

# Enacting the Story: Pilgrimage, Learning and Renewal in Ministry

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## Abstract

Findings from this eight-month qualitative study of the extended pilgrimage of an ecumenical group of twenty mid-career pastors to the Holy Land included themes related to spiritual renewal, transformation, and an expanded view of experiential learning that included cognitive, embodied, and spiritual dimensions. The themes suggest ways to strengthen the effectiveness of adult religious education in the postmodern environment in the twenty-first century.

*Docet perigrinandum esse in mundo*  
We travel as pilgrims in this world  
(Calvin, 1960, III, vii. 3)

“...the present life is for people as a pilgrimage on which they are hastening toward the Heavenly Kingdom” (Calvin, 1960, III, x. 1)

Long an important educational practice for many faith traditions, pilgrimage is an intentional journey to a sacred site to discover meaning and rekindle hope. Those who make pilgrimages often associate their experience with spiritual renewal and transformation. Examples of pilgrimages abound from the time of Abram’s call by God to journey to a new land, the epic pilgrimage of faith by Moses and the Hebrews during the Exodus, through stories told and retold by Egeria, Chaucer, Bunyan, and countless others. Their stories show how the journey of faith has been enacted through pilgrimage, transforming lives, and inspiring others to take their own journeys. For centuries, adherents of most faith traditions have made pilgrimages to thousands of sacred sites across the world. Today, there are more than 6,000 pilgrimage sites in Europe alone.

Pilgrimage is a neglected area of study in religious education. Given the growing emphasis on travel with a purpose exemplified by congregational mission trips, youth retreats, and church-sponsored travel for adults, growing interest in virtual electronic travel, and continuing emphasis on pilgrimage in Catholic and other traditions, a better understanding of the pedagogical significance of the pilgrimage experience holds promise for broadening the current conceptualization of religious education.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the pedagogical dimensions of the phenomenon of pilgrimage including its relationship to spiritual renewal and transformation. Underlying the study is the assumption that a better understanding of the pilgrimage phenomenon might offer insights that could increase the effectiveness of adult religious education in congregational settings.

## Methodology

Qualitative research methods were used because they were consistent with the conceptual model of this study as well as the topic (Garrison and Shale 1994). These methods also supported the heuristic dimension of the study, as participants sought to understand their experience of pilgrimage by sharing their perceptions in order to make sense of a complex phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Rather than making the assumption of an existing learning theory, use of these methods allowed theory to emerge from the data (Brookfield 1990).

Key assumptions guided this study: an ontological assumption that essential reality was not external to the individual but rather a product of experience and that “experience is an indispensable clue to understanding” (Polanyi 1962, 150); an epistemological assumption that the process of knowing itself is experiential; an assumption concerning human nature that the human subject actively participates in the process of knowledge identification and that knowledge is not a pre-determined “given;” a postmodern assumption that understanding is particular to the individual without favoring, *a priori*, a more general understanding (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991; Lather 1991); and an assumption that a particular understanding is always affected by its context (Elias and Merriam 1994; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Building on a subjective, interpretivist, and postmodern conceptual framework, this paper reports the results of an eight month qualitative research study involving twenty participants in *Journey of Faith*, an intentional two-week experience of pilgrimage to the Holy Land for pastors in mid-career. With an average of eighteen years in ministry, twelve women and twenty eight men were selected from 114 applicants to participate. While the majority of pilgrims were Presbyterian pastors (PCUSA), five other denominations were also represented. Journey of Faith consisted on a three-day orientation retreat, followed six weeks later by a two-week pilgrimage, and six weeks after that with a three-day follow up retreat. Participants documented their experiences through written reflections completed before, during and after the pilgrimage experience. In addition to these written data, group interviews were conducted during the orientation retreat, on the pilgrimage itself, and at the follow up retreat. Additional data sources consisted of over original written essays that were a part of the application process, 400 emails, a comprehensive journal compiled by participants, and personal reflection papers completed at the conclusion of the project. In addition to the data collected from the participants, data were collected from congregational leaders in the pastors’ parish regarding the pastor’s participation in the pilgrimage. All data were transcribed and analyzed. QSR NVivo software was a tool that facilitated the constant comparison of data across subjects and sources in order to determine themes that described participants’ experiences (Miles and Huberman 1984). Through member checking participants clarified the themes that emerged from the data to ensure that the interpretation corresponded to their experiences (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Findings include themes that emerged from the data analysis. The presentation of study findings is integrated with the literature as suggested by Bogden and Bilken (1992).

## Findings

Themes identified from the analysis included spiritual renewal and transformation, the role of experience, whole person learning, and activities situated in a context. The themes are interrelated and are understood in conjunction with the dynamic context of physical settings.

### ***Spiritual Renewal and Transformation***

Themes of spiritual renewal and transformation depicted profound changes resulting from the pilgrimage. One female participant summed up her experience, “My soul was replenished more than I could ever have expected and that is what drives my energy and vitality for ministry. I realized how passionate I am in ministry to share the Word in teaching, preaching, pastoral care and service.” Another pastor wrote in his journal: “I have been re-formed once again; I have been re-connected to the One who walks before us, and leads us home, to a familiar place, yet a new place.” Of the 40 forty participants, all but two reported one or more experiences of spiritual renewal. Participants spoke of renewed energy, clarification of call and vision for ministry, instances of discernment regarding issues they faced, and a deepening sense of community both with fellow pilgrims and their families and congregations.

Transformative learning has been defined as “a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions... a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world” (Morrell & O'Connor, 2002, p. xvii). Pilgrims identified significant changes in perception, assumptions, and their sense of call or purpose in ministry which they attributed to their pilgrimage. As one said, “This pilgrimage opened a new window on my life... I am amazed at what I’m beginning to see.” Another remarked, “I will never read the Bible in the same way again. This has opened up a whole new world.” Other participants reported changes in perspective on their congregations, their calling, their marriages, and their own self image. Following the pilgrimage, congregational leaders were asked to make observations on their post pilgrimage perception of their pastor. One noted “a new depth of perception, enthusiastic sharing, a more personal faith and a willingness to talk about it.” Another said, “I could tell an almost immediate difference in [Name’s] tone of voice, an increased intensity in his ministry, more energy and openness to others views.” Based on the data, the pilgrimage had an effect on participants, yet each experienced renewal differently. Experiences of renewal and transformation have long been identified as a hallmark of pilgrimage in numerous religious traditions (Cousineau, 1998; Clift & Clift, 1996; Webb, 2002; Sumption, 2003). What is less clear is the pedagogical experience of pilgrimage that seems to make it so efficacious.

### ***Role of Experience***

For participants in this study the pedagogical foundation of pilgrimage was personal experience. Experience was participatory. As one noted in his journal:

The most powerful place of faith is where a pilgrim makes a deep personal connection with God. A site is sanctified as pilgrims ‘remove their shoes’ so to speak and walk around as if on holy ground. Ultimately faith is not about the sanctification of sacred sites but the sanctification of the people who visit. It’s something you experience.

Echoing the literature on experiential adult learning (Boud, 2005), pilgrimage in this study was experiential in two senses: each participant brought a wealth of prior life experience to the pilgrimage, and the pilgrimage itself became a powerful experience of learning. In ways similar

to Cousineau (1998) a number of participants used the term “thin place” to describe their experiences of epiphany.<sup>1</sup> One said:

The ‘thin places’ I experienced had less to do with learning about places and events in the Bible than with drawing together the people and stories of my own life into a psalm of remembrance and praise and thanksgiving. My pilgrimage to Israel brought into focus the pilgrimage which has been my life.

Another added, “The pilgrimage put 55 years as a Christian in context, what I have studied in seminary, taught in African history and believed of biblical history came to life.” Experience was foundational for learning, but the process of making meaning of experience was complex.

### ***Whole-person Learning: Cognitive, Embodied, and Spiritual***

Making a connection involved a cognitive dimension of reflection on experience long emphasized in adult learning theory (Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1983). Participants learned through reflection on experience in ways similar to those noted by Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985; 1996) and Miller (2000) where reflection involves returning to experience or remembering, perception, awareness and paying attention to feelings, and a process of re-evaluating experience or reforming one’s perceptions and interpretations. One participant described his experience in the Elah Valley, where David met Goliath: “In that valley, next to the field of pepper plants, I remembered. A flood of gratitude washed over me for the men and women who, in my childhood, cared enough to teach me the stories of the Bible. My eyes got watery. I got a new sense of why I am a minister.”

Yet there was more to the reflective process than cognition. As one participant wrote after the pilgrimage:

I learn by seeing and doing. All my years of study and reading and even watching films about the Holy Land could not possibly impart the same experience of first hand sensory experience. Seeing Jerusalem, hearing prayers in Hebrew (and many languages), feeling the wind off the Sea of Galilee, touching the earth, discerning the scent of water, flowers, and trees in the Holy Land as people have done for millennia adds new dimensions and layers of understanding.

This participant is describing a more active embodied form of experiential learning than is generally thought of as “learning through experience” (Fenwick, 2003). Michelson (1999) suggests that experiential learning is more than “reflection on learning” and that the body itself can be the site of learning. In this study such learning was affective but also had a physical dimension. Another participant described her experience:

I think I expected to be ‘moved in the moment’ when visiting places with names I’d heard since I was a little girl. I expected some kind of euphoria, or to be deeply touched, or to be racked with emotion. But I didn’t experience that at all. Yet it’s almost as if those places somehow attached to me... like I was connected to the experience. It was me. The memories I have from being in Israel seem to be not only intellectual or cognitive, but in my blood. They are a living part of me. It’s not something I planned for or expected. I lived it. I live it now.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Marcus Borg, “A thin place is anywhere our hearts are opened. They are places where the boundary between the [spiritual and physical] becomes very soft, porous, and permeable. Thin places are places where the veil momentarily lifts and we behold the ‘ahaah of The Divine.’” (Borg, 2003, p. 149)

In this sense pilgrimage is a form of what is termed “embodied learning” (Clark, 2005)

Pilgrimage has long been associated with physical experience (Miles, 1988). Fenwick 2003 argues that experiential learning is embodied, situated in the physical as well as mental experience of the learner in ways also suggested by Yorks and Kasl’s (2002) concept of “whole person learning.”

Whole person learning extends to the spiritual domain. Many participants described a profound sense of spiritual learning, describing their experience of spirit was personal, embodied and sensual; it was enacted as a part of their pilgrimage journey. Yet it also transcended the particularities of the moment. One man described his experience:

Four days into our pilgrimage, while we were in Galilee, it became clear to me that a primary reason I had come to Israel was to search for Jesus. I was not looking for his body. I was looking for the presence of the personal God. While sitting in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, I realized that even though the times have changed, Jesus also sailed this body of water. I looked at the surrounding hills. I felt the breeze and the rocking of the boat, heard the gulls, and smelled the fish. Sitting quietly, I looked across the water and saw the early morning sun breaking through the clouds. In that quiet moment, surrounded by incredible beauty, I sensed the presence of God.

Another recalled her experience as the group worshiped together at the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount on a beautiful hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee:

When I heard the words, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit,’ I felt a deep connection with that place and with Scripture as the Living Word. I looked at [name] and realized that I was not alone in my feelings. Something happened. Just as Jesus spoke at that spot ages ago to a people who were weary and depleted of spirit, so he spoke to me that morning, words of deep refreshment.

Whole-person learning includes cognitive, embodied, and spiritual dimensions that take place in the context of activities.

### ***Reflection and Connection in the Context of Activity***

For participants, whole-person learning was associated with the process of reflection and making connections in the context of activities. One participant described his experience:

When we arrived at the garden [Garden of Gethsemane], the olive trees I saw were huge and gnarly and had the look of having gone through fire and more. They were also currently being pruned significantly. What looked like large fresh growth was being lopped off. Suddenly I saw myself reflected in the life of those trees. There were times when I was burned in ministry, times when I felt like I have been cut down, or severely pruned. I took heart and still take heart in those trees. Those trees did not die, and I am still standing. The strength of the tree is in the roots, and the pilgrimage continues to push my roots deeper. As I reflect on those trees, the line from the hymn ‘Great is Thy Faithfulness,’ comes to mind; ‘Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, great is thy faithfulness O Lord to me.’

This story was unique yet shared similarities with many others. Participants made connections between what they saw and their lives beyond the pilgrimage. As one said, “I have been amazed

how this experience has shed light on my life – my family, my ministry, even the ways I was taught to read the Bible.” Another wrote after the group had spent a day working as a part of an archaeological dig:

Each layer of a *tel* tells the stories of the people in that time and reveals its story in the ruins of its gates, houses, water systems, and holy places. There is both a transience and permanence within a *tel*. Each layer is a reminder that nothing lasts forever. It [the dig] made me realize that this pilgrimage is like archaeology of faith, my faith.

Participants made connections between the concrete experience - the activity - of the pilgrimage and other life experiences by reflecting on their experience. These connections helped to make them aware of new insights some of which changed their perspectives in ways that were often powerful and profound. Making connections involved a kind of “metaphorical naming” that facilitated the connection between something unknown or abstract and something familiar (Ihde, 1986, p. 86).

The activity where connections were made was not an add-on but fundamentally connected to the learning process. In this sense, learning is enacted in “spontaneous, adaptable, and unpredictable ways” that change both learner and environment and that result in “a continuous enlargement of the space of the possible” (Sumara & Davis, 1997, p. 303). According to Davis and Sumara, learning involves a “complexified awareness... of how one [individual] exists simultaneously in and across these levels, and of how part and whole co-emerge and co-specify one another” (Davis & Sumara, 1997, p. 120). Understanding is embedded in conduct (Fenwick, 2003, p. 36). Learning is inseparable from activity. As Horton and Freire (1990) said, “we make the road by walking.” Pilgrimage literally and symbolically is one of the ways we “learn our way” through this life (Finger and Asun 2001).

Activity in this study took different forms: visiting sites, walking, eating, conversations and religious rituals of worship and prayer. The process of conversation and especially story telling was central as it provided a way to deepen reflection and make connections that enhanced learning. As one participant said:

Probably the most powerful part of the pilgrimage was the stories we told. From the beginning at the first retreat when we spent two days telling each other our life stories, I found my vision broadened. And I would remember. Like when we were at Capernaum and I remembered [name’s] telling about her childhood. I looked at the site of the homes, heard the text read, and all of a sudden I remembered an experience from my own childhood long forgotten. I’ve thought about that experience a lot and [fellow pilgrim] and I have spent hours talking about it.

Participants underscored the value and importance of relationships in their learning. One said, “We formed a close, supportive group, which helped me to experience ‘the body of Christ’ in a new way.” Another observed “Looking over the two weeks, my favorite site was the place within the community of pilgrims who journeyed together, where we told our stories, where each person was cherished, challenged, and loved as a brother or sister in Christ.” Often different stories came together in unexpected ways. At the end of our journey we visited the Western Wall on a cloudy and cold February afternoon. It was a powerful experience. One participant wrote in her journal afterward:

I was praying with so many devout, observant Jewish women at the Wailing Wall listening to them speak in Hebrew when all of a sudden I heard the Muslim call to prayer. A few moments later the church bells from the Church of the Holy

Sepulcher rang out. It was an unforgettable reminder of how all three traditions of faith are birthed from one place and one God, and how important prayer is. I looked up and my eyes met those of a young Jewish woman. We smiled. Somehow we both knew.

Based on the data, learning appears to be inseparable from context. Pilgrims participated; they lived the pilgrimage and the learning experience. And their learning extended beyond the immediate or apparent context.

All participants described the journey itself as an important context for learning. Many spoke of their experience of Sabbath in leaving their busy lives and traveling to Israel: “The pilgrimage gave me the time and space away and a chance to reconnect with important parts of myself.” Echoing insights of Victor Turner (Turner and Turner, 1978) participants described their experience as having three steps: “separation,” a transition from home and parish symbolized by the long overnight airplane flight, entry into a “different world” where they made a “journey of faith” deepening insights and profound experiences, and return to their homes and churches. Turner describes the pilgrimage as a “liminal experience,” a time of profound often life-changing learning and potential encounter with the sacred. Such learning is often associated with activities and enacted in rituals. For participants in this study those transforming rituals included religious practices, but also extended well beyond traditional religious practices to include such things as nature walks, swimming, drinking and eating together and even spa treatments. One woman described her experience:

Imagine spending two hours Sunday morning in a spa being covered with mud, rubbed, soaking your feet. It was delicious. And one of the most profound experiences of grace I can remember. It was like God was surrounding me with a grace that I didn’t deserve, couldn’t fully understand, and that so totally filled me with warmth and energy that I felt like a new person. I know this doesn’t have anything directly to do with Christian faith – and certainly not with the rituals we usually do on Sundays, but for me it was worship and it was filled with grace.

Most participants in this study talked or wrote about pilgrimage as a journey to a new places, filled with new insights and new life, often described in the literature as a “transformative journey” (Turner & Turner, 1978; Clift & Clift, 1996). As Cousineau (1998) says, “Pilgrimage is the kind of journeying that marks just this move from mindless to mindful, soulless to soulful travel” (p. xxiii). “Pilgrims,” as Richard Niebuhr (1984) has said, “are persons in motion, passing through territories not their own, seeking... completion or clarity; a goal to which only the spirit’s compass points the way” (p. 7).

Findings suggest that pilgrimage is a form of whole-person experiential learning that reflects five key elements: activity, reflection, connection and awareness, all of which are fundamentally contextual. This learning is often experienced as transformative, occurs in unpredictable and nonlinear ways, and is perceived as deeply spiritual. In pilgrimage learning is an embodied, contextual, and participatory activity that is enacted in a complex, dynamic, and chaotic environment. These findings on the pedagogy of pilgrimage have important implications for the practice of adult religious education in the church.

## **Discussion and Implications for Adult Religious Education Practice**

While echoing important elements of traditional forms of religious education pedagogies such as praxis, findings extend the theological understanding and practice of adult religious education.

### ***Whole Person and Cognitive Approaches to Learning***

Adult religious education in most North American churches is dominated by cognitive approaches to learning. Typically these involve discussion, reading, some learning activities and perhaps the use of media. Such approaches might include the study of topics such as the Gospel of John or issues such as the relationship of Christianity to Islam, or practical issues such as Biblical approaches to parenting. Pedagogically they are often dominated by rational, abstract discussion. When activities are included in educational events, they are often used as experiences to reflect upon, in ways reminiscent of more cognitive models of experiential learning which “use experience for learning” (Miller, 2000).

While these more abstract cognitive models of adult religious education still dominate congregational religious education, there are a growing number of examples of more activity-based learning in churches today. Examples would include mission trips, work camps, study tours, service learning, the use of the Rotation model of Sunday School, and the practice of using a labyrinth. In addition to these and other activities that occur as a part of the church religious education program, many participants in adult religious education programs in congregations also engage in family vacations, trips to places like the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC, the M. L. King Memorial in Atlanta, or the site of the World Trade Center in New York, as well as a host of historical sites. These journeys continue the heritage of the traditional pilgrimage, yet often without any sort of reflective grounding in faith.

This study underscores the effectiveness of whole person learning, a different kind of experiential learning that focuses on enaction. In enacted approaches to learning, learning is embedded in conduct (Fenwick, 2003). Findings from this study point to the effectiveness of enacted approaches to learning. Those on the pilgrimages remembered what they did, saw, talked about and experienced in great detail months after the experience. There were widespread reports from colleagues of significant changes in participants energy for ministry that were associated with their experiences of spiritual renewal and learning on the pilgrimage. Based on the data pilgrimage was effective in faith formation, building a sense of community, understanding stories and traditions of faith, spiritual renewal, and motivation to continue and apply learning across a wide spectrum of life experiences. Findings suggest the need to more actively explore the use of whole person learning in adult religious education.

### ***Pilgrimage and Practices of Faith***

Foster (1994) advocates increasing attention to a “congregation’s efforts to initiate people into ways of thinking and behaving according to the heritage of the church” (Foster 1994: 30). Westerhoff (2000) echoes Foster’s suggestion when he says that the way to strengthen the congregation is through catechesis, a process of ‘formation, education, and instruction/training’ (p. 139). Pilgrimage has long been associated with the process of faith formation and discipleship (Cousineau, 1998; Clift & Clift, 1996; Webb, 2002; Sumption, 2003) and could be likened to Harris’ (1989) notion that in Christian education people are fashioned through a contextual, collaborative learning experience involving God’s Spirit. The pilgrimage also involved a type of



Christian praxis similar in many ways to Groome's (1980) five movements: naming present reality, critical reflection, interaction with the traditions of the Christian story, dialog between the stories of tradition and present experience, and a concrete faith response.

In many ways pilgrimage is a type of faith practice. Dykstra and Bass (2002) identify a faith practice as "a sustained, cooperative pattern of human activity that is big enough, rich enough, and complex enough to address some fundamental feature of human existence" (p. 22). Dykstra and Bass (2002) suggest that Christian practices are "things people do over time in response to and in light of God's active presence in the world" (p. 5). As Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) observed, "practices are more than instrumental activities" (p. 175). Practices are the processes that help us "learn our identity and calling" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). Practices are by their very nature pedagogical. In practice, activity is the catalyst that engages the participant and informs the process of meaning making. Practices can be examples of whole person learning. They are enacted; learned by doing. They embody rituals for learning that are shared and often repeated (Turner and Turner, 1978). Pilgrimage as experienced by participants in this study was a form of Christian practice. Yet pilgrimage at least as experienced in this study was also distinct.

In pilgrimage pedagogically effective practices extended beyond those traditionally identified with Christian faith. Common everyday activities such as walking were identified as grace filled experiences, and traditional Christian practices such as reading scripture took on new meaning. Sometimes Christian rituals were viewed as barriers to learning by participants, and informal incidental encounters with nature had a profound effect as when something as small as a blooming flower in the desert became memorable metaphors of grace for one participant. A variety of factors may have influenced this of transformation of everyday experience such as changes in routine, place, opportunity for paying attention, or the sense of community with fellow pilgrims.

The practice of pilgrimage was also fundamentally spiritual. In the best sense practices can be celebrations of discovery that are spiritually energizing and transforming. Over time however practices can become dull, dry, taken for granted rituals empty of spirit and meaning. In pilgrimage the sense of the world as a place rich in spiritual meaning is enhanced by the journey from the known into the unknown as daily habits and assumptions are dissolved in the call to become aware as if for the first time of the presence of God in the pilgrimage experience, and the sites and the people encountered on the journey itself. Stepping beyond the known either physically or metaphorically and sharing the stories of that experience with others often led to experiences of refreshment, remembrance, and renewal. In this sense pilgrimage can not only connect one with the traditions of faith, it can also be a catalyst for new insight and spiritual renewal, change in perspective, and renewed hope. Pilgrimage also offered unexpected opportunity to connect with others from disparate perspectives who also walk the road and tell their stories.

Perhaps the most important distinguishing mark of pilgrimage as a pedagogical practice though is spiritual. In his book *Before God*, George Stroup (2004, p. 185) points out, "Theology is... a matter of 'living to God,'" echoing "Calvin's claim (and that of Augustine before him) that Jesus teaches his followers 'to travel as pilgrims in this world that our celestial heritage may not perish or pass away'" (Calvin, 1960, III .7.3). In pilgrimage the focus is on the spiritual in ways not always apparent in active learning or even in the intentional practices of Christian faith at the congregational level.

### ***Pilgrims and Tourists***

In the introduction to *In the Steps of the Master* by H.V. Morton (2000), Richard John Neuhaus writes of those who visit the Holy Land, “They have been coming for hundreds of years now. Almost every year, hundreds of thousands come as tourists. It is a pity. The fortunate ones come as pilgrims.” A pilgrim is a person who makes an intentional journey to a site of religious significance with a particular openness to experience the sacred dimensions of the site, and their possible applications for life. A tourist on the other hand just goes to see and take pictures.

Historically pilgrimage has had both a literal and metaphorical meaning. For centuries Christians have made physical journeys to sites of religious significance. Others have journeyed metaphorically. Today the majority of the “educational journeys” undertaken as a part of typical adult religious education programs in North American congregations occur in church buildings and involve focus on cognitive topics alone. In this sense they are much more like “tours” than they are “pilgrimages.” In a tour one goes to a site to see what is there and take pictures. Tourists are observers. Classes, like tours, typically represent very limited encounters with the sites and texts of faith, focusing on such things as books of the Bible, contemporary issues of faith, the history and practice of Christian faith, and the faith stories of other people. Participation in the class is often limited to discussion. Rarely do people become personally engaged in the learning process. More often they are tourists. What is needed in adult religious education today is to cultivate the way of the pilgrim.

At the same time it is important to note that in the history of pilgrimage many a tourist has become a pilgrim, and many a pilgrim has become a tourist. Pilgrimage is fundamentally a heuristic spiritual endeavor. More than anything else it celebrates the unexpected and grace-filled ways that the Spirit of God touches our lives. In this sense every day of life can and should be a pilgrimage. Yet special times and places often do serve a catalytic effect, helping individuals perceive God’s grace in particular ways. In this sense they serve as windows opening to the spiritual dimensions of life and often ways for the light of that spirit to touch the broader dimensions of life. It is important to note as well that historically the shadow side of pilgrimage is crusade, where the goals of activity are often very clear and the methods of achieving them violent. Just as a pilgrim can become a tourist and a tourist a pilgrim, so can a pilgrim become a crusader, as the briefest look at history will attest (Armstrong, 2001).

Limitations of the study could include the fact that all participants were ordained clergy. A further limitation could involve the two-week length of the trip or the destination of the Holy Land, both of which may have affected the learning experienced. Participation in pilgrimage has historically included both laity and clergy (Webb, 2002; Sumption, 2003; Coleman and Elsner, 1995). The literature on pilgrimage also suggests the clergy /lay distinction or that of religious background have had little effect on pilgrims’ learning (Coleman and Elsner, 1995; Cousineau, 1998; Clift and Clift, 1996). Additional research is needed to further understand the pedagogical dimensions of pilgrimage.

### **Conclusion**

Pilgrimage offers promise for strengthening the practice of adult religious education. This promise is enhanced when one considers that the historical practice of pilgrimage was often associated with times of significant cultural change (Turner and Turner, 1978; Clift & Clift, 1996) and was not evidently limited by the education level or background of participants who historically were often described as illiterate in the faith (Webb, 2002; Sumption, 2003). Both

cultural change and faith illiteracy are elements often mentioned in discussions of the modern practice of adult religious education.

One of the earliest reports of pilgrimage is recorded in the Bible where Abraham is called by God to “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1 NRSV). The experience of pilgrimage points to the transience of life as well as the importance and urgency of living it well. The nuclear world buffeted by fundamentalist crusaders desperately needs the image, metaphor and model of pilgrimage that underscores the importance of gratitude, hospitality, and humility of learning, as well as our responsibility to God, one another, and the world itself. In an age of religious pluralism and contested educational practice, the pedagogical dimensions of pilgrimage offer promise for enriching our understanding and practice of the journey of faith.

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