Gabriola Ecumenical Society
Pilgrimage Retreats
for Times Such as These

1. Beginning (May) **2. *Walking (June)*** 3. Coming Home (July)

Introduction

What is a Pilgrimage? A pilgrimage is an intentional journey into an experience of unknowing and discomfort for the sake of stripping away preconceived expectations. The Latin root of the word pilgrimage, *peregrini*, means "strange" or "stranger." The journey to become a pilgrim means becoming a stranger in the service of transformation.[1]

Something is happening to you in this wilderness
that does not happen when you are safe at home.
~ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Altar in the World*

What to Expect: This pilgrimage was created as a self-guided, individual retreat. Some have chosen to retreat with another person – you are welcome to adapt it in this way. The content comes from a variety of sources that are intended to be broadly resonant. Retreatants are invited to set aside time to work through the retreat on their own and then meet on a zoom call with Rev. Karen Hollis and other retreatants ***Tuesday, June 29 at 7pm*** to share our experiences and reflections.

There are several references to God, Spirit and the Divine throughout this retreat. Please read into these references the 'God of your own understanding.'

Prepare Space/Time

- *Carve out Time: decide on a 2-3 hour block of time, write it into your schedule and honor this commitment you have made to yourself.*
- *Prepare the Space: create a sacred space to begin your pilgrimage. What do you need for your journey? Bring this booklet as your guide . . . What else is essential? A candle, journal, or other objects that are meaningful? Make sure there is room in this space for you to sit in stillness and write any reflections which arise.*
- *Turn off your phone and your computer and bring to the space the retreat materials and necessities.*

Suggested Schedule *(Approx. 3 hours) - adjust the times for your own needs (include all the pieces)*

Opening prayer (15)
Making the Way by Walking (60)
- *We Make the Way*
- *When I First*
- *Wild Space*
- *I Walk With*
- *Feeding Your Heart*

Ignatian Prayer of Imagination and journaling (30)
Nature Bathing (60)
Reflection & Journaling (30)

[1] Valters Paintner, Christine. *The Soul of a Pilgrim* (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2015) p. 1-2.

Opening Blessing

Sit with your eyes closed and feet on the floor. Take a few deep breaths and bring yourself into the present moment. Open yourself to the presence of the Divine inside of you and sit for several minutes. Offer authentic gratitude for this day and this time of retreat, and name your intention for this time of retreat. When you are ready, you're invited to pray these words.

All things come from you, O God,
and to you we return.
All things emerge in your great river of life
and into you we vanish again.
On this day we journey
not as separate streams
but as countless currents in a single flow
the flow of this day's dawning
the flow of this day's delight
the flow of this day's sorrows
your flow, O God,
in the twistings and turnings of this day.
~ John Philip Newell, *Praying with the Earth*, edited

Making the Way by Walking

We make the way by walking
We came away with nothing
We ran from the home we've known
Down the stairs, running, scared
To face the great unknown
We left the front door open
No key for a souvenir
Nowhere to go and all we know
Is home will not be here
The path remains unclear
We make the way by walking

We left the well-worn circle
We left the city lights
Came up here where the air is clear
And the stars are bright at night
Maybe there's a distant valley
Maybe it's a ways away
We're all here on the new frontier
Because we knew we could not stay
Knew we could not stay
We make the way by walking

I climbed a little bit higher
Some things you cannot unsee
I walked a little bit further
And the walking set me free
Then you were walking with me
And you asked if I knew the way
I made you laugh
When I said our path
Might be a road someday
We make the way by walking

We make the way by walking
Our steps are the votes we cast
The crazy few that have seen this view
May not be the last
The way that a pilgrim travels
Is to set out for parts unknown
So if history's kind
We're the ones who may find
The way we all come home
We make the way by walking
~ David Wilcox, *We Make the Way*

Listen to the song on YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqATuqedoGk

When I first moved to the land where I live, I shared it with a herd of cows… with a hundred acres at their disposal, they had worn narrow paths across those acres to their favourite watering holes, shady spots, and clover patches… since I soon found myself following those same tracks when I walked the land, I think I understand something about why the cows use them. in most cases, the tracks mark the shortest route from point A to point B. Where they do not, that is because the cows have found ways to get where they are going without expending too many calories. In these

cases, the tracks avoid both steep climbs and dicey descents, choosing long stretches under leafy tree lines wherever possible. For my purposes, the most valuable thing about the tracks is that I can see where I am putting my feet . . . I am convinced that this is normal human behaviour, which means that something extra is needed to override it. Why override it? Because once you leave the cow path, the unpredictable territory is full of life. True, you cannot always see where you are putting your feet. This means you can no longer afford to stay unconscious. You can no longer count on the beat-down red dirt path making all of your choices for you. Leaving it, you agree to make your own choices for a spell. You agree to become aware of each step you take, tuning all of your senses exactly to where you are and exactly what you are doing.[2] ~ **Barbara Brown Taylor**, *Altar in the World*

Wild Space "[Jesus] had a great deal of what some anthropologists have called 'wild space'. Wild space is that part of each of us that doesn't quite fit into our conventional worlds; it is that part of our own personal world that doesn't completely overlap with the ordinary world – for us, this is the consumer market-oriented, individualistic, greedy world. Maybe we have some wild space because we are different in some way: poor, disabled, a person of colour, a refugee, gay or lesbian, and so forth." Perhaps a pilgrimage or a pandemic offers us wild space. "Whatever makes it possible to think outside the box, to think that things ought to be different – not just for oneself but for the world – is useful wild space. Jesus had a lot of wild space; in fact, we could say he was a wild man. He imagined what he called the kingdom of God, where this new pattern for living would come about." "We want this different world. Peter Short, a past moderator of the United Church of Canada, puts it this way: 'The residual memory of paradise is still in you, lingering like a scent of jasmine on a breeze. You are a paradise-haunted creature. If it were not so, why would you expect so much of the world? Why would you expect so much of yourself? See how you rage when hatred and greed and the desecration of the good earth make clear again and again that this is no paradise?' (Emmanuel College Newsletter) Our wild space is a memory of where we came from and the hope of where we are going: from paradise to the kingdom of God, from living with all other creatures within the love of God to living once again all together within God's love. Nothing short of this will satisfy us."[3] ~ **Sallie McFague**, *A New Climate for Theoloogy*

I Walk With the scars of a lifetime of living. Some were self-inflicted wounds. Some were caused by others. Either way, they mark the trajectory of six decades of experience with the ins and outs, ups and downs, doubts and certainties of my relationship with living. They mark the territory of my being. I don't regret a single one of them now. in fact, I'm thankful for them. My scars have the strange ability to remind me that my past was real, and what is real offers knowledge, understanding and an ultimate forgiveness.[4] ~ **Richard Wagamese**, *Embers*

Feeding Your Heart

No matter how dark, the hand always
knows the way to the mouth. ~ **Idoma Proverb** (Nigeria)

Even when we can't see, we know how to feed ourselves. Even when the way isn't clear, the heart still pumps. Even when afraid, the air of everything enters and leaves the lungs. Even when clouds grow thick, the sun still pours its light earthward.

This African proverb reminds us that the way is not a mystery. We have inner reflexes that keep us alive, deep impulses of being and aliveness that work beneath the journey or hardships we are struggling with.

We must remember: the hand cannot eliminate the darkness, only find its way to the mouth. Likewise, our belief in life cannot eliminate our suffering, only find its way to feed our heart.

- *Sit quietly and, with your eyes closed, bring your open hands to your mouth.*
- *Inhale as you do this and notice how, without guidance, your hands know the way.*
- *Breathe slowly, and with your eyes closed, bring your open hands to your heart.*
- *Notice how, without your guidance, your heart knows the way.*[5]

~ **Mark Nepo**, *The Book of Awakening*

[2] Taylor, Barbara Brown. *An Altar in the World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009). p. 70-71.

[3] McFague, Sallie. *A New Climate for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008). p. 152-153.

[4] Wagamese, Richard. *Embers*. (British Columbia: Douglas and McIntyre, 2016). p. 147.

[5] Nepo, Mark. *The Book of Awakening* (San Francisco: Conari Press, 2000). p. 9.

How is this pilgrimage reflecting the larger pilgrimage of your life?
In what ways are you in wild space and
in what ways are you on the well-worn path?

Ignatian Prayer of Imagination

Building on Lectio Divina from Pilgrimage 1, you're invited into an experience of this Ignatian prayer (St. Ignatius of Loyola, a Spanish mystic and founder of the Jesuit order of priests). This kind of prayer is suited especially for the gospels; the idea is to visualize the story as if you were making a movie. Contemplating a scene from scripture in this way is not simply remembering it or going back in time, rather through the act of contemplation, the Spirit makes present a mystery of scripture in a way that is meaningful for you now.

This form of prayer uses your imagination to dig deeper into the story so that the Divine may communicate with you in a personal, evocative way. You will want to pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings in the text and at some point, place yourself within the images.

Some might worry about going beyond the text of the story, or their imagination running too wild or going too far. If you have offered your time of prayer to God, then begin by trusting that God is communicating with you. If you are still uncomfortable, you might do some discernment with how you are praying. Where did your imagining lead you: closer to God or farther away? Is your imagining bringing you comfort or distress? At any point during the exercise you can return to the text itself.

Some people find imaginative prayer difficult. They may not be able to picture the scene easily, yet they may have some intuition or gut reaction to the text. Or they may hear or feel the text more than visualize it. In a spirit of generosity, pray as you are able; don't try to force it. Rest assured that God will speak to you, whether through your memory, understanding, intellect, emotions, or imagination. ~ Kevin O'Brien, SJ, *The Ignatian Adventure*, edited

Step by Step Instructions for Ignatian Prayer of Imagination

1. Relax in your seat and centre yourself
2. Acknowledge yourself to be in God's presence and how you are within yourself in this moment; sit with this awareness.
3. Ask for what you hope to receive from this prayer time (the graces you are praying for): if this is your first time with this practice, you might just pray for guidance as you try something new.
4. Read the text several times.
5. Close your eyes and "visualize" the images and action in the text, involving as many of your senses as possible.
6. Read the text again and decide which image(s) you want to work with (you don't have to work with them all).
7. Close your eyes and see yourself within the image(s) you have chosen. Be there with your senses, your emotions… and let what happens happen; don't worry if the experience takes you "off script."
8. When the experience feels complete, take a short break.
9. Journal or draw about your experience. Simply answer the question, "what happened?"

Psalm 139:1-18 (Translation by Lynn C. Bauman)

O God you have come searching for me.
You know me inside and out.
You know when I rise up and where I fall.
Before I think them, my thoughts are already clear to you.
The track of my journey you discern ahead of me.
All the pathways of my life shall take are known to you.
Indeed before I speak them
the meaning of every word is understood by you.
I am encircled by your presence,
embraced by your hands.
These things I can hardly grasp, O my God,
they transport me to heights beyond myself.
Is it possible, then, to be absent from your presence?
Is there anywhere I could escape your Spirit?
Say I traveled to the limits of space,
or passed beyond this world into death,
in both cases you would already be there ahead of me.
Suppose I lifted up on wings through the morning's light
and flew to the edges of some distant land or sea,
Even there your hands would be holding mine, guiding me.
Or if I were to say to myself,
the light around me has turned to night,
surely this darkness will hide me.
Darkness never exists for you.
The night shines as brightly as the day.
Darkness and light to you are both alike.
You have brought together the constellation of my being.

Before I was born your presence was there forming me.
I am grateful to you for the artistry of my own creation.
I realize that I have been carefully crafted by you.
Nothing about me has been hidden from your presence.
While I was quietly being woven together from my own ancient sources,
Knowingly you have shaped the unfinished product even in the womb.
Step by step you have been guiding all the stages of my completion, from their beginning to their end.
Your awareness of me is infinite, O my God.
It is limitless. It transcends everything I know.
Trying to calculate the sum total of your awareness is useless.
It would take an eternal life-span as long as yours

Nature Bathing

Teachings come from everywhere when you open yourself to them. That's the trick of it, really. Open yourself to everything and everything opens itself to you. ~ **Richard Wagamese**, *Embers*

This moving meditation was inspired by ancient Shinto and Buddhist practices first popularized in Japan. The main goal is to experience the natural world through all five senses: Listening, seeing, touching, smelling, and tasting. The senses help bring us into the present as we walk along as pilgrims; they help us remain awake, aware, and mindful of ourselves and our surroundings. This practice was originally designed for the forest, however it is applicable to any natural setting. Early morning and evening are great times to nature bath, since the air is moister and more fragrant, and the sounds are easier to hear.

Here's what to do:

1. breathe deeply and slowly the fresh oxygen from the trees.
2. practice using each of your senses, one at a time, e.g., see (not look), feel (not touch), listen (not hear), savour (not taste).
3. Notice the colours, shapes, sizes and textures in the scenery.
4. begin by absorbing the 'big picture' and then gradually zoom in to observe the details.

~ Thanks to Rob Brockley for these resources

Creating with Nature: As you walk along, practicing with your senses, you might notice things like twigs, leaves, shells, stones along your path that call to you; collect these as you walk (use your own judgement about picking living things like plants and flowers).

When you come to a place with a bit of a clearing on the ground: perhaps a wide and flat stone, a fallen log, or the beach, lay out your materials there. Allow some time to simply play with arranging the objects in various ways. You might stack up a series of stones in the form of a cairn or arrange the items in a circle to form a mandala. Just notice what feels satisfying, without any judgment. This is a time to play and explore. When it feels complete, you might take a photo to share with the group on zoom, then give thanks for this time of playing and creating and leave your creation to be a blessing to others and be scattered by nature. (see examples below)

What does it feel like to be walking this pilgrimage? What is the quality of your walking? Is it rhythmic, chaotic, laboured, or easy?

What blessings have you encountered along the way?
How does it compare with your expectations?

Walking is the second part of our overall pilgrimage journey.
How might you continue "walking" into July?

A Blessing

Walk as slowly as possible, all the while imagining yourself moving through pools of honey and dancing with snails, turtles, and caterpillars.

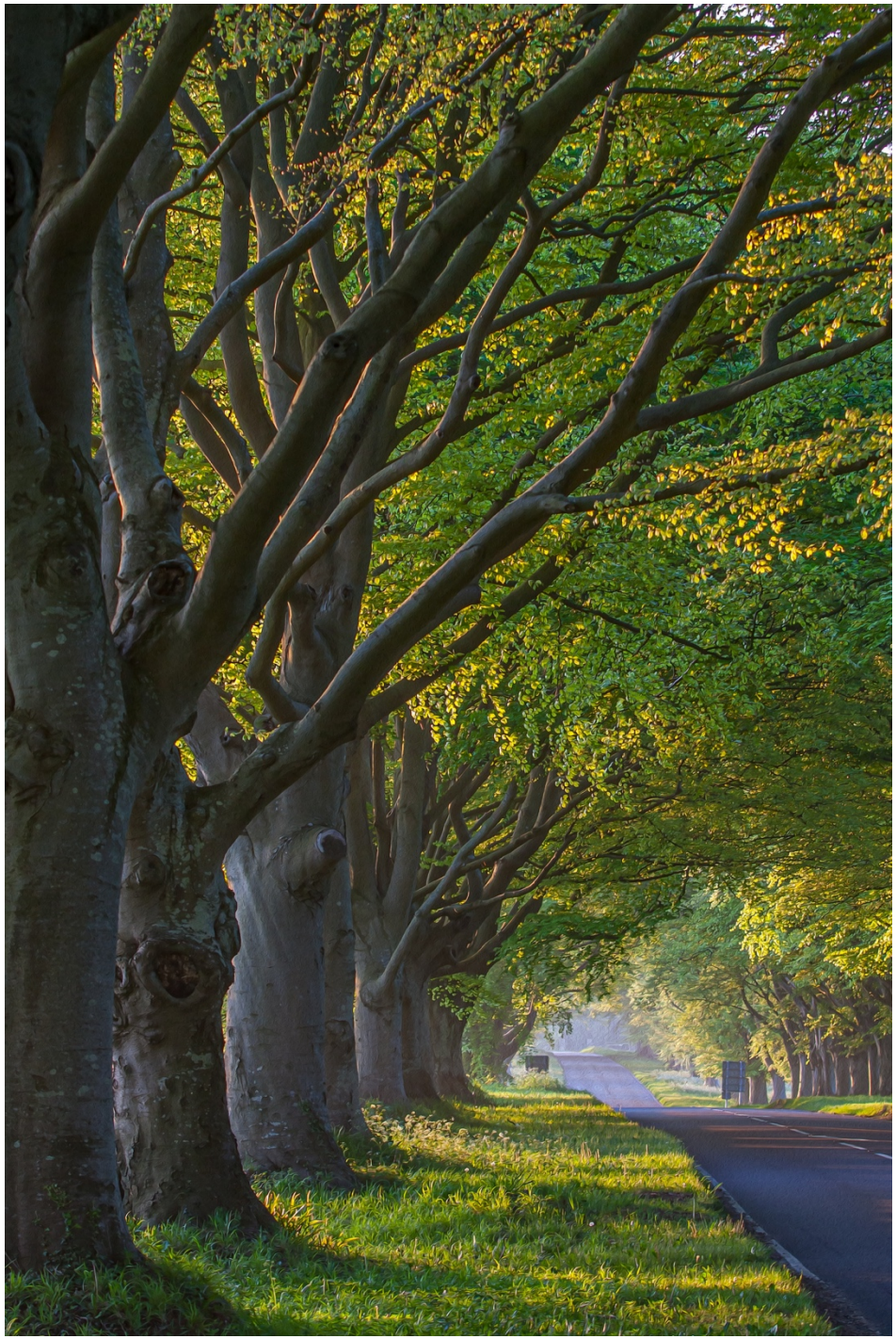
Turn your body in a sunwise direction to inspire your dreams to flow upward. Imagine the trees are your own wise ancestors offering their emerald leaves to you as a sacred text.

Lay yourself down across earth and stones. Feel the vibration of dirt and moss, sparking a tiny (or tremendous) revolution in your heart with their own great longing.

Close your eyes and forget this border of skin. Imagine the breeze blowing through your hair is the breath of the forest and your own breath joined, rising and falling in ancient rhythms.

Open your eyes again and see it is true, that there is no "me" and "tree" but only One great pulsing of life, one sap which nourishes and enlivens all, one great nectar bestowing trust and wonder.

Open your eyes and see that there are no more words like beautiful, and ugly, good and bad, but only the shimmering presence of your own attention to life.

Only one great miracle unfolding and only one sacred word which is *yes.*

~ **Christine Valters Paintner**, *The Soul of a Pilgrim*