

A large, stylized wooden crucifix is the central focus. The cross is painted in a vibrant red with gold-colored borders. The figure of Jesus is dark-skinned and has a halo. The background is a brick wall. In the foreground, there are several red plastic chairs. To the right, there are some red cylindrical objects, possibly candles or containers. The overall lighting is warm and somewhat dim.

KEEP WALKING:
AN INVITATION TO PILGRIMAGE

Sr. Jennifer Mechtild Horner

Dear Friends,

I am excited about the opportunity to offer this resource on the practice of pilgrimage. This resource comes out of my experience of going on pilgrimages, alone and with others. As I reflected both during and following my pilgrimages, I came up with seven insights that might help you as you both prepare for and go on a pilgrimage. I share these with you with some hesitance, as I am deeply aware that I am still unpacking the many gifts and teachings I received during these times of pilgrimage. I share them with you so you might add your own reflection, and together—we, as a Christian community—might continue to grow in our understanding of our God, a God who offers us so much and in return asks us for the totality of our life.

The primary audience for this resource is the students I teach in the University's Lantz Center for Christian Vocations and Formation. We have explored and practiced many of the Christian disciplines and practices together. In the process of this exploration and practice, I came to realize that many of them are not aware of the practice of pilgrimage. This lack of awareness does not in any way mean that the students I know do not have a desire for such a practice. Many of them have spoken often of their desire to travel to sacred places—both those close to home and those in far-away lands. They have not necessarily used the language of pilgrimage when we engaged in these conversations. More often than not, they were talking about taking a vacation to one of these places. Yet, as the conversation deepened, it became clear that their desire was much deeper than a fun vacation or time away could provide. They wanted to be changed by the journey and they knew that such a change could happen only through an encounter with the Divine. I am thankful for the conversations we shared, because it is through these conversations and my own experience that this resource began to take shape. I offer my students, and any other reader who desires to undertake the practice of pilgrimage, this resource as a way to begin their own journey. My hope is that God will use my reflections to plant within the reader a desire to make the journey.

Of course, my reflections come out of particular pilgrimages with particular people and places. To allow you to understand the context out of which these reflections arose, I will share a little about one of the pilgrimages I have made since coming to the University of Indianapolis. This pilgrimage evoked within me a desire to go deeper on my life journey of faith and to work fervently for unity among Christians. It led me to understand, in a more holistic way, the practice

of pilgrimage as a way of life. In the words of a refrain from a song sung in Taizé, “Happy those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.”¹ The intentional practice of pilgrimage is a call never to forget that our hearts must be set on pilgrimage every day of our life.

May your journey with and in God be one of blessing and transformation. As you undertake the practice of pilgrimage in the way that you are called, may God give you the grace to come to know that all of life is a pilgrimage when understood and embraced.

Peace be with you,

Sr. Jennifer Mechtild Horner

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*The Lantz Center for
Christian Vocations and Formation*

Cover photo: Taizé cross taken by a participant on the pilgrimage.

THE PRACTICE OF PILGRIMAGE

The practice of going on a pilgrimage is an ancient one. Throughout the ages, people have made pilgrimages to visit holy places and holy people. The purpose of a pilgrimage is to enter into the spiritual journey more deeply, so that through an encounter with the Divine, the pilgrim will be transformed in some way. The word “pilgrim” comes from the Latin word *peregrinus*, which means “foreigner” or “stranger.” This word comes from *per*, meaning “through,” and *ager*, meaning “land.”² A pilgrim, then, is one who travels across or beyond his or her own land to enter an unknown landscape where the pilgrim is a stranger. This unknown landscape is understood as the outer landscape of the places we visit and the inner landscape of our heart. As a stranger, the pilgrim can begin to see anew what can be missed easily in a landscape too familiar. God is present everywhere, but in the familiar we can sometimes miss what is right before our eyes.

One of the gifts of a pilgrimage is the encounter with the unfamiliar that helps us see the old in a new way. A pilgrimage is a journey of both the heart and mind. It is a journey into the sacred. The ordinary can become extraordinary when one looks at it with the eyes of the heart.

Some go on pilgrimage to visit holy places. Others go on pilgrimage to visit holy people. They go in search of insight or a word from someone further along the journey than they are. Wherever the pilgrimage, the goal is the same: to come to know God in a deeper way. Through this encounter with a loving God, the pilgrim is transformed. But this transformation is never for the pilgrim alone. It is in sharing the story with others that the deep meaning of the pilgrimage takes root, both in the pilgrim and in the community. These pilgrimages take place within the context of the pilgrimage of our whole life—a pilgrimage that begins with our birth and that will end when we see God face to face. It begins when we respond to the call to keep walking.





PILGRIMAGE TO TAIZÉ, FRANCE

In May 2005, I received a wonderful gift. Rev. Lang Brownlee and I, Co-Chaplains, had the opportunity to journey with ten students and our colleague Kory Vitangeli on a pilgrimage to Taizé, France. This was a dream of a lifetime. This pilgrimage would give our students an opportunity to live, work, and pray with the ecumenical Christian community of Taizé. Each week students gather on our campus for a service of Taizé Christian worship. Now our students would grow to understand the vision behind the prayer and music that they take part in each week. They would also come to know the passion of the many young adults around the world who visit Taizé each year.

The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian community founded by Brother Roger Schultz,³ a member of the Reformed (Calvinist) tradition. Following World War II, Brother Roger wanted to begin a community of brothers that would be a *parable of communion* and witness to a life of simplicity and reconciliation. The community now numbers more than 100 brothers. These brothers come from the Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox traditions and represent more than 25 different countries. The community takes no gifts and relies on the work of their hands and their faith in God. Not long after their founding, young adults from around the world began to visit the community. Brother Roger, noting the passion these young people had for service and a life of Christian community, called his brothers to serve these young adults as a full-time ministry of the community. In the summer months, there can be as many as five to six thousand young adults at Taizé each week, along with older adults, families, and children. Since we were there before the summer season officially began, there were only around 2,500 young adults there—a relatively small gathering at Taizé.

We arrived in Taizé, France, in the afternoon of the Feast of Pentecost. We had taken a train from Paris and then connected to a bus that took us on the winding roads that led us to the little village of Taizé. When we arrived, we were tired and a little overwhelmed as we saw the thousands of people gathered for the evening meal. One of the volunteers, whose job it was to orient us to the week, met us and showed us the process of registering for the week. It was not long before we were settled in and eating our first meal at Taizé. Following supper, we joined the community for evening prayer. It is the custom of the community to sing songs, read Scripture, and pray in many different languages. Our group of pilgrims knew some of the songs already because we had sung them each week on campus during our Taizé Worship service. We

were not ready for the powerful experience of hearing these songs sung in the languages of our brothers and sisters from around the world. Nor were we ready for the sight of Brother Roger, the community of brothers, and thousands of young adults sitting in the silence of prayer and entering into the praise of God through chant and song. Let me share some words from my journal that might give you a sense of what that moment was like for me:

I walk into the darkness of the Chapel of Reconciliation. This chapel, illumined only by the candles and the presence of one another, reminds me of the call to be the light to one another. The silence in this chapel is not one of absence but a silence that is pregnant with the presence of possibility, of hope!

Quiet music starts playing and I sit and reflect. I am in France! At Taizé! The long-awaited pilgrimage is underway. What is God calling me to at this time in my life? I do not want to claim this call as one grabbing at possibilities. I want to listen to God speaking in and around me and have God's call rise up within the silence of my heart.

All the brothers of the community slowly assemble in long white robes, quietly taking their places. Then a monk comes leading a frail old man. Brother Roger, the founder of the community, walks in slowly as he holds onto the robe of one of his brothers. Tears come to my eyes. The young helping the old—the old loving the young. Brother Roger's eyes smile at those around him as a white cloth is draped around him—to keep him warm, I assume. Then the music starts in its fullness—MAGNIFICENT beyond words! We sing an alleluia, while monk after monk repeats a Scripture verse in a different language. Once again, I begin to cry. This is what it must be like—God receiving our prayers in every language and claiming them as her own. Loving us in all compassion and knowing us completely. The silence, the song, the prayer, the people—this is the CHURCH—not the building, but God's people sitting before God in community, adoration and praise. O God, how magnificent you are. You reign in glory and come close to us in Jesus Christ. My beloved, you are my glory, may my love for you deepen each day of my life.





We were in Taizé for a full week and participated in the rhythm of life lived by the community. Each day everyone gathered for prayer in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. A meal preceded or followed each gathering for prayer. Each person present received a work assignment that helped the community run smoothly. Some of our students did dishes or helped with making sure that other pilgrims knew how to get to the places of solitude. Others spent a couple of hours watching the children of families visiting Taizé so that their parents could have an opportunity to participate in the life of community. The work that each one did always contributed to the well-being of the whole group.

Being part of a small group was an integral part of the experience. Each morning one of the monks would lead a Bible Study on a particular Bible passage. Following the Bible study each morning, we would meet in small groups to reflect on what we had learned. Because those in a small group were from different countries and Christian denominations, the conversation was rich in diverse understandings. After meeting in small groups, each of us was given time for silence so that God's word could soak into our hearts as we took time for personal prayer.

There is a place in Taizé called the Source. It is a beautiful part of the property of Taizé where one can enjoy the beauty of nature. Waterfalls and a lake, along with the beauty of the trees and land, help each pilgrim settle into the silence more easily. The pilgrims are asked to keep silence in this area so that it might be a place of prayer. There was also time to attend workshops on different aspects of the spiritual journey.

Fellowship and conversation took place throughout the day and into the night. I had the opportunity to meet men and women from many different countries and many denominations. Even though there were differences among us—differences that were not ignored but talked about—we all desired to know God in a deeper and more personal way. We longed for unity in the body of Christ torn apart by divisions. We yearned for peace: peace in our hearts, peace in our communities, and peace in our world.

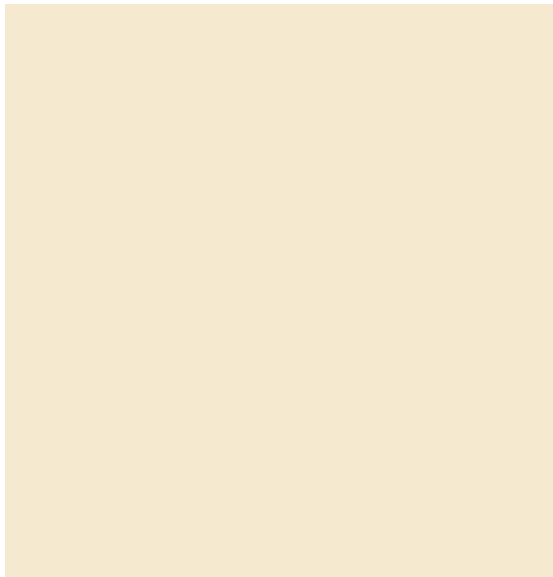
Our pilgrimage to Taizé was more than I ever could have hoped it to be. Yet, even with all the power of the experience and the many graces given, there were struggles on the journey. It should be quite obvious that when you make a pilgrimage, you take yourself along; it is not possible to leave yourself at home. Yet, it seems that we are surprised when little parts of ourselves show up and demand attention even in what seems to be a place of peace. During the pilgrimage and on to this day, I continue to reflect on this obvious yet surprising reality. We can so easily want to exclude our real selves from the pilgrimage and embrace only those new places and people

who might not ask too much from us. The real practice of pilgrimage takes place when we embrace all that arises within us—the good and the bad, the new and the old—and offer it all to God. This offering comes out of the “stuff” of our lives, the very “stuff” of our humanity. It is this gift of our lives that Jesus wants from us.

Early in the morning of the day we were to leave, I knelt in the chapel and renewed my vows to God and to my Benedictine community. Even though I sat alone in this chapel, I felt deeply connected to the sisters in my monastic community, seven hours away by plane, in Beech Grove, Indiana. I also felt deeply connected to all the people present during this week at Taizé. I had met some of them personally, but I had met all of them in the heart of community prayer. Strangely, I, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24: 13–35), felt my heart burning deeply within me.

Prayer of a Pilgrim

*O Lord, I long for you
and yet you are already here
I search for you
and yet you have already found me
Beloved, I give myself to you
as one who longs to live
in the heart of her beloved
You are my hope, my desire,
my every longing
fill me! ⁴*



WHEN MAKING A PILGRIMAGE

I. All of life is a pilgrimage—it is a journey home to the heart of God.

We are all pilgrims on this earth. We journey through this life with and in God. From the moment of our birth, we set out on a journey, a pilgrimage. This pilgrimage of life leads us to discover the One who calls us and helps us grow in ways that will lead us into the heart of God. This pilgrimage leads us to discover the deep connection between the exterior and interior life.

As we live this pilgrimage of life in a faithful, intentional manner, we come to know our God and ourselves in new and transforming ways. While we are very often unaware of the pilgrimage we are undertaking, our God is always present and forever faithful. The God that we long for and yet so often run from beckons us to follow. The journey we make is the unfolding of our vocation, our calling from and to God. God blesses us with moments of deep knowing. Just as the disciples met Jesus on the road to Emmaus and declared, “Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road?” (Luke 24:13-35), we meet Jesus Christ throughout the pilgrimage of our lives, and, when we are open to Christ’s presence, great change takes place. All of life is understood in light of this pilgrimage to God. No aspect of our life is unimportant.

Each moment of every day, our God is calling us to set out on a pilgrimage, a journey that will lead us into the life of the One who calls. We can never lose sight of the One who beckons. Our loving God is the end of all our searching, all our longing. When we keep our eyes on the God who calls us into life, we will faithfully make the pilgrimage of life—a pilgrimage that will lead us into the heart of God.

Questions for Reflection:

*Do you live each day with an understanding that you are being called by God to set out on pilgrimage?
What are some ways that you can deepen your understanding of life as a pilgrimage in and to God?*

Prayer:

Jesus our peace, you call us to follow you our whole life long. And so, with humble trust, we understand that you invite us to keep welcoming you again and again.⁵



*II. When one makes a pilgrimage, one stands on a spiritual threshold—
“in-betweenness”—a place where one can see the world and God anew*

The practice of pilgrimage opens us up to an experience that we might not meet in the dailiness of life. The pilgrim stands between two realities. As we stand here, this place where we stand “in between,” we stand at the threshold of something new. Away from the familiarity of home and not totally a part of the new environment we find ourselves in, we have the opportunity to see things anew. This new way of seeing does not happen automatically, however. It is something we can embrace or something we can resist. It is choosing to cross the threshold and enter into this new experience that allows us to go deeper on the journey and become pilgrims who seek and not travelers who observe.

It is easy to want to cling to the familiarity of our lives and not enter the experience at hand or jump into the new without reflecting on what is happening in and around us. The one who desires to make a pilgrimage does so with intentionality and reflection. Because of this, solitude is an important part of any pilgrimage. In the silence, we listen to God speaking. Through this listening to God, our mind and heart are able to see anew. It is in the place of silence that the familiarity of the old and the excitement of the new become one, and we are able to see in a new way Christ’s light in our midst.

When I was at Taizé, I found this happening to me especially during the times of prayer. As I entered the church where we prayed three times a day, I was always aware that I was stepping into both a familiar place and a place of newness. Sitting in silence before the music of prayer began, I imagined my sisters at home slowly gathering for prayer. The reading of Scripture, the melodious sound of chant and song, and the powerful invocation of God through prayer are familiar to me as I pray daily in community at the monastery where I dwell. Yet, there was also the engagement of something new. The depth of silence embraced at Taizé called me to a new way of listening. As I sat in silence with around 2,500 other followers of Christ, I became aware in a new way of the importance of silence. The silence embraced in Taizé was never self-gratifying or an end in itself. Through the grace of silence, I was led deeper into an experience of the One who calls me into life.

As we cross the threshold of silence into speech and then back into silence again, we never journey alone. We journey in community, a community of love. I carry this gift of silence with me to this day. Even in the midst of activity, I find myself returning to the place of silence given to me through our pilgrimage to Taizé. Entering this place of silence in a new way in a community far from my own, helped me embrace in a more powerful way the silence that I already knew in the monastery I call home. Sometimes our pilgrimage leads us full circle, but we return able to see the familiar in a totally new way.

Questions for Reflection:

Crossing the threshold from the familiarity of home to the unknown of a new experience can be a frightening experience. Can you think of a time in your life when you have encountered such a crossing? How did you feel? How did you embrace or resist the experience?

Spend time in prayer reflecting on this experience. What can you learn from it that might help you as you undertake the practice of pilgrimage in the future?

Pilgrimage Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, Comforter. Come Creator Spirit! Come! Come and lead us with your light! ⁶

III. As one makes a special pilgrimage, it is a call to return changed in some way. You have to open yourself to transformation; if you choose, you can miss the pilgrimage even though you make the journey.

Within our understanding of all of life being a pilgrimage, we find ourselves called to make special pilgrimages during our lifetime. These pilgrimages help us grow in our understanding of the divine and help us re-enter the dailiness of our lives in a more centered and focused way. Such a pilgrimage calls us to return changed in some way.

Here we note the difference between a “vacation” and a pilgrimage. While a vacation allows for refreshment and renewal, a pilgrimage calls us to face God and ourselves, and, in the process, be open to change. This process of change in our lives can be awe-inspiring and powerful in nature, and yet it can be terrifying and something we do not want to face in our lives. It would be easier at times to live in the familiar rather than face change that is necessary in our lives. At times, those around us will not support the change we face because it will mean that their life will change as a result. Yet, when we have the courage to answer the call to change, we will return home in a way that will bring life to ourselves and to those around us.

While we were at Taizé, I was deeply touched by a student who had the courage to look at herself with honesty through time in silent prayer and reflection with others on the pilgrimage. She had been running from herself in the busyness of life. But life with the Taizé community did not leave room for running. The times of silence and holy conversation allowed for all that was bothering her to rise up inside of her. Initially, she wanted to keep running, and she could have done so by going through the motions rather than making the pilgrimage. There were many ways of avoiding the silence, but she caught herself in the midst of her struggle and made a choice. She made a choice for a more abundant life. She realized that she wanted to go home changed, and so she chose to go deeper into the pilgrimage through prayer and reflection.

Questions for Reflection:

Are you open to the changes you need to make in your life? Can you name some of these changes?

While you are on pilgrimage, you might become aware of other changes that you need to make. Begin to pray for both the courage and insight to listen to God's call for change in your life and the ability to face it.

Pilgrimage Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, your light shines within us. Let not my doubts nor my darkness speak to me. Lord Jesus Christ, your light shines within us. Let my heart always welcome your love.⁷

IV. A pilgrim must pack light and continue unpacking along the way. All the baggage we hold within us will rise to the surface, and the pilgrim's duty is to keep sifting through the baggage until what is necessary remains.

This point about pilgrimage came from a rather practical experience during our journey to Taizé. As Rev. Lang Brownlee and I prepared for our pilgrimage with the group of students we were leading, we had several meetings on campus where we talked about the pilgrimage we would be undertaking. Attention was given during part of these meetings to practical details. On numerous occasions, we had mentioned the importance of packing lightly.

“You will have to carry your stuff wherever you go,” I said at one meeting. “Don’t forget that streets in France are narrower than ours and we will be taking public transportation,” Lang said at another. After a while, I felt like a broken record, or at least that I was probably overdoing it with the need to make sure that they heard me. So you can imagine that it came as quite a surprise to meet the students at the Indianapolis airport and see them arriving with more luggage than they could possibly need for a long time. Trying to hide my surprise, I joked about it and did my best to cover my concern.

Our concern was justified the moment we arrived in Paris. We were not in the subway station for more than five minutes when it became painfully evident why packing light would have been a good idea. We laughed about it (after a few tears!) and made do with the situation we had created.

During our days with the Taizé community, I had time to reflect on our experience of hauling our baggage around. As I spoke with our students and other pilgrims at Taizé, I came to realize that it had a lot to say about our spiritual pilgrimage. We carry external baggage on the journey, but we carry a lot of internal baggage as well. The baggage of our interior life can become so heavy that it prevents us from seeing the reality of life around us. One person I spoke with at Taizé spoke about this reality in an insightful way. She shared, and I paraphrase here, that she came to Taizé to look for answers to her struggles in life. She wanted to come to this holy place and dwell in the midst of these holy people so that she might come in touch with the holy inside of herself. She wanted to leave the old behind and embrace the new.



As she encountered the silence and the conversation that flowed out of the silence, she became confused and scared. She said that everything that she had left behind, including the fears and doubts of her life, began to rise within her. It was not long before the noise of her life began to take over. She wanted to run, to stay busy, so that she would not have to face herself. She tried this for a day or two but it did not help. Then one day in the silence of the chapel at Taizé, God spoke to her. She came to understand that she had come to this holy place and these holy people so that she could face her inner self within the context of christian community.

It was still a terrifying prospect but not one she had to face alone. Knowing that she would be held by those around her, she gave herself to the loving embrace of God. Slowly she began the process of spiritual reflection that would indeed take a lifetime. She had to begin sifting through the baggage within. She said that she knew that this process could not be something she embraced in Taizé and then let go of once she returned home. It would be something that she would need to be about for the rest of her life. It was this letting go of self and growing in Christ that would allow transformation to take place in her life.

Questions for Reflection:

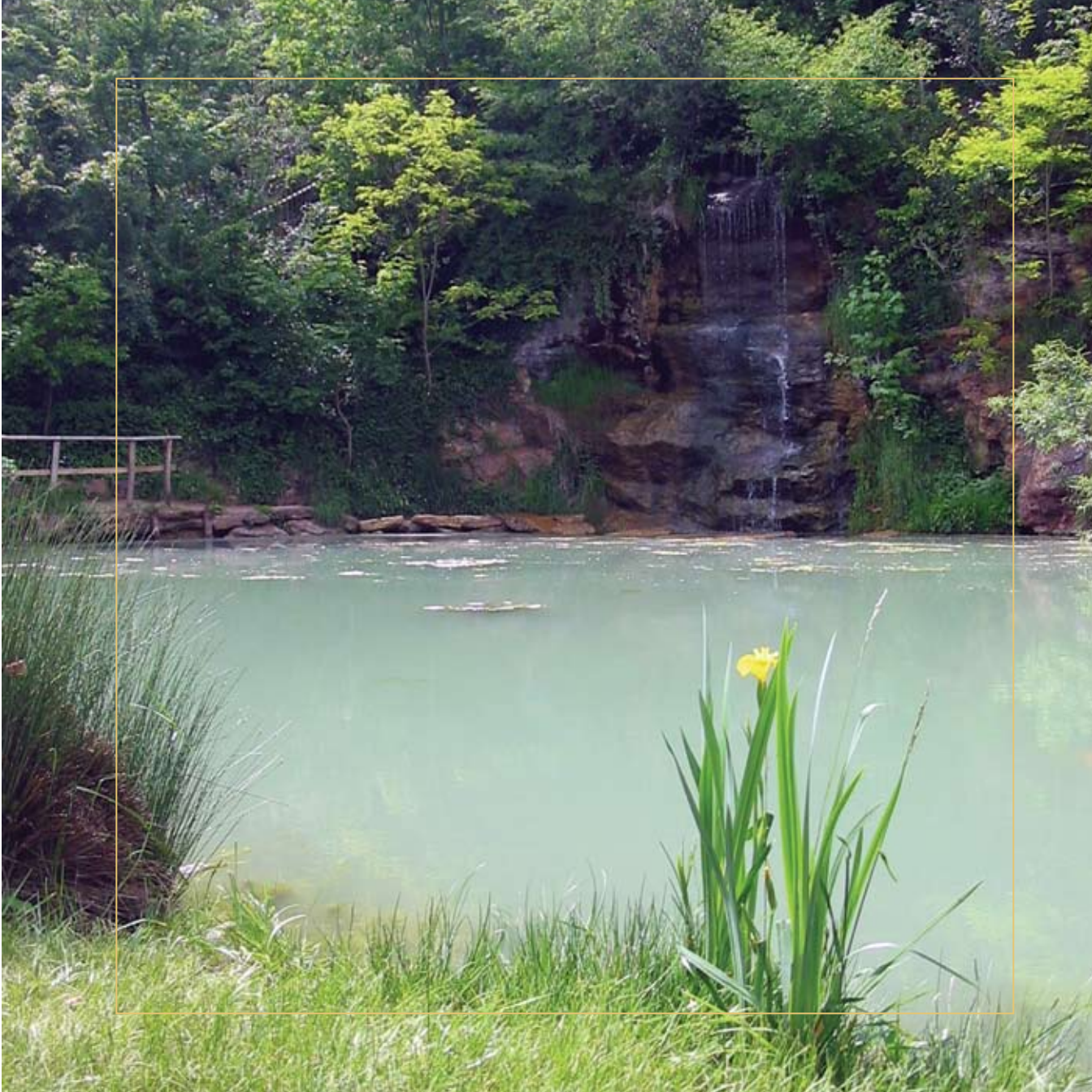
We all carry baggage within us. Take time to reflect on your own life. What baggage do you carry?

What do you need and what do you carry that you are called to let go of?

What articles in your baggage are you willing to let go of now so that you can begin the process of change and transformation?

Pilgrimage Prayer:

In God alone my soul can find rest and peace, in God my peace and joy. Only in God my soul can find its rest, find its rest and peace.⁸



V. Each pilgrim makes his or her own way supported by the community—both the community present and the community beyond. Each person can be there for the other, but each makes his or her own pilgrimage; each person chooses how to respond to the time and grace given.

A pilgrimage is both a communal and a solitary journey. This might sound like a statement of contradiction to some. Yet, in order to grow in the spiritual life, each believer must come to terms with this reality. American culture does not cherish solitude. Indeed, one has only to watch television for a little while before being bombarded with images that teach us that being alone is not a good thing. I wonder if this is because we have gotten our understanding of solitude confused with that of being isolated. None of us cherishes the thought of being isolated from another. In fact, experiencing isolation is a terrifying thing. Isolation is not of value on the spiritual journey.

Solitude is something very different. It is something we must embrace if we are going to make progress on the spiritual journey. It is the experience of solitude that allows us to enter more fully into community. Nourished by the word of God in solitude, we come to know ourselves in a new way. Solitude allows us to become more fully who we are, a gift that is deeply needed in community. When we are alone in silence, we are never apart from community. Community sustains us in our solitude; solitude sustains us in community.

One cannot be truly lived without the other. We are always surrounded by community—those present and the communion of saints that went before us. Nevertheless, we have the responsibility for making our pilgrimage. No one can make our pilgrimage for us. While those on the journey with us can support and encourage us, it is up to each one of us to choose whether we make the pilgrimage. We can choose to enter in or sit on the sidelines.

One of the options at Taizé is the opportunity to make a silent retreat. Those making the retreat join others for prayer in the chapel, but their meals and the rest of their day is lived in silence. One student in our group decided that she wanted to do this. The other students were excited for her but also unsure of how it would unfold. On the morning she entered the silent retreat, we assured her of our prayers and sent her off with our blessing. We saw her occasionally and exchanged a smile but never a word. We missed her but felt deeply connected to her somehow. She was in the midst of community even in the midst of her solitude. On Sunday, when she came out of her silent retreat, there was great rejoicing. We asked her about her experience, and she said that it was extremely powerful for her. While initially she had been afraid of the silence, she had found it guiding her into a new way of understanding. She had never felt isolated in the

solitude but rather found herself deeply connected to those around her. She came back renewed. No, she did not look different (even though some looked for a halo!) but one could detect a difference in her presence. She acted as one more at peace with herself, at peace with God, at peace with others. Entering into solitude helped her understand community in a new way. No one else in the group could enter the solitude for her; she had to make the choice herself. She did! And she was changed through the experience.

Questions for Reflection:

Are you comfortable with solitude, or does the idea of taking time for solitude scare you? Take some time to get in touch with how you feel about solitude.

Why is solitude an important part of the pilgrimage of life and any special pilgrimage you would choose to take? How can you include times of solitude in your life right now?

Pilgrimage Prayer:

Bless the Lord, my soul, and bless God's holy name. Bless the Lord, my soul, who leads me into life.⁹

VI. As a pilgrim, one has to be open to surprise—if one comes with too many expectations, one can easily block out the still voice within.

Unrealistic expectations can block us from experiencing what God is trying to teach us. Expectations are part of life, and we cannot stop ourselves from having them. Who has not lived through situations when we expected one thing and were disappointed when we found another? This can happen in jobs we accept, circumstances we encounter, and relationships we embrace in our lives. It is part of life! Nevertheless, when our expectations are out of proportion to the experience at hand, they can become like walls that block any possibility of our crossing the threshold and being able to see something new. Our expectations, at times, even block out the still voice within that tries to speak to us in every situation. If we are unable to allow God to surprise us, we will snuff out the possibility of encounter with mystery in our life. Openness to surprise is admitting that we are not in control. This can be a scary thought, but it opens us up to seeing life in a new way.

During our pilgrimage to Taizé, I had an encounter with surprise that helped me understand the practice of fasting in a new way. The first night at Taizé found me standing in line for supper. This was no ordinary line but one filled with a couple of thousand people from many different countries. I was tired but excited as I listened to the languages and enjoyed the smiles of the people around me. (I found during my time in Taizé that facial expressions have a language all of their own.) It was hard to believe that I was finally in Taizé after months of planning for this pilgrimage. As I stood there, I realized that I was hungry, since it had been quite a while since our meal in Paris. I knew that the fare we would be served would be simple in keeping with the simplicity of life the brothers lived and shared as a witness.

As I got to the front of the line and had my supper portioned out for me, the surprise of it all hit me full force. Even though I am thin, I am known for my appetite. In fact, I struggle going to sleep without a little bowl of cereal to tide me over. Looking at the roll and rice dish on my plate and the sweet tea in my bowl, I went into frightened mode. How would I handle this? There was the temptation to try to get more and save it for later. This became my experience for the first couple of days. I resisted anything that God might have been trying to teach me through the experience. Instead, I found myself grumbling within. Eventually I came to realize that I had a choice to make. I could spend my energy *resisting* what God was trying to teach me, or I could choose to open myself up to God's grace offered me.

I recall vividly the moment I chose to open myself to God. At this point in the journey, I discovered a new surprise. I have always struggled with fasting. Could it be that God was trying to teach me the point of fasting as a spiritual practice? As I allowed myself to receive what I was given, I realized that I had enough. I was satisfied at the end of a meal and ready for the next one. I even came to enjoy knowing what it felt like to be ready for the next meal.

Rather than eating nothing or eating everything, fasting calls me to walk the middle road. One of the things I learned at Taizé was that there is abundance in having enough and nothing more. I will carry this insight with me for the rest of my life as a gift. It would have been easy to block this gift out by remaining frustrated. Embracing God's grace allowed me to be open to the surprises of this pilgrimage.

Questions for Reflection:

Think of times in your life when you were surprised by an experience and had the choice to be open or closed in your response. How did your response to this surprise change your experience?

Have you ever prayed for the grace to be open to God's surprises in your life? What risk do you take when you make this prayer?

Pilgrimage Prayer:

The kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Come, Lord and open in us the gates of your kingdom.¹⁰

VII. A pilgrimage will not answer all one's questions of life—indeed, it might awaken even more.

As human beings, we have a desire to have all of our questions answered. We do not always do well with ambiguity or uncertainty in life. Yet when we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we often have more questions than answers about how to proceed. Even though we find answers to some of our questions, these answers eventually lead us to more questions.

I believe we want certainty in our life because we are not very comfortable with the mystery of God. Yet we are called to dwell in the mystery that is God. We can and should know many things about God. However, just when we think we know everything there is to know, or at least a lot, we discover that there is so much more to know. Those who are truly wise know that they do not know it all (I Cor. 13:12). It is this continual asking of questions and searching for answers that becomes the discovery of our vocation. God is always calling us home into the heart of God. Just like a parent who coaxes her child to take his “first steps, God calls us to keep walking the journey that will lead us to a deeper understanding of God, ourselves, and the life we are called to live in and for God. Such a journey requires risk and deep trust in God.

During our pilgrimage to Taizé, each of us discovered that we had many more questions than answers. That could be frustrating for some. What one is to do with one's life is a question with clear immediacy for a college student. After all, from the moment they arrive at college, they are continually asked the question, “What are you going to do with your life?” Wanting to know the answer to this question became the driving force for one of the students. It became a block to truly listening for the still voice within that would arise during prayer, times of reflection, or holy conversation.

The answer came in the form of more questions that the student would need to explore upon her arrival home. Realizing that these questions rising up within her were indeed part of the answer, the student began to listen more intently. As she allowed herself to listen, she came to be at peace with both the questions and answers welling up inside. The pilgrimage became for her a means of grace that allowed her to open herself up to God's presence in and around her. She returned home with more questions than when she left. She returned home more comfortable dwelling in the mystery of God, dwelling in the mystery of her identity as a child of God.



Questions for Reflection:

Are you comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity in your life? What questions do you have about your life and your relationship with God? Write them down and sit with them for a while. Talk to God and listen. Maybe over time you will receive an answer—or maybe another question.

Thomas Merton, a christian monk who spent a great deal of time listening to God's call in life, offers this prayer for one who desires to follow God on the pilgrimage of life. I encourage you to pray this prayer during times of struggle, trusting that God is with you each step of the way.

My Lord God

I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself,

and the fact that I think I am following your will

does not mean I am actually doing so.

But I believe that my desire to please you

does in fact please you.

And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road

though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore will I trust you always

though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear for you are ever with me,

and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.¹¹

Pilgrimage Prayer:

Keep me, O God, for I trust in you. You show me the path of life. With you there is fullness of joy.¹²

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE JOURNEY

My hope is that the points that I have invited you to consider regarding the practice of pilgrimage, will be a help to you now or sometime in the future. I invite you to take time to reflect on each point, both in the context of a special pilgrimage you have taken or might take in the future. I also encourage you to reflect on them in light of your pilgrimage of life—one that will lead you into the heart of God. Never forget the love God has for you. Spend your life seeking God and never tire of doing so. May each pilgrimage you make in your life lead you to the God whom you seek.

Endnotes

¹ Monks of Taizé, *Sing to God (Ateliers e Presses de Taizé, 1995)*, Alleluia 8, #4.

² Edward Sellner, *Pilgrimage* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorbin Books, 2004), 26.

³ Two months after our visit on August 16, 2005, Brother Roger Shutz was murdered during evening prayer. The woman who killed him suffered with mental illness. The brothers of community acknowledged her pain during Brother Roger's funeral and asked for her forgiveness. May Brother Roger rest in peace.

⁴ Prayer offered by Sr. Jennifer Mechtild Horner in the village church of Taizé.

⁵ *Songs from Taizé 2005–2006* (Taizé, France: *Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 2005*), Taken from the *Prayers by Brother Roger* in the English section—no page number given.

NB. Following each of the points considered in this resource, there will be a prayer by Br. Roger or a Taizé chant.

⁶ *Songs from Taizé 2005–2006* (Taizé, France: *Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 2005*), song #43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, song #9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, song #5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, song #125.

¹⁰ *Songs from Taizé 2005—2006* (Taizé, France: *Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 2005*), song #148.

¹¹ Thomas Merton, *Dialogues with Silence* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, reprint 2004), vii.

¹² *Songs from Taizé 2005–2006* (Taizé, France: *Ateliers et Presses de Taizé, 2005*), song #150



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