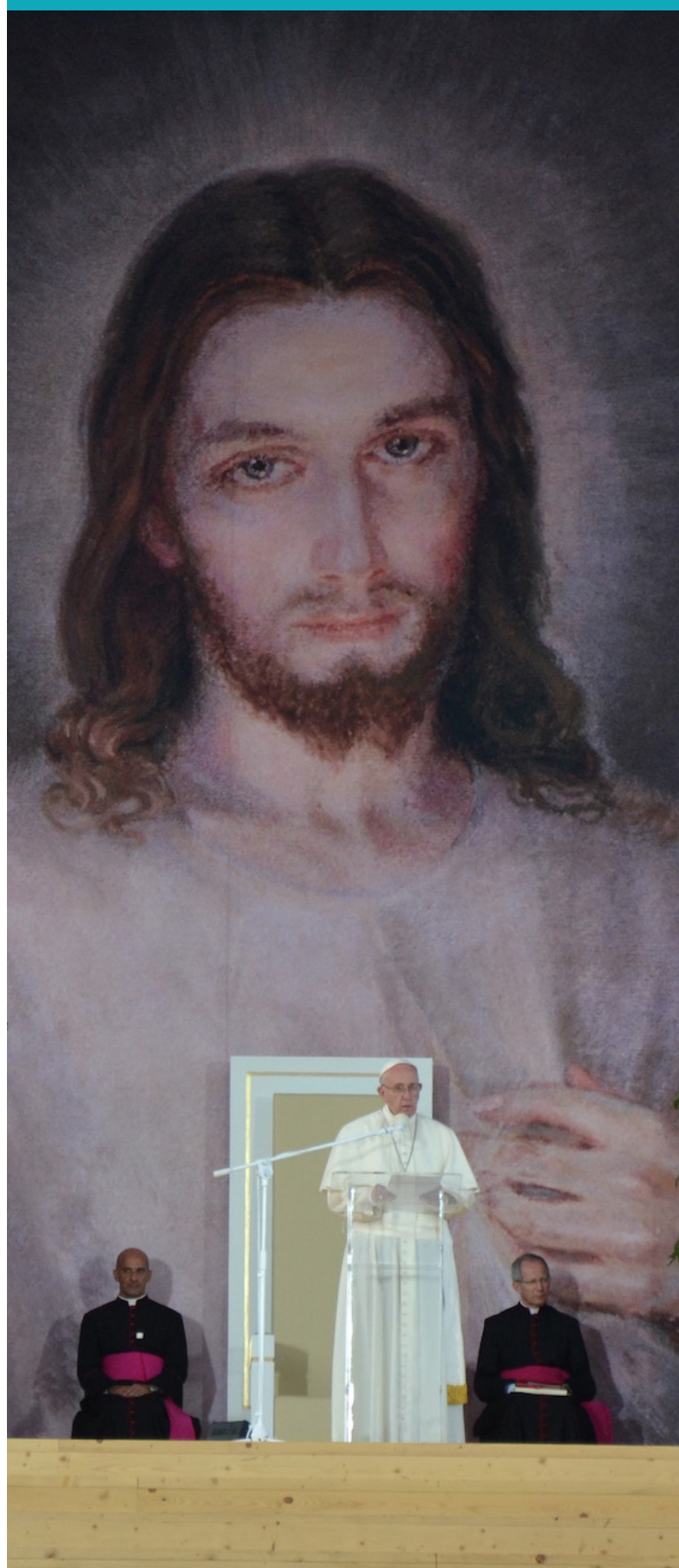
And I can't help but compare this to back to school, where even the system pits us against one another. Where society drives us towards an individualistic lifestyle, and too many people, even in Xavier, judge or are judged by people who always think the worst. I don't wanna go back home. I wanna stay here. But that's the type of selfishness I've grown to condemn.

Something Pope Francis said, while I listened to him in a drenched field outside the city, has stuck with me. He stated that "the world doesn't need any more messiahs; it needs only more disciples." As I stood in that field, I thought that when I return home, I'm not gonna preach about God. I'm not gonna go around and love everybody. I'm just gonna merely take that genuine selflessness that I've found here, and try and bring it back to Xavier, in the hope that some of you guys might follow suit.

This place, WYD, has changed me. I've realised that my faith goes far beyond the unending Masses, beyond the prayer. It's too much a part of who I am and who I want to be, and so I can't give up on it, otherwise I will be lost.

Why am I here? I'm here to find the person I aspire to be. And, in this chaotic mayhem of love, I think I've found him.

*Thomas Whitely with his mates at WYD Krakow 2016 (left),
Thomas in the blue cap.*





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