

What is a Pilgrimage Anyway?

A pilgrimage differs from a tour in several important ways. It is a personal invitation from God, comprised of His offer and dependent upon the pilgrim's acceptance. God's call may vary but the purpose remains consistent: It is an individual summons to know God more fully. A pilgrimage is a spiritual journey to which the pilgrim joyfully responds 'yes' to God's invitation.

“Although in previous centuries many trials were intrinsic to a pilgrimage, the modern pilgrim has an abundance of affordable travel options, yet the purpose remains unchanged. It is a journey to a holy, sacred place to usher the pilgrim into the presence of God.

“The pilgrim must embark on this journey with joyful anticipation, being willing temporarily to separate himself or herself from the world and to offer himself or herself in humble service to another. A successful pilgrimage involves a commitment to leave behind one's problems and to focus instead on seeking to learn more about our heavenly Father, making one's heart full of desire for special graces, praises, petitions, and thanksgiving, returning home transformed, renewed, and restored by the abundant blessings received.”

"What is a Pilgrimage Anyway?" adapted from <http://www.medjugorje.org/whatisapilgrimage.htm>.

Goals of a Pilgrimage

The goals of a pilgrimage, especially for youth, should reflect the general goals for youth ministry found in *Renewing the Vision*. As a reminder, those goals are:

- To draw young people into responsible participation in the life, mission, and work of the faith community
- To empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in our world today
- To foster the total personal and spiritual growth of each young person

Helpful Tips for Pilgrimage Planning

- Provide training and formation for adult chaperones.
- Watch your language—use the term “pilgrimage to NCYC” instead of “trip to Indy.”
- When marketing, use language of pilgrimage
- Reinforce that idea as much as possible
- Remember: It is about the people, not the program.
- Be organized in the trip (and be open to the Spirit when things do not go exactly as planned).
- Develop guidelines for the pilgrimage with the pilgrims and chaperones.

Thanks to the Diocese of Buffalo for helping us create this guide.

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Plan for regular gatherings of the pilgrims—since a pilgrimage is about journey, one must prepare for such an undertaking.

- How often will your group meet? Will it be with just the pilgrims or the pilgrims and their parents?
- How will you communicate that the pilgrimage is about a journey, not a destination?
- Will you have themes for each gathering? The themes should add to an understanding of either the event theme or to the concept of pilgrimage; ideally the sessions will highlight both.
- How will you help pilgrims to better understand what a pilgrimage is?

Pilgrimage Covenant (developed by each pilgrim)

- A covenant should be established between the pilgrims and the parish—what the parish will do to help the pilgrims on their journey and how the youth plan to uphold the expectations of attending a pilgrimage.

Parish Pilgrimage Journal Entries by ALL Pilgrims

- Have the pilgrims keep individual journals or have a group journal highlighting experiences before, during, and after NCYC. Use these (with permission) to share the experience of NCYC with the parish upon returning.

Pilgrim Prayer Partners

- Have the pilgrims randomly draw for Pilgrim Prayer Partners to keep in their prayers throughout the journey of NCYC. These partners could be open or revealed upon the return from NCYC.

Parish Prayer Partners

- To get the whole parish involved in the pilgrimage, perhaps ask the parish as a whole to pray for the pilgrims and/or assign a pilgrim to a willing family, who would keep that specific pilgrim in prayer throughout NCYC.

Commissioning & Sending

- Have the pastor of your parish bless the pilgrims the weekend before NCYC during Sunday Mass. Or you could have a separate prayer service with the priest to bless the pilgrims and their families before the journey.

Welcoming Home

- Have time for your pilgrims to process the experience as a group after returning from NCYC. Have a reunion for everyone who went and share stories and experiences from the conference.
- Guide them in applying what they learned from NCYC to their lives now that the “high” of the pilgrimage is over, and they are back in the “real world.”

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