

NEWSLETTER

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Dear Pilgrims

There were many who said that we'd never manage to organise another pilgrimage to Lindisfarne in under a year: too far away, too few places to stay, and so on. But, thanks to the efforts of so many people in the planning team, we not only succeeded, but we enjoyed one of the most smooth-running of pilgrimages, our main challenge being squeezing people into halls as it proved to be a very popular event.

You might think that we would propose an easy route for 2010, one close to home (which would certainly please some past pilgrims who would love to be able to drop in). On the other hand, there has been an increasing lobby to undertake another pilgrimage in Wales, an enthusiasm we hope will be reflected once more in the applications. Having considered many various suggestions, and thought about rationale and logistics, we have plumped for a route starting at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Taper at Cardigan, <http://www.ourladyofthetaper.org.uk/>, up the Ceredigion Coast to Aberystwyth, inland via Lampeter to Carmarthen, then west to the ancient Cathedral City of St David's (his flag below) <http://www.stdavidscathedral.org.uk/>.

So will this be any easier to plan than Lindisfarne? It's not much closer to "home", and initial feedback was that accommodation was proving hard to come by. But at the January meeting we heard that Rosemary has more accommodation booked than is usual at this stage, and John has more volunteers for route planning than he needs. So I am confident that we can do it, and that it's a route that will attract both new and old pilgrims. I would urge you to book soon to reserve your place.

Last year, rather than running a coach from the Diocese to the start of the pilgrimage and/or another back from the destination, we simply organised transport from nearby rail stations, to which pilgrims made their own way. This year we will do the same, meeting at Carmarthen Railway Station before being bussed to Cardigan, and returning from St David's to Carmarthen at the end. This allows pilgrims to make their own arrangement to get to and from Carmarthen, by rail, coach or car (the station has a reasonably-priced long stay car park).



Our "theme team" have worked their magic again, linking the Seven Sorrows of Mary (Our Lady of the Taper) and the life and quotations of St David (from which our strapline "We walk the path our fathers have trod before us" is taken) to give a journey through our Christian Life. On the way we take in the Celtic saints of Wales and the contribution of Welsh non-conformism.

Thinking of the pilgrimage as a jigsaw, most of the edge pieces are now in place; we've got several pieces ready to slot in to define the route; all we need are the individual pilgrim-pieces without which we won't see the wonderful picture of "St David's 2010" – whatever that might turn out to be!

Finally, a word of thanks to all those who contribute to the planning, and execution of our pilgrimages. A lot has already been going on behind the scenes, without which our jigsaw would still be in the box. And every piece is vital. God bless.

Aidan

The Seven Sorrows (or *Dolours*) are events in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary which are a popular devotion and are frequently depicted in art.

1. The Prophecy of Simeon over the Infant Jesus. (Gospel of Luke 2:34)
2. The Flight into Egypt of the Holy Family. (Gospel of Matthew 2:13)
3. The Loss of the Child Jesus for Three Days. (Luke 2:43)
4. The Meeting of Jesus and Mary along the Way of the Cross. (Luke 23:26)
5. The Crucifixion, where Mary stands at the foot of the cross. (Gospel of John 19:25)
6. The Descent from the Cross, where Mary receives the dead body of Jesus in her arms. (Matthew 27:57)
7. The Burial of Jesus. (John 19:40)

Let's go for a walk upon the water: name that Pilgrim.



“I will walk the path that our fathers have trod before us” ~ St David

Every year, for the last 20 years, I have undertaken a personal journey. I never want to go. That Journey is done on foot from starting point to destination over 200 miles of British countryside, from one religious site to another. It is called a Pilgrimage. In the middle ages people undertook pilgrimages to atone for their sins. I go Pilgrimage not as a form of penance, but as a way of restoring body and soul, a way of recovering fitness, a way of living in community close to others, a way of life, a way that I think that we should all live. It is an intense two weeks of pain, exertion, excitement, fun, hard work. It is a huge effort but so rewarding. Had it not been so, I would have given up after the first one.

My first Pilgrimage, in 1989, some years before most of you were born or even a twinkling in your parents' eye, when many staff were still at school*, I embarked on my first journey. It came about the summer after I had bought a flat after a difficult time in my personal life. The previous summer, I had walked the South Downs way with my sister, a last minute holiday as I had been so busy moving house that I had had no time to plan my own. Afterwards, we were sitting in a pub with a mutual friend and I mentioned how much I had enjoyed walking the South Downs way, and that I would like to do a similar walk again, but with a Christian content. I remember to this day saying this to him. Richard replied, “go on the pilgrimage, you will love it”.

I nearly didn't. I had such flu in the preceding days that I rang the organiser to ask what to do. She said she wouldn't miss it for the world. So I struggled to Wimbledon station to pick up the coach that was to take us to an unheard of place called Droitwich in the West Midlands. On arrival as the coach pulled up, this enormous man with a compelling grin got off to welcome us; I knew then it would be alright. We arrived at this school hall; a lady helped me find somewhere to bed down, in a quiet spot away from other people. Roll mat out, tea mug found, I went to the Induction Service. That was when I found that although I had called myself a Christian for 20 years, as a non-Catholic, I could not take communion. How odd, I thought, never mind get on and enjoy it.

Bold as ever, and armed with my experience of walking the South Downs way the year before I didn't think twice about the long distance walking. Admittedly the distances were a bit longer than I had done before, 16-17 miles a day, but what the heck, I would cope. Within two days my heels were raw with blisters and little toes much the same. The distances were longer than I had realised and I was still recovering from flu. Someone took pity on me and gave me a lift to the hall from the lunch stop, whereupon, with first choice of bed spaces, I found a sofa in a lobby and promptly fell asleep on it for the whole afternoon. By the time the pilgrims arrived, I was fresh and ready and had recovered my spirits. "Bring your guitar to the pub" Patrick (the tall man I had met on the first day) said. In a crowded bar, squashed around a table with pints of beer and musical instruments, I experienced my first pilgrim song evening. I had been chuck out of a church music group some months before for no apparent reason and felt raw about it, and here I was, invited, welcome and in the midst of this friendly group of pilgrims who were having a marvellous time.

Within days the flu went, blown away on the winds, I recovered my health and spirits. My feet were a different story. The last day into Oxford (our scheduled rest day) was 22 miles. I was literally hounded down the last 7 miles along the canal in crying pain. Slept on the floor of St. Aldgate's and went round Oxford in a pair of red socks, my feet were so painful that shoes were impossible. Someone lent me a pair of sandals for the next few days, the feet healed, and with a combination of shoes and sandals, I was back in the boots for the last day's walk into Chichester some two weeks later. I vowed never to come on pilgrimage again without alternative footwear, and walked the next 6 pilgrimages in a pair of trainers, before finally acquiring boots that didn't give blisters.

Although a struggle, by the end of that first Pilgrimage, I felt fitter than I had been in my entire life, more whole, wholesome and healthier than ever; happy, spiritually at peace, with a profound sense of wellbeing and that that this was how it should be all the time, not just at the end of Pilgrimage; then we had a pep-talk about returning to the real world; a lonely flat, work, a normal life.

So what now? Each year, has been different, different destinations, different roles, a different group of pilgrims each year but always the same camaraderie, community spirit, fun, spiritual tensions, healing, and sense of well being and putting life into perspective at the end. 2009 was the first year that my body has started to complain that it has done enough, but I have walked pilgrimages with folk in their 70's who walk twice the speed that I do and seen 16 year olds struggling. Over the years, I have done everything from lead a day, co-ordinate the route, say prayers, help in the kitchen, do the Church Liaison and plan all the services, help husband book accommodation, to leading the whole Pilgrimage for the two years 2005-2006. And what an honour that was. The joy of being welcomed in Chester 2004 by Canon Trevor Dennis, the great cathedral doors swinging open and being given a real, rather than ceremonial foot washing. The sense of achievement in Lincoln 2006, as we sat around miniature tables in Lincoln Minster pre-prep school for our celebration meal, thanking everyone individually for their contribution to pilgrimage, knowing that we had coped with setbacks, such as the roof collapsing 2 days before our arrival at the hall in Chester, and on that last day, Patrick admitting privately to me that he was about to lead his day into Lincoln having never walked it! For the last two years I have taken a back seat as personal and school roles have taken priority. Now, I take the minutes.

But what have I not done? I have not told other people about it – well I have done in passing conversation and over the years, those who like walking, don't mind hard floors and lack of washing facilities, enjoy good company and fun, and are of all or no religious persuasion have come and stayed. But I have not spread the word to the young. To look at us now, you will see largely a bunch of older people, but that was not how it started. It started in 1975, as a young people's walk around the catholic dioceses of Arundel & Brighton to celebrate the Pope's visit. It was organised by the then catholic priest, Bill Haynes. Over the years, people have grown up, moved on others have come. The Pilgrimage is now run by committee. The Pilgrimage has become ecumenical but maintained its catholic roots; all sorts of people from far and wide come. Now the young people are largely the children of those who originally came on Pilgrimage as youngsters. Our young pilgrims need more of their age to keep things going. The Pilgrimage needs new blood; it needs people to come on it now, be enthused who in time will take it forward as a going concern. It needs people of any age, but particularly people in their teens, twenties and thirties for whom it matters. Who see the challenge and community benefit. Who see the spiritual possibilities, are prepared to fight battles and overcome challenges to make it happen; who will share the load. Are you prepared to come? And the Pilgrimage needs us, those who have come for years, to sponsor, support, pray and help in any way that we can to ensure that it continues. How can you help?

Our next Pilgrimage, last two weeks of August 2010, is to St David's Wales; a journey from Cardigan via Aberystwyth and Carmarthen. Details for the intrepid can be found on www.thepilgrims.org.uk a booking form will be available in February.

Sue

*(*written with a school assembly in mind)*

Obituary



We learnt last December of the death of pilgrim Liz Halley. Pilgrims of a certain vintage may remember Liz who was one of Bill's parishioners in Woodingdean and walked with us on the 4 Pilgrimages between 1985 and 1988.

She played clarinet with the music group and helped front-mark the final day into Bath in 1986, but otherwise seems to have kept a low profile and avoided the camera! She talked a number of times about coming again, but it never worked out. Sadly Liz suffered from mental illness, and she came into contact with our pilgrimage again through meeting Pat Donachie on the Lourdes Pilgrimage in 2008. Pat and Liz discovered that not only were they pilgrims, but they had both trained to be Medical Lab Technicians and both had chosen to specialise in Biochemistry! They shared fun and friendship in Lourdes. Larry [Liz's father] said her death was a happy release, as Liz had a history of self harming, and he wanted the pilgrim to know that she had passed away. I'm sure that we will keep Liz and her family in our prayers. May she rest in peace.

An Update from Mivumoni

Most of you will have heard of Fr Joe Kengah, who walked with us a few years ago, and will be aware that I nominated Joe's projects as "Coordinators Charity" last year. The money collected at Lindisfarne paid for the renovation of a borehole near Joe's home at Mivumoni, giving a community clean water (and I was able to get my employers to match it, renovating a second borehole). Joe has so many projects on the go – the long-standing ones of the epilepsy clinic and funding children orphaned by AIDS through school, and now building a secondary school for deaf students, and a feeding programme for nursery-age children. Because of the interest of so many people, I have put together a website to document Joe's parish and projects at www.asimons.co.uk/mivumoni

Aidan

Pilgrims Social Networking

Find us on Facebook at <http://www.new.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=13203916228>

And on Xt3 ("Catholic Facebook") at <http://www.xt3.com/group/view.php?id=1430>

Remember you don't have to be young to use social networking - just young at heart!

Pilgrimage Contacts

The Pilgrimage can be contacted via:

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Web Sites: <http://www.thepilgrims.org.uk> (Aidan's)
<http://www.pilgrimsprogress.org.uk> (Danny's)