The Journey: a guide for churches planning to walk the Pilgrim’s Way

St Stephen’s Church, Shottermill

Honouring God, following the example of Jesus and sharing His love in our community
Acknowledgements

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Last but not least, we are very grateful for our vicar Rev Danny Wignall and curate Giles Carpenter, who ensured that our pilgrimage kept on the right spiritual path and became a time of blessing for our whole congregation and community.

This booklet was written by Jean Leston who, together with Maura Howard, helped to organise the St Stephen’s pilgrimage. If you have any further questions about walking the Pilgrim’s Way, please contact us via the St Stephen’s office at office.shottermill@gmail.com or by phone on 01428 642609.

St Stephen’s pilgrims on arrival in Canterbury, June 2013
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This is the story of how one church, St Stephen’s Shottermill in Surrey, decided to step out in faith and go on pilgrimage, walking the Pilgrim’s Way from Winchester to Canterbury—a distance of some 140 miles which took us 13 days to walk. It’s also a story about how we tried to involve the whole congregation and community in the idea of pilgrimage and make it special for everyone, not just those walking the Way.

We’re not a big church with lots of resources—just an ordinary, family-friendly Anglican church with a heart for service in our community and a willingness to experiment with different styles of worship and ways of seeking God.

That’s why we decided to go on pilgrimage—to set aside time for God, to discern His will for us and to reflect on our individual journeys of faith. It has been a wonderful and joyous experience! As a result, we have come back refreshed in our faith and keen to serve God in new ways. Pilgrimage has also brought us closer together as a church family, with happy memories that should last for years to come.

The Pilgrim’s Way is an ancient track which has been used by countless people over the centuries, including medieval pilgrims wanting to worship at the shrines of St Swithun in Winchester and St Thomas à Becket in Canterbury. As it runs so close to our parish, it seemed the obvious choice for our pilgrimage. Although much of the original route is now under tarmac and best avoided, the St Swithun’s Way (from Winchester to Farnham), followed by the North Downs Way (from Farnham to Canterbury) provide a beautiful and well-marked alternative. We were still able to see plenty of authentic (and little changed) stretches of the Pilgrim’s Way where the two routes overlap, as well as many other signs of pilgrimage—from carved crosses in pilgrim churches to place names—helping the modern pilgrim to reconnect with our Christian past and the community of saints who have gone before us.

Even though there are lots of secular guide books on walking the Pilgrim’s Way, it is surprising how few materials exist to help a congregation prepare for a distinctly Christian pilgrimage. We hope that by sharing our experience and providing some practical advice, others will find it useful and perhaps be inspired to walk the Pilgrim’s Way too.

You are in for a treat—pilgrimage is a special time of blessing and a spiritual discipline that is well worth reviving!

Go with God!

With love from St Stephen’s, Shottermill
Some top tips for a successful pilgrimage

- Do try and involve everyone in your pilgrimage, whether they’re walking or staying at home. Sharing the same prayers and reflections each day is especially valuable.
- Reconnaissance is never wasted! Get a team of individuals to pre-walk each day of the route so there won’t be any nasty surprises—and, if possible, get them to lead on the day so you can focus on more important things than reading maps.
- Be honest about the level of physical challenge involved each day (we rated each day’s walk from ‘easy’ to ‘difficult’) and gently suggest less taxing options for those who might struggle.
- Have a support vehicle on hand each day to ferry luggage to the next overnight stop. That way, walkers only need to carry light day packs and there’s a ‘sag wagon’ available for those who need to stop early.
- Try and alternate nights of primitive sleeping conditions (e.g. a church hall floor) with more luxurious accommodation (e.g. anywhere with a mattress and shower).
- There are some churches en route that have been hosting pilgrims for centuries. It is one of the great joys of pilgrimage to share in Christian worship and fellowship in the churches that you visit. Also try and make the most of the many nature reserves that you will be walking through—they provide wonderful opportunities for celebrating the beauty of God’s Creation.
- While you’re travelling together as a pilgrim community, some people are bound to annoy you. When this happens, Canon Clare Edwards of Canterbury Cathedral suggests seeing this as Christ holding up a mirror to yourself. What’s bothering you is more likely to be your problem than theirs.
- Pilgrimage is a spiritual adventure. Be open to all experiences and you will be amazed at the kindness and hospitality of strangers, the opportunities to share your faith, and the joy, peace and contentment of being with your fellow pilgrims on the road.
Learning from our mistakes

- Have a spiritual director each day who is someone different from the person responsible for pilgrimage logistics. That way you will be sure to have sufficient time for prayer and reflection and someone on hand with pastoral responsibility for the group. This also helps once you return in retaining the inspiration of pilgrimage and helping individuals and the congregation to take ‘next steps’ as a pilgrim people.
- It might be worthwhile having a rest day, or Sabbath, in the middle of the walk so that people can put their feet up and have a break. We wished we’d had two nights at Aylesford Priory instead of one!
- Getting people to commit to go on pilgrimage takes time and is often very last minute. This can make it very difficult to book accommodation in advance. We wish we’d been more ruthless in giving people deadlines and sticking to them!
- If you’re allowing day trippers, agree a start time and don’t wait for stragglers! You don’t want others waiting around in the cold or having to walk faster, or later, to make up for lost time.
- Distances on the ground are often greater than the guidebooks and maps suggest. And the path, although not especially difficult, is certainly challenging in places. Be ready for some long days and very weary people at the end of them—who are too tired to cook. All the books and board games we brought along simply didn’t get used.
- Make sure you position faster walkers at key turnings so slower walkers don’t miss them. This happened to us a few times so have mobile numbers available to call missing walkers.
- Have set hours during the day when people can call. Otherwise keep mobiles off except for emergencies. They can easily become an interruption and nuisance.
- Be sure to bring waterproof jacket, trousers and backpack cover. And carry your camera and phone in a waterproof bag if you want to avoid water damage!
Chapter 2: Preparing for Pilgrimage

Preparing for a church or parish pilgrimage takes time and commitment—and a whole team of people to make it happen. Having more than one person to organise the pilgrimage helps to share the workload—and ideally it shouldn’t be the vicar who’s responsible for all the planning!

From start to finish, our pilgrimage took one year in the making. We found that this length of time was needed, not just to organise the logistics but also to build interest in the idea, allow sufficient time for a sermon series on pilgrimage, and enable people to plan ahead and book time off.

Here are the steps we took to get us ready.

The proposal

A successful pilgrimage requires wholehearted commitment from everyone so a good starting point is a written proposal. This can be presented to the vicar and PCC to get their official approval for the pilgrimage, which is also necessary before any detailed planning can take place. It is also a good idea to have minuted PCC approval for insurance purposes.

Our proposal contained some basic information about walking the Pilgrim’s Way, including the purpose and value of pilgrimage, the proposed dates and itinerary, plus some suggestions on logistics, accommodation and communications needed.

Fortunately, our vicar Danny was very keen on the idea—as he’d just come back from a sabbatical on the theme of pilgrimage—and our proposal was readily approved. We then let the congregation know what was planned, making copies of the proposal available to anyone interested, as well as posting it on the St Stephen’s website.

Key considerations

When you are first beginning to plan your pilgrimage, there are several initial decisions you’ll need to make such as:

Purpose

Every pilgrimage needs a purpose. And if you can’t communicate what yours is, simply and succinctly to your congregation, you won’t get much interest. We wanted our pilgrimage to be a time set aside for

“Guide our feet into the path of peace.”
1 Luke: 68-79
God, to learn more about what He has in store for us. Others might want to focus on peace and reconciliation or some other theme.

**Timing**

According to Chaucer, Spring is the traditional time of pilgrimage but Autumn is also a lovely time of year to be walking through the Itchen Valley and the North Downs. The main thing is to avoid walking in the heat or cold. We chose to walk during the late May half term week so that more families could join us. Our timing also included a Bank Holiday, so people who work needed fewer days off.

**Route**

Some may wish to try and trace the ‘authentic’ route of the Pilgrim’s Way, which is marked on maps, but this involves considerably more roadside walking. We chose beauty over historical accuracy by walking first the St Swithun’s Way from Winchester to Farnham and then the North Downs Way from Farnham to Canterbury. This follows the original route approximately one third of the time but still allows modern pilgrims to see many of the same places that would have been visited centuries ago. Both of these paths are also well marked and maintained. There is also a Pilgrim’s Way route from London to Canterbury.

For further information about Pilgrim’s Way routes, see Canterbury Cathedral’s website with interactive map at [www.pilgrimswaycanterbury.org](http://www.pilgrimswaycanterbury.org)

**Duration**

Some pilgrims choose to walk the Pilgrim’s Way all in one go. Others prefer to break it up into day walks, for example doing one day per month for a year. Both have their attractions. Travelling together over a stretch of several days allows a pilgrim community to form and gives perhaps a more intense pilgrimage experience. Daily walks, however, may better suit congregations with less time to spare or who prefer a less demanding physical challenge.

We decided to walk the Pilgrim’s Way over 13 consecutive days but didn’t expect people to walk it all, unless they wanted to. The majority walked at least 4 days, with others—primarily full time workers or those with young families—choosing to do daytrips instead. Out of our congregation of 200, over 30 people walked at least part of the Pilgrim’s Way.

**Day trippers**

Allowing people to ‘dip in and out’ of pilgrimage allows many more people to get involved, but it does add substantially to the logistics—for example agreeing meeting points and returning people to where their cars are parked. We did offer complete flexibility and welcomed the changes in dynamics that different walkers brought to each day. But you may wish to restrict day trippers to particular days if you wish to keep extra logistics to a minimum.
Accommodation

Travelling light and living simply is the pilgrim tradition but this may not suit everyone. You will therefore need to think carefully about where you sleep and how much you want to spend. We opted for more of a traditional experience, staying in a mix of church halls, inexpensive Christian accommodation, youth hostels and camping barns. That way we kept our costs down to an average of £35 per person, per day, including meals. But there are plenty of pubs and B&Bs en route if that’s what your congregation prefers—although this will increase the cost! (A full list of the places we stayed and their costs are included in an Appendix at the end of this booklet.)

Be warned that many places do want you to book early, six months in advance in some cases. Many also want deposits. This means either needing early commitment from people who intend to stay overnight or keeping your fingers crossed that the accommodation you want will still be available closer to the time.

Itinerary planning

The St Swithun’s Way maps available from Hampshire County Council and the North Downs Way official guide both suggest very helpful daily walking itineraries and points of interest. In order to keep it simple, we decided to follow these itineraries rather than plan our own.

However, you may wish to supplement these guides by doing additional research about the Pilgrim’s Way. Old guide books from second hand bookshops are a mine of information about the cultural and natural history of the Pilgrim’s Way and highlight the special places you won’t want to miss. Give your congregation the challenge of helping to find them!

Raising money for charity

Many people go on pilgrimages and use it as a fundraising opportunity for worthy causes. However, our congregation thought that this would be a distraction, and perhaps not entirely in keeping with a God-centred pilgrimage, so we opted not to do this. Others may have different views.

Doing the groundwork

Once your proposal is approved and you have decided on the shape and scope of your pilgrimage, it’s time to get walking! Having a reconnaissance team of individuals who are each prepared to walk one day of the route has enormous benefits later on. It always helps to recruit your team when the weather’s fine rather than in the depths of winter. Human nature being what it is, we found that many people did their reconnaissance walk at the last possible minute, having put it off for several months. So make sure you allow plenty of time or give people a strict deadline to finish their walk!

We gave everyone a map with the route marked for them to walk, with a clear start and ending point. Most important was a set of questions we expected each walker to answer (provided as an Appendix).
These asked walkers to identify possible lunch stops, toilets, car parks, and places of interest. We also asked them to take photos or purchase postcards of places en route for putting on a display board in church, and to evaluate conditions underfoot, including any steep hills or styles, and whether there were any points where the path was not well kept or signposted, as well as the level of fitness needed to walk that day. Although we had estimated the level of difficulty beforehand (dividing daily walks into easy, moderate and difficult), several times we had to revise the level of difficulty upwards as a result of the reconnaissance walks. But to be forewarned is to be forearmed!

The notes that the advance walkers wrote up then became our detailed ‘guidebook’ for the day. Knowing in advance where we’d be able to find shelter or have our lunch—and how much further we had to go—gave us extra confidence, and comfort, while on pilgrimage.

In addition to your reconnaissance team, it is also good to recruit drivers willing to provide a support vehicle for each day. Although it seems a luxury, having a driver and vehicle available means you can respond to emergencies, provide hot drinks on a cold, wet day and ferry luggage from one place to the next. It also means that tired walkers can stop early and day trippers have a lift back to their car. The alternative is to rely on public transport which isn’t nearly as convenient.

Seeking planning advice

The Guildford diocese is very fortunate in having an expert pilgrimage leader, Rev Haydon Wilcox, who occasionally runs workshops on ‘How to Plan a Pilgrimage’. Attending such a session with others who are organising a pilgrimage is a great way to share ideas and to learn from each other. This particular workshop looks at the function of pilgrimage and Christian holidays as well as the planning process and the importance of spiritual direction during and post pilgrimage, with plenty of time to ask questions. For more information contact Rev Wilcox at haydonwilcox@mac.com

Another invaluable source of pilgrimage advice and support is Canon Clare Edwards of Canterbury Cathedral who can be contacted at canonclare@canterbury-cathedral.org. Canon Clare looks after pilgrims coming to the Cathedral and is not only a great enthusiast for pilgrimage but has walked the Pilgrim’s Way more than once herself. She went out of her way to help our congregation prepare for pilgrimage, came to St Stephen’s to give us a talk on the value of pilgrimage, and led us in a special prayer walk and celebration service at the Cathedral once we arrived. Canon Clare can also suggest different routes to Canterbury and inexpensive places to stay.

Preaching from the front

Spiritual preparation for pilgrimage is key in helping to make this a meaningful journey with Christ beside us rather than just a long walk. Some people may struggle with the idea of pilgrimage and not understand its value straightaway. They need help to see pilgrimage as a time of worship and learning—a form of devotion that helps to illuminate the journey of life.
At St Stephen’s, our vicar Danny is very fond of telling us that discipleship in Christ needs to be three dimensional: Up (loving and serving God), In (loving and serving our church family) and Out (loving and serving our neighbour, witnessing, seeking justice and caring for creation). Pilgrimage invites us to engage with all of these dimensions. How? By deepening our ability to listen to and serve the Lord, to help and serve each other as a pilgrim people, and to discern God’s will for us in our individual ministries.

The Bible suggests any number of pilgrimage themes, such as:

- Moses and the Exodus: remembering our story as believers who are similarly ‘in exile’ and merely travelling through this world towards our home with the Father
- Jacob and the angel: wrestling with our issues while walking with God and accepting our scars and disappointments
- Jesus in the wilderness, on the road to Emmaus: revealing himself to us as we journey through life and sending us out as disciples to the ends of the earth

As our pilgrimage was in May, we used Lent as a time of spiritual preparation for our journey. A series of sermons called ‘This is our Story – Journeys in Faith’ from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland was delivered to the congregation to help get us ready. For more details see [http://www.ctbi.org.uk/630/](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/630/)

**Prayer & worship**

Having a daily bible reading and prayer focus needs advance preparation if you want your pilgrimage to be a time of contemplation and waiting on the Lord. There is definitely something very special about developing a spiritual ‘rhythm’ during pilgrimage. We asked one member of our congregation to develop a pilgrim’s prayer book that the whole congregation could use, whether or not they were walking. (you’ll find this in an Appendix to this booklet.) Our pilgrim prayer book contained a bible verse and a theme for contemplation for each day of the pilgrimage. Very often a phrase from the reading turned into a walking prayer, which we would repeat silently as we went, with the simple repetition leaving us open to God in much the same way as singing a Taize chant.

Walking pilgrims started each day in prayer, with lunchtime worship followed by 15 minutes of silence, thinking through the theme for the day. We also finished each day in prayer, which gave us a chance to reflect on the day’s experiences and what God had revealed to us. Those staying at home were encouraged to also follow a daily routine of reading, prayer and reflection.

It may help to have an appointed ‘spiritual director’ for each day of the pilgrimage. This doesn’t have to be the same person, or even the vicar, but it is invaluable to have someone responsible for ensuring that sufficient time is given over to God. We also asked those who were on the reconnaissance team if they would be willing to lead a brief reflection somewhere on ‘their’ day’s walk. One of the most memorable times during our pilgrimage was when one of our pilgrims read an excerpt from the Magician’s Nephew by C.S. Lewis, where Aslan is ‘singing creation into being’, while we were seated in a beautiful glade.
filled with wildflowers and butterflies. Such perfect moments help to bring worship and joy into what pilgrims are experiencing.

**Cultivating interest**

To start getting people interested in the idea of pilgrimage, we showed the film ‘The Way’, which is about walking the Santiago de Compostela pilgrim’s route in Northern Spain (also known as the ‘Camino’ or the Way). It is a deeply moving film about a man whose son tragically dies on the Camino and the father winds up completing the pilgrimage that his son had begun. It deals with the themes of loss, love, and redemption and shows all the reasons that people go on pilgrimage (not all of them religious) and the types of profound experiences that can happen. All the characters in the film are changed, often in ways they didn’t expect. Both the director and star of the film are Christians (Emilio Estevez and Martin Sheen). It’s a great way to get people talking! We invited everyone to see it, whether they intended to do any walking or have their pilgrimage at home.

Quite early on, we put up a big map of the route, from Winchester to Canterbury, and invited our reconnaissance team to bring back photos or postcards and pin them up on the board, in order to give people an idea of what they would be seeing. By the end, the map was absolutely covered with pictures. We also used the map to indicate where railway stations were and our start and end stops for each day.

A special treat was that Canon Clare came to speak to us about the value of pilgrimage, just a few days before we embarked on our Journey of Faith. Once again we invited both walkers and non-walkers to come along and have a pilgrim’s shared dinner. Canon Clare gave us a wonderful and entertaining talk about her own experiences of pilgrimage. She stressed how everyone can go on pilgrimage, even if it’s only to walk around your lounge at home. Pilgrimage is both an outer and an inner journey that reminds us that our earthly home is only temporary.

**Getting the message out**

There is a lot of information to communicate when you are planning a pilgrimage. We found the best way of doing this was through regular newsletters, starting a few months before our time of pilgrimage, which relayed all key information such as where we would be staying, costs and booking information, how to get involved at home and prayer requests. We also prepared a pack list (attached as yet another Appendix).
Chapter 3: Making Your Pilgrimage Inclusive

If pilgrimage is to be a spiritually deepening and unifying experience for your church, it is essential to find ways of including those staying at home, as well as those walking the Pilgrim’s Way. This is where creativity comes in, to engage not only the congregation but also the wider community with the concept of pilgrimage. Here are some ideas, ones that we used to get everyone involved in pilgrimage, including those who are not able to participate in the walk.

The weaving project

A member of our congregation, who is an artist, came up with the idea of making a woven hanging made from strips of coloured fabric, predominantly in church colours of red, purple, gold, green and white, to represent the life journeys of all that helped to make it. When finished, it would become the altar cloth at St Stephen’s.

A portable loom was constructed with ‘warp’ threads, with the fabric strips to be woven in as the ‘weft’. We then took the loom to schools, care homes, the local museum, and to an arts festival in our area, inviting everyone we met to help make the weaving. People were asked to choose a strip of fabric and then encouraged to write a few words on the fabric, reflecting on their own life’s journey. They were then shown how to weave it into the loom. Of course, members of our congregation helped too!

Some people wrote down their favourite bible verse, others the name of a special person or place. It really touched people to do this and helped to engage them with the idea of pilgrimage, even if they weren’t a Christian. Those walking the Pilgrim’s Way also took strips of fabric with them and we asked several people we met on the road to add their reflections, which we then brought back to weave in. Canon Clare and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, also graced us by contributing to the weaving.

“O God of the journey, lift me up, press me against your cheek. Let your great love hold me and create a deep trust in me. Then set me down, God of the journey; take my hand in yours, and guide me ever so gently across the new territory of my life.”

Joyce Rupp

The weaving at a local care home
Now that the weaving is finished and has pride of place on our altar, it helps us to remember that we are all one in Christ. The altar cloth represents our interwoven stories and community.

**The pilgrimage artwork**

Another talented member of our congregation developed a visual representation for each day, a mixture of the sights and symbols that would be seen along the route that everyone could use as a prayer focus, whether or not they were walking.

There are 13 of these beautiful ‘collages’ which we also turned into colourful bunting, used in various places to draw public attention to our pilgrimage and weaving project. We also threaded cut outs of the scallop shell artwork through ribbons to identify us as pilgrims and used the various images as gifts to the churches who hosted us along the Pilgrim’s Way as well as to illustrate this booklet!

**The pilgrim blog**

An IT-savvy member of the congregation put together a simple blog site where we could post photos and messages to each other. It was a good way for non-walkers to see what the walkers were up to and for the walkers to feel connected to those at home.

Each day we posted the day’s visual, as well as bible readings and reflection themes from the prayer booklet that we put together for everyone to use. We also posted a link to the pilgrim blog on our church website which you can see at [www.shottermillparish.org.uk](http://www.shottermillparish.org.uk)

Our blog also became a form of witness to a much wider, indeed international community. We were amazed that it got over 3,000 hits in 28 countries!

**The postcard**

One extra collage was produced to show the entire route, from Winchester to Canterbury, shown on the cover of this booklet. We used this image to produce a postcard which explained a bit more about our pilgrimage, why we were doing it and inviting people to follow us on the pilgrim blog. Each postcard had a little foot with the address of our blog site glued to it. We invited people who we gave the card to detach the foot and put it somewhere meaningful for them, again helping them to engage in the spirit of pilgrimage.

These postcards proved a huge hit with those staying at home and with people we met through the weaving project or when walking the Pilgrim’s Way. They become a real tool for evangelism too, providing us with the opportunity to talk to non-Christians about our faith.
Joint send-offs and celebrations

A Pilgrim’s Picnic was arranged for the Sunday afternoon before the pilgrimage began to which all were invited. It also gave us a chance to work on the altar cloth weaving and for everyone to feel involved. People were invited to a prayer send-off for the walkers which gave us another opportunity to come together as a church family. Most of all, those at home were able to come to Canterbury by coach for a reunion lunch with the walking pilgrims and a special Celebration Service at Canterbury cathedral. This allowed over 30 non-walking pilgrims to also participate in the highlight of the pilgrimage.
Chapter 4: Walking the Pilgrim’s Way

**Iona Pilgrim’s Prayer**

*Our brother Jesus, you set our feet upon the way and sometimes where you lead we do not like or understand.*  
*Bless us with courage where the way is fraught with dread or danger;*  
*Bless us with graceful meetings where the way is lonely;*  
*Bless us with good companions where the way demands a common cause;*  
*Bless us with night vision where we travel in the dark, keen hearing where we have not sight, to hear the reassuring sounds of fellow travellers,*  
*Bless us with humour – we cannot travel lightly weighed down with gravity;*  
*Bless us with humility to learn from those around us;*  
*Bless us with decisiveness where we must move with speed;*  
*Bless us with lazy moments, to stretch and rest and savour;*  
*Bless us with love, given and received;*  
*And bless us with your presence, even when we know it in your absence.*  
*Lead us into exile,*  
*Until we find that on the road is where you are,*  
*And where you are is going home.*  
*Bless us, lead us, love us, bring us home bearing the gospel of life.*

*Kathy Galloway (Iona Community)*

In this section, we would like to provide a ‘taste’ of what it was like to walk each day of the pilgrimage based on our walking journal and reconnaissance notes. This might help you to identify what days are best for the less fit or those with little time who nonetheless want to come along for particularly special days.

The places we stayed were all suitable for groups and chosen where possible to be either Christian or low cost. (Our suggestions for accommodation can be found in an Appendix to this booklet.)
Day 1: Winchester to Alresford

How far we walked

This is a 9 mile walk, mostly on level ground with a fair amount of road walking. It is one of the easiest days to walk and suitable in parts for buggies. However, it would require a moderate level of fitness to walk the whole day.

What we experienced

The 18th century diarist William Cobbett describes the countryside here as ‘a vale of meadows’ and so it is to this day. After a lovely prayer send off from the St Stephen’s congregation (reading aloud the above Iona Pilgrim’s Prayer), and sharing lifts by car, our first stop was St Cross Hospital in Winchester, which in medieval times was the traditional meeting place for pilgrims. We then walked through beautiful water meadows to Winchester Cathedral where we visited the tomb of St Swithun, the patron saint of the cathedral. One of the canons officiated at a special service to commission our pilgrimage, reading from Cardinal Basil Hume’s wonderful book To be a Pilgrim. He even allowed our well-behaved ‘pilgrim dog’ to sit in on the service!

We then followed the St Swithun’s Way, through more water meadows along the River Itchen, through beautiful valleys full of wildflowers, sheep and pigs (!) and several villages—many have ancient churches with pilgrim connections, such as St Swithun’s Church at Martyr Worthy (where we ate our packed lunches). We finished our walk at the lovely village of Alresford, known for its watercress which we saw growing in the River Itchen. There’s one point where you have to ford the river but fortunately there’s a little bridge to help you.

The St Swithun’s Way, which runs from Winchester to Farnham, is well signposted with waymarks showing the scallop shell, the traditional symbol of pilgrimage, and two croziers representing St Swithun and St Thomas à Beckett.

Don’t miss

St Cross Hospital, Winchester is a medieval almshouse of ‘noble poverty’, where pilgrims are given the Wayfarer’s Dole of bread and ale to mark the start of their pilgrimage; tours of this beautiful 12th century medieval charitable foundation, home of the Black and Red brothers, can also be arranged. http://stcrosshospital.co.uk/

Winchester Cathedral has been a place of pilgrimage for over 1200 years in honour of St Swithun, a saint known for his good works and legacy to British summer weather. His burial on a wet day in mid-July prompted the saying ‘St Swithun’s day if thou dost rain, for forty days it will remain. St Swithun’s day if
thou be fair, for forty days ‘twill rain na mair.’ You can visit the spot that marked his tomb (destroyed in the Reformation) in the Cathedral.

Where we ate

We brought packed lunches the first day, which seemed easiest and cheapest. We arranged a first night pilgrim’s dinner at Old Alresford Place, run by the diocese of Winchester, where we also spent the night.

Where we slept

Old Alresford Place is a beautiful Georgian house which has now been turned into a retreat and conference centre, as well as offices for the diocese of Winchester. It is also where the Mother’s Union was founded. We had lovely single and double rooms and were able to join everyone who works there for morning chapel. In the garden, pilgrims are invited to place a stone on a mound while prayerfully seeking God’s guidance and presence. [http://www.oldalresfordplace.co.uk/]
Day 2: Alresford to Alton

*How far we walked*

This is a 12 mile stretch of beautiful rural countryside, primarily through farmers’ fields and flower meadows. There is a steep stretch through Alton pass that is heavily wooded (full of bluebells and wild garlic when we walked through it, a powerful scent combination!) and lots of stiles but otherwise fairly level walking, of moderate difficulty.

*What we experienced*

This is an area full of sheep and we spotted one poor little lamb with its head stuck in a feed bucket. We rescued it and you have never seen a lamb run so fast to its mum. Chawton, a beautiful village close to Alton, was the home of Jane Austen, her mother and sister are buried in the churchyard, where we held our evening prayer, very grateful to sit down on the lush grass in the sunshine after a very long day. Some of us cheated and got lifts to St Lawrence Church in Alton where we finished our walk. The vicar gave us a fascinating tour round the church, including their new, modern ‘pod’ which houses meeting rooms and a kitchen—truly a blend of ancient and modern!

*Don’t miss*

Jane Austen’s house in Chawton is a treat for booklovers and there is an excellent teashop, Cassandra’s across the road: [http://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/](http://www.jane-austens-house-museum.org.uk/)

St Lawrence Church, Alton is a lively, thriving church with an ancient but sad history as it was the scene of a bloody battle during the Civil War. You can still see musket ball and spike damage to the church walls and door.

*Where we ate*

Be warned—there are very few places to eat along this stretch. If it hadn’t been for the very friendly and well stocked post office and village store in Ropley, we would have starved! The people there seemed very interested in the fact we were on pilgrimage and we enjoyed talking to them about it, handing out our postcards and inviting them to place the little feet somewhere special. Once you get to Chawton and Alton, you’ll be spoiled for choice with plenty of pubs and restaurants.
Where we slept

We slept on the St Lawrence Church hall floor—thank goodness for the nursery school mats! When you are a very tired pilgrim, a warm welcome and roof over your head is really all you need. But there are also plenty of pubs and B&Bs in Alton if you prefer.

Bluebell woods near Alton
Day 3: Alton to Farnham

How far we walked

This is another long (13 mile) walk of moderate difficulty, primarily off road through farm fields, full of rapeseed (which was in brilliant yellow flower in May) and wheat. It is charming countryside that is never too far from the River Wey, providing lots of swimming opportunities for any pilgrim dogs.

What we experienced

We started our day in early morning prayer, in joyful fellowship with St Lawrence Church. We were pleased to see that their youth group was also going on pilgrimage, but in reverse order to ours—from Alton to Winchester—and in half the time! We then visited the lovely church at Holybourne, leaving them one of our postcards and little fee, headed off into the fields for a few miles and then had a welcome coffee stop at the very comfortable Anchor Inn in Lower Froyle. As it was a day of heavy showers, we appreciated sheltering at St Mary’s Church, Bentley, where there is also an ancient yew tree, bent over so low it needs lots of support (a bit like us in the wind and rain). Brilliant sunshine greeted us on the hills overlooking Farnham, making the tarmac steam and the wet leaves shimmer. We arrived in Farnham, where the walk finished, just in time to avoid a heavy hailstorm which left the pavements covered in ice. It was truly a day to be reminded of John Bunyan’s hymn: ‘Come wind, come weather...to be a pilgrim’.

Don’t miss

This is a day simply to enjoy the countryside and the local churches, which are helpfully left open for pilgrim visitors.

Farnham Castle, which used to be the home of the Bishops of Winchester, is one of the most historical buildings in the South of England. The Keep is under the management of English Heritage and can be visited. http://www.farnhamcastle.com/

Where we ate

We bought provisions in Alton and had our picnic lunch sitting on a log, sheltering from the rain. The Anchor Inn in Lower Froyle would also make a good lunch stop. http://www.anchorinnatlowerfroyle.co.uk/default.asp
Where we slept

We had planned to stay at the Puttenham Eco Camping Barn which, unexpectedly, was temporarily closed before our visit. Fortunately, we were shown wonderful kindness and hospitality by local residents who put us up for the night. Having a hot shower and real bed felt positively glorious! The camping barn is now back in business and would make a wonderful and inexpensive stop over, although you will need a lift back to the starting line for the next day’s walk from Farnham.

http://www.puttenhamcampingbarn.co.uk/

Emerging from the rape fields, very common along the Pilgrim’s Way
Day 4: Farnham to Guildford

How far we walked

Leaving the St Swithun’s Way behind, this 11 mile starting stretch of the North Downs Way is of moderate difficulty, taking in Runfold Wood nature reserve, Puttenham Common and the pretty villages of Puttenham and Compton (both with pilgrim churches), before reaching Guildford.

What we experienced

We were joined on this stretch by several day pilgrims as it is near to our home. On the outskirts of Farnham, at Runfold Wood, we were met by a ranger with the Surrey Wildlife Trust, who helped us to tune into the natural world around us. Within a few minutes we had spotted two rarities: a birdsnest orchid and townhall clock flower. Both are so easily overlooked yet are so beautiful and intricate when examined up close. We then followed the path through the lush bluebell woods of Puttenham Common, descending into the village of Puttenham, which was a popular stop for medieval pilgrims. Indeed, one of the old village houses has a serving hatch which was supposedly used to offer pilgrims a drink as they walked past.

We then followed the route until we reached an underpass to the A3, marked with a large cross, and headed for St Nicholas Church in Compton. By then we were soaked to the skin and exceeding grateful for the fabulous tea and cakes provided by the congregation—who had also kindly turned on all the radiators, even though it was late May, for us to dry out our jackets, mittens and hats! We were also treated to a fascinating talk about the pilgrim history of the church and were able to have a good look round before we left to trudge up a few final hills and, at last, gratefully descend into Guildford with its ruined pilgrim church of St Catherine’s and beautiful water meadows.

Don’t miss

St Nicholas Church in Compton is truly extraordinary. It is perhaps the best preserved pilgrim church on route where you can still see and touch all of the crosses and other ‘graffiti’ left by medieval pilgrims on their way to Canterbury—and a knight on his way to Jerusalem. A mostly Norman church, St Nicholas may have once contained a shrine as it has a rare double sanctuary and the oldest wooden balustrade in Britain, as well as two anchorite cells—for an extreme form of enclosed prayer life, practiced during the middle ages. http://www.stnicholas-compton.org.uk/
Where we ate

The Good Intent pub makes a welcome lunch stop in Puttenham, serving homemade soup and sandwiches, and is used to serving walkers with dogs and muddy boots. A bit further along, the Watts Gallery tea room, which is also en route, is a real treat. There are numerous pubs and restaurants in Guildford for your evening meal.

Where we slept

We spent a warm and comfortable night at St Saviour’s Church, Guildford, having been greeted first by one of the churchwarden’s and fed a wonderful meal cooked by the congregation. If sleeping on a mat or zedbed (provided once again by the thoughtful congregation) doesn’t appeal, there are plenty of B&Bs in the Guildford area.

Day 5: Guildford to Westhumble

How far we walked

This 13 mile stretch goes up a steep hill to St Martha’s (pilgrim) Church, Chilworth, and along the North Downs to Ranmore Common nature reserve, with beautiful views onto Dorking. This day’s walk is of moderate difficulty with a few steep places.

What we experienced

After morning worship at St Saviour’s Church in Guildford, we headed out into glorious sunshine (somewhat late as one pilgrim was unfortunately locked inside the church!), walking rather briskly in order to meet the verger of St Martha’s Church, on a hilltop above Chilworth, who told us about its fascinating pilgrim history, with yet more crosses to be seen carved into some of the walls and stonework. Through local clergy, we had been introduced to a woman who has a real vision for her area, near Abinger Hammer, to be a place of pilgrimage and peace. She invited us to pray with her and told us more about her vision, and the charities she supports, and kindly sent us off with tea and cakes, as we headed for the nature reserve of Ranmore Common where we ended the day’s walk, just short of Westhumble.
Don’t miss

Some say that the area between Guildford and Westhumble was the inspiration for John Bunyan’s ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’, full of hill and dale (although no ‘Slough of Despond’). It is certainly beautiful, with viewpoints from St Martha’s Church and Newlands Corner.

There is a special place near Pickett’s Hole where there is a long line of yew trees, which tradition says were planted by pilgrims pointing the way to Canterbury. There is a viewpoint with a bench under these trees called ‘God’s seat’ where one can look down on Dorking and simply soak up the beauty of His Creation.

Where we ate

Once again we preferred to picnic with provisions purchased in Guildford. Alternatively, there is a good café for walkers at Newlands Corner, which also has picnic benches. Our support vehicle had the ingredients for dinner and the next morning’s breakfast waiting at the end of our day’s walk, which we then carried to our youth hostel in Ranmore Common, where we spent the night.

Where we slept

Tanner’s Hatch youth hostel can only be approached on foot and is situated in the middle of Ranmore Common, run by the National Trust and known for its birds and butterflies. There are separate dorms for men and women and lovely communal areas for lounging in front of a fire. Our pilgrims enjoyed meeting other people staying at the hostel, including a young American chap who had lost his credit cards and was waiting for more funds to be wired from home. We made sure he at least had plenty of food to eat, sharing our meals with him. http://www.yha.org.uk/hostel/tanners-hatch

Having a tour of the pilgrim church of St Martha’s, Chilworth
Day 6: Westhumble to Merstham

How far we walked

Although it’s only officially 10 miles from Westhumble to Merstham, it felt a lot longer as we had an extra two miles coming from Tanner’s Hatch and the day’s route has some very steep stretches, especially up Box Hill and Colley Hill. Be prepared for the toughest climbs of the pilgrimage, but rewarded by wonderful views and a walk through several nature reserves known for rare orchids, butterflies and bats! We considered this to be a moderate to difficult stretch.

What we experienced

It was a gloriously sunny and warm day as we set off from Tanner’s Hatch towards Dorking, taking in the lush scenery around Denbies vineyards (which unfortunately we didn’t have time to visit). Coming into the village of Westhumble on the outskirts of Dorking, at the foot of Box Hill, we had to cross the River Mole, at the same spot where medieval pilgrims are thought to have crossed. There are stepping stones to help so no one needs to get their feet wet. Then it’s a steep climb up Box Hill, with lots of little steps carved into the hillside to help weary pilgrims.

At the top, we were met by Steve, another ranger with Surrey Wildlife Trust, who offered to walk with us for a few miles along his ‘patch’—pointing out flora and fauna as we went and explaining some of the land management issues he is responsible for, from tree clearance to keeping people from stealing the local peregrine falcons. Steve was very interested to know more about our pilgrimage, even though he isn’t a Christian, and joined us for our noontime worship, having first led us to a very special hidden glade which was the perfect place to praise the Lord. Perhaps we left him with a little mustard seed of faith as he really seemed to enjoy being with us and said it made him think about his work, which is caring for Creation, in a whole new way.
Don’t miss

Box Hill has beautiful views but there’s something special about nearby Brockham Lime Works, a reclaimed quarry, which speaks of God’s ability to renew and restore our lives—and his world.

The Millennium Standing Stones, erected by the Jerusalem Trust, stand just outside of Merstham and look like a mini ‘Stonehenge’. Several of the ‘stones’ have Christian text carved into them, from the words of St John’s gospel to the sayings of St Augustine. We held our evening prayer seated in the middle of them.

Where we ate

By the time we got to Merstham, we were so tired we couldn’t even walk to a pub or restaurant, let alone cook, so we were grateful to be able to call a take away Indian and have them deliver our meal!

Where we slept

St Katharine’s Church, Merstham, very kindly let us use their church hall as our home for the night. It had all we needed for a cosy stay and we all slept very soundly on the floor. We were glad to have brought along foam pads and air mattresses!

Day 7: Merstham to Oxted

How far we walked

If you follow the route in the North Downs Way guidebook, this stretch is a relatively short (8 miles) and gentle walk of moderate difficulty—much appreciated after the exhausting walk the previous day. Although it’s not as scenic a walk as many of the days, with the M25 often in sight and in earshot, it still passes through some idyllic places. Much of the walk is level but there is one steep descent with 120 steps. (Our group made a navigational error and wound up walking an extra 2 miles to meet our support vehicle!)

What we experienced

Once again, we were so blessed by the kindness shown by our church hosts. The churchwarden at St Katharine’s gave us a tour round this 13th century church, with its whitewashed interior and beautiful quilted wall hangings, where we also held our morning prayer. Having our prayers interrupted by a phone call made us realise the importance of keeping calls to certain times of the day, except for
emergencies. From then on, we made it a rule to only allow calls before 10am and after 6pm to avoid their intrusiveness.

Our walk took us into high farmland, with fields full of butterflies and curious young beef cattle, through beautiful woods with masses of wild garlic, and then to the Caterham Viewpoint where we had a picnic lunch. From there we started our descent, passing Godstone Vineyards, down a steep flight of steps with a good view of trains going into the Oxted Railway Tunnel, and then concluded our walk along the sloping Oxted Downs, with a steep final stretch up Botley Hill.

We were glad to have a lift waiting for us, a real luxury, to take us to our accommodation at Oak Hall, a Christian centre further along in Otford, where we held our evening prayer and were able to look out of vast windows across the garden of Kent.

A true blessing of pilgrimage is being able to learn from each other. One of our pilgrims was not from St Stephen’s but a member of the local Quaker church. Over dinner, she told us about the Quaker spiritual discipline of ‘focussing on the light’—in other words not letting details distract you from being Christ-centred. The story of Martha and Mary illustrates the point beautifully with busyness and ‘sweating over the small stuff’ so often keeping us from discerning God’s will.

**Don’t miss**

Chaldon Church, which is a short detour off the route but clearly marked, has 800 year old wall paintings, reputedly, the oldest in England, showing a grisly depiction of Heaven and Hell—all in graphic reds and blacks. It is believed that many pilgrims went to see these paintings on the way to Canterbury ‘for the good of their souls’.

Sadly, we had to give these paintings a miss as we got off to a late start and had to make up for lost time.

**Where we ate**

We bought provisions in Merstham and had a lovely picnic lunch, followed by prayer, at the Caterham Viewpoint. As we were in Otford at dinnertime, we wandered into town for a pub meal at the Bull’s Head. However, those staying in Oxted also have a choice of numerous restaurants and pubs.

Oak Hall also made sure we were welcomed with cake and hot drinks with bedtime snacks also provided!
**Where we slept**

We opted to stay two nights at Oak Hall Christian Centre in Otford, one day’s hike further along. However, this did add to the logistics of getting there and returning to our starting point back in Oxted the following day. Thank goodness for the support vehicle!

Oak Hall (also known as Otford Manor) is a converted mansion that used to be owned by Mr Lyle (the sugar magnate), and has extensive facilities including wonderful places for bible study and worship as well as a number of single and double rooms. They also serve excellent food although their kitchen is closed on Monday nights. [http://www.oakhall.co.uk/pages/manor.asp](http://www.oakhall.co.uk/pages/manor.asp)

**Day 8: Oxted to Otford**

**How far we walked**

This felt like a very long day (12 miles), made worse by relentless rain. It is also the day when you pass, at long last, from Surrey into Kent—marked by a striking sculpture. Once you’re in Kent, you’ll also start seeing milestones telling you how much further it is to Canterbury! The route goes up hill and down dale, with yet more trekking along sloping downlands. This can play havoc on weak ankles! It is mostly off road although you will see more stretches of the M25. Ultimately you’ll end up in picturesque Otford, where St Thomas à Becket used to have an archbishop’s palace—the ruins of which are still visible. We deemed this to be a moderate to difficult walking day, especially as there’s a steep slope at the end up to Oak Manor, just beyond Otford.

**What we experienced**

After a hearty breakfast of porridge (much appreciated given the cold, wet weather), we started the day by joining the staff at Oak Hall with bible study and prayer. We then hired a big van to take us all back to our previous day’s end point at the carpark near Botley Hill.

Funnily enough, the rain actually helped us to focus our thoughts and steps so, spiritually, it was quite a powerful day. As we walked, we spotted several deer in a field which didn’t seem to mind our presence. Just as we were crossing a gap in a hedge, a car stopped and a young man with an East European accent rolled down his window to ask if we were pilgrims. He was fascinated by what we were doing and
wanted to know more. We were very pleased to tell him the Good News and give him one of our postcards, inviting him to place his little foot somewhere special.

By lunchtime, we were truly bedraggled and soaked to the skin but the very kind owners of the Three Horseshoes Pub in Knockholt Pound took pity on us, turned on all the radiators so we could dry our clothes and kept the kitchens open well past closing time so we could have something hot to eat and drink—even though Oak Hall had also provided us with (by then rather wet) packed lunches. It was another lesson on the importance of hospitality and, once again, the people we met were very interested to know more about our pilgrimage.

The rain had stopped by the time we started out again and it was mostly downhill to the town of Otford before a steep final climb back to Oak Hall, which is right on the North Downs Way.

**Don’t miss**

Keep your eyes open walking through the streets of Otford as you will see plenty of scallop shells, the symbol of pilgrimage, carved into the old oak doors. There is also a mosaic showing the history of Otford including the life of St Thomas à Becket.

There is a legend that St Thomas (who was notoriously bad tempered) was so disturbed by a nightingale singing while he was trying to write a sermon at his palace in Otford that he cursed the bird and nightingales have not been heard there since. There are, however, plenty of ducks in the delightful pond at the centre of the village—although there is not much left of the palace, where Archbishop Cranmer later wrote his famous prayer book.

Although we did not visit it, St Botolph’s Church in Chevening, named for the patron saint of travelers, is another church associated with pilgrims. At one time, there were four altars, perhaps to cater for all the pilgrims that went there.

**Where we ate**

We hurried back to Oak Hall in time to have a hearty dinner in their Tudor dining room in front of a roaring fire, all seated together round a big table.

**Where we slept**

Sleeping two nights in the same place—in a bed—seemed a real luxury, as did the hot showers after a cold, wet day.
Day 9: Otford to Cuxton

How far we walked

This is one of the longest walking days, of moderate difficulty. The North Downs Way guide book says it’s a 15 miler but we reckoned it’s closer to 17 miles. It helped to start from Oak Hall which is right on the North Downs Way. Conditions under foot were pretty treacherous though, and it times it felt like we were cross country skiing through mud.

What we experienced

Unity was the theme discussed at our joint prayer and bible study in the morning at Oak Hall and it seemed very apt for the whole day. As we were a small group for this stretch, it felt right to be a close knit, pilgrim community—talking and chatting, interspersed with quiet times for contemplative prayer.

Some of us had been praying for ‘eventful encounters’ and we bumped into a couple, not far from Cuxton, who asked if we were the pilgrims coming to stay at their church. The wife was so intrigued that she came to join us the following day for morning prayer.

Don’t miss

The lovely town of Wrotham (pronounced Rootham) has the ruins of another archbishop’s palace—and well maintained public toilets (much appreciated).

Near Trosley Country Park are the prehistoric Coldrum stones, at one of the wildest places along the North Downs Way. There are also several ancient yew trees to be found on the route.
Where we ate

There’s an excellent café at Trosley Country Park to have lunch. We had dinner at the White Hart, a friendly pub in Cuxton which didn’t seem to mind our muddy boots, and we were very grateful to have a pint in front of a log fire.

Where we slept

We had a warm welcome from St Michael & All Angels at Cuxton, who let us sleep in their church hall. After evening prayer, we welcomed a good night’s sleep after our very long day of walking.

Thank goodness for walking sticks!
Day 10: Cuxton to Detling

How far we walked

This 12 mile stretch includes noisy motorways as well as quiet countryside lanes, with the sound of skylarks. It is of moderate difficulty.

What we experienced

It is one of the great joys of pilgrimage to share in Christian fellowship with other churches along the Pilgrim’s Way and experience many different forms of worship. Cuxton church invited us to join them for matins which, for many of us, was the first time we’d experienced this type of service.

We were promised sun in the weather forecast but got drenching rain instead. The day’s theme in our prayer booklet was ‘encouragement’ and if there was ever a day we needed it, it was that particular day.

The route from Cuxton passes first through Ranscombe Farm nature reserve but soon leads to a busy stretch of road where you can see Eurostar whooshing by, and then onto the M2 which you walk beside to cross the River Medway. It is a relief to eventually leave the noise behind and head again into the Kent hills, where we passed through some lush nature reserves.

After lunch and coffee at the Robin Hill pub near Chatham, we came to Blue Bell Hill, an area known for its wildflowers and butterflies, and then to Kits Coty House, the ancient burial site of a Celtic leader. Then it’s a walk through woods and farmland to reach Detling, a pretty village that’s rather spoiled by the A249 running next to it.

We met our support vehicle at the Cock Horse pub and were driven to Aylesford Priory where we were staying. We held evening prayer in the lovely guest lounge at the Priory.

Don’t miss

This area is full of nature reserves and Neolithic sites (Kits Coty House and the White Stone), an interesting mix!

Aylesford Priory was founded in 1242 and has been welcoming pilgrims for centuries. It even has a Pilgrim’s Hall where medieval pilgrims were fed and given straw pallets to sleep on, as well as protection from bandits! Following the dissolution of the monasteries, the Priory was left deserted for centuries. But the monks returned in 1949 and the Priory is once more a thriving Carmelite community where both Catholic and Protestant pilgrims are welcome to join in whatever activities and worship are taking place, including mass. Several of our pilgrims like to sing and hugely enjoyed being invited to rehearse with the chapel choir. There is a fabulous library for guests to sprawl out on sofas and chairs and read to their hearts content.
Where we ate

We bought provisions in Cuxton and had a picnic lunch at the Robin Hood pub near Chatham. At Aylesford Priory we had a simple meal of bangers and mash, joining other pilgrims for our evening meal.

Where we slept

We slept at Aylesford Priory in what used to be monk’s cells with high windows and narrow beds and enjoyed the huge, deep bathtubs to warm up in. http://www.thefriars.org.uk/

Day 11: Detling to Lenham

How far we walked

This stretch is a ‘mere’ 9 miler but it is a walk of two definite parts. The first 4 miles are difficult indeed with long uphill stretches but the last 5 miles are pure joy—flat walking on tarmac roads with little traffic, alongside fields of cereal crops. With sunny skies and a gentle wind blowing, it was a joy to hear and watch the sky larks, swooping low over green waves of grain. (Less able walkers might want to meet up at the Dirty Habit pub in Hollingbourne and do the second, easier part only.)

What we experienced

After a communal breakfast and morning prayer, we were delighted to have Father Michael take us on a tour of the Priory. He told us about the history of the Carmelite monks, who take their name from Mt Carmel where they originated, first as hermits at the time of the Desert Fathers in the early days of Christianity. They have a close identification with the prophet Elijah and a strong dedication to the Virgin Mary. Although they are a Roman Catholic order, the Carmelites welcome all Christians to stay and worship with them in community. They provide a pilgrimage centre for those coming to honour Catholic saints, as well as those walking the Pilgrim’s Way.

Our support vehicle then drove us back to Detling to begin the day’s walk, up hilly terrain that was so lush and green, and so full of wild flowers (speedwell, buttercups, campion, bugle and dandelions), we had to keep reminding ourselves we weren’t in the Alps. A herd of cows with very long horns weren’t too pleased to see us so close to their calves so we were careful to keep our distance—with walking sticks to the ready, but fortunately not needed!
This is a stretch that closely follows the original Pilgrim’s Way and it was a joy to be on the same path where so many feet have trod, thinking of the communion of saints who have gone before us. The last stretch to Lenham is a joy, with easy walking and good companionship much appreciated pleasures!

**Don’t miss**

The Dirty Habit pub in Hollingbourne is where pilgrims have wined and dined since the 11th century. It is also right on the Pilgrim’s Way and makes a delightful treat and half-way stop, if only for a drink. Muddy boots and dogs are welcome. [http://www.elitepubs.com/the_dirtyhabit/](http://www.elitepubs.com/the_dirtyhabit/)

Brother Percival—a friendly wooden statue, resting on a bench at Pilgrim’s Rest—is waiting to greet weary pilgrims on the outskirts of Lenham. He makes a great photostop!

Lenham is a very pleasant village with interesting shops and an excellent pub, the Dog & Bear which is walker and dog friendly.

**Where we ate**

This is a day spent largely away from towns and villages so you’ll need to buy provisions in Detling and picnic—or eat at the Dirty Habit, which we enjoyed doing!

**Where we slept**

We stayed at the Palace Farm hostel in Doddington, which is approximately 4 miles from Lenham, our finishing point. It is an eco-friendly hostel next to a farm and our pilgrims had two big rooms with bunkbeds which suited us nicely. There is a large kitchen where we cooked our dinner and a communal lounge which we shared with merry visitors from France. Once again, they wanted to know all about our pilgrimage, which we tried to explain in our best French! [http://www.palacefarm.com/](http://www.palacefarm.com/)

If hostel-style accommodation is not to your taste, the Dog & Bear at Lenham is also a good place to stay (dogs also welcome). [http://www.shepherdneame.co.uk/pubs/lenham/dog-bear-hotel](http://www.shepherdneame.co.uk/pubs/lenham/dog-bear-hotel)

**Day 12: Lenham to Chilham**

**How far we walked**

This is a long, long day—easily the longest of all. Officially the route is ‘only’ 15 miles but our walkers insisted that it was more like 18 miles. Fortunately, the walking is mostly of moderate difficulty, although there’s a steep stretch near the end. It is also a day where you are mostly walking on
the original Pilgrim’s Way. There is a good pick up point at Boughton Lees, after about 10 miles, for those who don’t want to walk all the way.

**What we experienced**

Although requiring perseverance, this is a delightful walk and it is amazing how you quickly spot when you are on the Pilgrim’s Way proper. It does have a special feel about it, a green tunnel with slightly rounded sides, often on a natural shelf above the muddy valley floor but below the hilltop, sheltered from the wind. Those pilgrims were smart!

We had lots of St Stephen’s pilgrims joining us for the final two-day approach into Canterbury. We headed out of Lenham through fields of yellow rape flowers, stopping at the chalk cross carved into the hillside above the town as a First World War memorial. It had to be camouflaged during the 2nd World War, to avoid the attention of German bombers.

Our next stop was Charing where there is a library with (much needed) public toilets and extensive ruins of another archbishop’s palace, where Henry VIII rested on his way to the Field of Cloth of Gold in France. Next to the palace is the 13th century church of St Peter and St Paul, whose claim to fame is that it used to house the block on which John the Baptist was executed, according to tradition.

It is then a long slog, through Eastwell Park, passing the ruins of St Mary’s Church where Richard III’s illegitimate son is supposedly buried, to Boughton Lees—where there is an important turning, easily missed, onto the Canterbury loop of the North Downs Way. Otherwise, you’ll wind up in Dover!

Just beyond Boughton Lees is the atmospheric church of All Saints at Boughton Aluph. This 13th century church has a covered porch which was the traditional meeting place of pilgrims who wished to band together for safety before going into King’s Wood, a notorious hideout for bandits. The covered porch is still there as a reminder of the days when pilgrimage was very dangerous and there was a real need for safety in numbers.

To this day, King’s Wood is a dark and spooky place and it is easy to imagine robbers and brigands ready to leap out and attack poor unsuspecting pilgrims. It seems to go on for miles and it is a relief, at the very end, to be able to spot the Bell Harry tower of Canterbury Cathedral if you’re lucky enough to be walking on a clear day. After coming such a long way, it is a cause for celebration to finally see your destination, looming in the distance some 10 miles away!

Having gone through Jane Austen’s village of Chawton earlier in the pilgrimage, it is an interesting coincidence to now be passing her brother’s estate of Godmersham Park, which Jane came to visit.

The day’s long walk ends at the pretty village of Chilham, with its lovely church and 15th century castle. A pint at the White Horse pub helped to revive us and we were then taken, by support vehicle, to our accommodation—where a much appreciated barbeque and bonfire were waiting for us to have a last night Pilgrim’s Party.
**Don’t miss**

Charing’s archbishop’s palace, although now in ruins and turned into a farmhouse, is still very grand and it was evidently one of St Thomas à Becket’s favourite places to stay.

All Saints Church at Boughton Aluph still has the covered porch where pilgrims would gather to travel together through King’s Wood, hoping that there would be greater safety in numbers. It is a poignant reminder of the perils of pilgrimage in medieval times.

**Where we ate**

Lenham has several stores for buying picnic provisions and we had our lunch in the public park at Charing near the palace. Alternatively, there are several places to purchase lunch in both Lenham and Charing and dinner in Chilham. There is also a good pub in Boughton Lees, the Flying Horse, which welcomes walkers and dogs—and where tired walkers can wait for the support vehicle to pick them up, if they want to finish early.

Pilgrims joining us for the party and final approach into Canterbury were in charge of bringing and cooking dinner, a spectacular barbeque which we enjoyed while seated round a campfire. During evening prayer, as was our normal practice, we shared reflections of the day and the pilgrimage. Danny encouraged us to practice the spiritual discipline of ‘examination’ on our return—prayerfully thinking about the points in the day when God has seemed particularly close as well as far away, and seeking to learn from these experiences.

**Where we slept**

We stayed at Brenley Farm Bunkbarn, a converted Georgian barn with upstairs dorm rooms, which is perfect for large groups. It housed over 20 of us very comfortably, with enough showers for everyone. We also made good use of the huge kitchen and farmhouse table, as well as the outdoor barbeque and campfire area. Brenley Farm Bunkbarn is approximately 4 miles from Chilham. [http://www.brenley-farm.co.uk/bunkbarn.html](http://www.brenley-farm.co.uk/bunkbarn.html)
Day 13: Chilham to Canterbury!

How far we walked

The last day is a short one, which is a blessing as everyone is so keen to get to the Cathedral. At 7 miles, it should take no longer than 3 hours to reach the Cathedral from Chilham. Other than a few uphill slopes, the majority of the walk is of moderate difficulty, over gently rolling farmland through fruit and hop orchards. It was easy enough for a six year old to join us, who was able to do the full walk without being carried.

What we experienced

We had a beautiful, sunny day for our final approach into Canterbury. Leaving the lovely village of Chilham, the route goes through Old Wives Lees and then through large orchards of apple and plum trees, which were in blossom. It is an area heavily reliant on migrant workers, who live in caravan parks on the farms, which we also passed.

We then wound our way through fields and down a narrow path, thick with cow parsley and lined with pollarded trees. Just before you get to Canterbury there is a community apple orchard and nature reserve called No Man’s Land, the last bit of countryside on the Pilgrim’s Way.

Soon the Cathedral was in sight right before us and the route led us through housing estates and then over a stream with a footbridge into St Peter’s Street, where we tied a banner onto our walking sticks, festooned with ribbons.

Canon Clare, who had given us so much help preparing for our pilgrimage, was waiting to greet us at the West Gate entrance to the Cathedral grounds. Many of us felt completely overwhelmed on reaching the Cathedral, with tears of joy streaming down our faces.

To our amazement, a champagne reception was waiting for us and we then headed for the Cathedral Lodge for lunch where we were joined by several other members from St Stephen’s who had come by coach. Some of Canon Clare’s parishioners, who had also walked the Pilgrim’s Way, were also there to greet us and with gracious hospitality served us home-made desserts to finish our meal.

All sixty of us, walkers and non-walkers, including some in wheelchairs, then headed to the Cathedral for Evensong. This was followed by a Prayer Meditation around the Cathedral, reflecting on God’s
welcoming embrace, giving thanks for our baptism, celebrating the life of St Thomas, and reflecting on our experience of pilgrimage—what would come next and what we had learned. We then took communion in the ‘quire’, in a special Celebration Service, led by Canon Clare and Danny.

We returned home by coach and private car, exhausted but elated by all that we had seen and done.

The pilgrimage thus finished on a ‘real high’. It has brought us closer together as a church, showered us with blessings and created precious memories for the congregation. But, as Canon Clare has reminded us, the end of pilgrimage is also the start of the next stage, the ‘what next’ to lead us closer to Christ as a church and in our own personal journeys.

**Don’t miss**

Canterbury Cathedral is the mother church of the Church of England and has been the centre of Christian worship since St Augustine brought Christianity to these isles in 587AD. From the chapel of St Thomas to the medieval stained glass windows, to the delights of the Canterbury choir singing evensong, it is an extraordinary place of Christian worship, witness and peace.

Time did not permit us to visit St Martin’s Church where St Augustine set up his mission and which is the oldest church still used for worship in the country.

**Where we ate**

We had a special lunch in the Canterbury Lodge, which we pre-ordered, giving us a chance to come together again as a church family with walkers and non-walkers together.

Alternatively, there are a wide variety of restaurants and pubs in Canterbury for pilgrims arriving at their destination.

*Our youngest pilgrim, worn out by the day’s exertions*
Chapter 5: Coming Home

Coming back from an intensive pilgrimage experience can be pretty bewildering. After feeling so refreshed in your faith and fully alive in Christ, you come back on a high only to come crashing down to earth once faced with the realities of home, family and work life. You feel more inspired to serve the Lord but how? It can be a very difficult time. Hopefully, pilgrimage equips us to see such challenges in a new and different way, relying more on Christ and less on ourselves.

It is very common for returning pilgrims to feel disoriented and a bit ‘at sea’ at first. That is why it is so important to try and process all that has happened. Danny’s suggestion to us all, walkers and non-walkers, was that we try and observe 15 minutes of silence a day to help keep the spirit of pilgrimage going in our daily lives and to give us the space to continue to listen to God.

Here are some other ideas which we used and you might want to try.

Pilgrim testimony Sunday

A few weeks after returning home, Danny set aside a Sunday for everyone to share what the pilgrimage had meant to them. Both people who had experienced pilgrimage at home, as well as walkers, told others what blessings they had received. It was an incredibly moving service. Some people had found healing, others had received invaluable prayer support. Still others had mended broken relationships. Lives had obviously been enhanced and changed.

A pilgrim reunion dinner

Six weeks after returning, we brought together all the people who had been instrumental in helping organise both the walking and non-walking sides of the pilgrimage. We also invited all those who had walked most of the Pilgrim’s Way and formed the core of the walking pilgrim community. It was a way of giving thanks as well as a chance for people to talk and reflect on the pilgrimage. It is important to find such times to share pilgrim stories.

Other suggestions

The Rev Haydon Wilcox, who runs the Planning a Pilgrimage seminar for the Guildford diocese, recommends providing spiritual direction for those requesting it following a pilgrimage. He also says it can be a good time for returning pilgrims to go on discipleship courses, or to go on periodic retreats to
keep ‘processing’ what has happened to them on pilgrimage and to further develop their sense of vocation and mission.

At St Stephen’s we have followed our pilgrimage with a sermon series based on the book ‘Emotionally Healthy Spirituality’ by Peter Scazzero. http://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/ This has helped us to continue our pursuit of contemplative spirituality, to discern God’s will for us individually and as a pilgrim people.
Chapter 6: What Pilgrimage has Meant to our Congregation

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Luke 24:32

Our pilgrimage has been a time of real blessing for the St Stephen’s congregation. We hope that many more churches will try walking the Pilgrim’s Way too!

Pilgrimage has produced a flowering of gifts within the congregation. It has encouraged us to trust in the Lord, step out in faith and witness to those we meet. It has brought us closer together with other churches and denominations, sharing in different styles of Christian worship. It has helped us to learn from each other and appreciate the kindness and hospitality of strangers. It has taught us that the pilgrim spirit of living lightly, in the moment, seeking closeness to God and enjoying the fellowship of community is the path to peace.

Peace and contentment are given to those who walk in the way of the Lord!

Testimonials

Here are just a few testimonials from our returned pilgrims, as shared during our testimony Sunday:

“I had a sense of God being with us on the Pilgrim’s Way. The focus on reading the Bible and prayer were really important to me. I had an important job interview during our pilgrimage which I thought I was unlikely to get. I had the little foot, from the postcard, which I took to the interview, where I was very calm and aware of God’s presence. I prayed to know if this job was meant to be part of my journey. And I got the job!” (Sandra, a walking pilgrim)

“The trip to Canterbury Cathedral was such a huge blessing for me as it brought me back to the very beginning of my journey of faith. I had no idea that I’d be having a chance reunion at the Cathedral with my very first house group leader from more than 20 years ago. While a member of that group, I had written a pilgrim’s prayer—the same one which we’d used during our time of pilgrimage. What an amazing coincidence!” (Brenda, non-walking pilgrim)

“At the same time as the pilgrimage, I was teaching on a youth course where some of the kids had experienced some horrible things and were really broken. I was thinking ‘Lord what do I do?’ when I found my little foot in my jeans pocket. I phoned my mum and asked if all the pilgrims could pray for me and it’s incredible how God used that. The next day those kids really experienced the presence of God and were healed and at peace. It taught me that prayer can turn even the worst things into something really cool.” (Ella, away from home but connected to our pilgrimage in prayer)
“For me the best thing about the pilgrimage was enjoying the beauty of Creation, which spoke of God’s love for all that he has made. I learned so much just from watching all the animals! They have no worries, living in comfort and peace. And having a pilgrim dog come too, jumping in the water, a pure expression of joy—yet aware of where his master is. I was also very grateful for the good navigators who walked the route before us. We often don’t have a sense of where we’re going but we do have a Navigator who has an overall vision for our lives.” (Jill, walking pilgrim)

“Pilgrimage allows us to be still and separate from the busyness of life. It helps us remember to be a human being, not a human doing. To be free from all that distracts, and to be free of clamour, is what makes a walk with the Lord truly valuable. At one point, I asked the Lord for scriptural pictures for St Stephen’s. A picture was given to me of a very large field of grass and flowers to be harvested for haymaking. It made me realise that within St Stephen’s parish there is a large harvest field that still needs to be reaped. The harvest is plentiful but workers are few—we need more workers for a planned, purposeful harvest. It’s the message of the Great Commission! (Matthew 28:19-20) The three big messages for me from our pilgrimage are: be still and know that I am God; evangelism as an imperative; and prayer is integral to our life in God as a pilgrim people.” (Paul, a walking pilgrim)

“While we were on pilgrimage I received an unexpected text message from my ex-husband who I had last seen over 20 years ago. He wanted to meet up, which left me feeling very confused and uncertain about what to do. There was still a lot of lingering pain from the split. On one of the days of the pilgrimage, the theme for prayer was ‘unfinished business’ and I prayed that the Lord would show me what to do. Danny came alongside me and we talked about all the unresolved issues I still had about my failed first marriage. I also still had a necklace that my ex had given me before our break-up that I had never felt able to wear, and wanted to give it to his daughter, who I’d never met. Danny helped me to offer this situation to God and ask how best to handle it, including how to gently offer to return the necklace without causing offense. After the pilgrimage was finished, my ex and I agreed to meet. I asked for his forgiveness for causing him so much pain. And I asked if I could give his daughter the necklace. He accepted both, in good faith. I feel so relieved—a huge burden has been lifted!” (Jean, a walking pilgrim)

Becoming a pilgrim people

In his book entitled ‘Pilgrimage’, Ian Bradley identifies four marks of a pilgrim people:

- Connecting with the saints
- Being more open and welcoming, including to those on the ‘fringe’
- Providing companionship
- Being on the move—on a journey and looking forward

Over the coming months, we hope to develop these areas as a church and as individuals. Our pilgrimage has certainly given us the impetus to try new things and take on new challenges, perhaps even growing and changing our church structure. As pilgrims, we now invite Christ to lead us, and embolden us, taking our next steps into the future.
**Be the Centre**

Jesus, be the centre  
Be my source, be my light  
Jesus  

Jesus, be the centre,  
Be my hope, be my song  
Jesus  

Be the fire in my heart  
Be the wind in these sails  
Be the reason that I live  
Jesus, Jesus  

Jesus, be my vision  
Be my path, be my guide  
Jesus  

Vineyard Music
Appendices

Reconnaissance questions

St Stephen’s used a reconnaissance team to ‘pre-walk’ each section, in order to plan our logistics for the day—so there wouldn’t be any nasty surprises!

We armed each member of the team with the following list of questions which they had to answer and return. We also used these sheets on the actual walking day, to remind ourselves of all the essentials.

We asked people to rate their answers from 1 to 5 – 1 being the easiest and suitable for all, 5 being only suitable for the very fit.

1. Meeting point at the start and end of the day’s stage?
2. Easy to find?
3. Parking: on or off road? Car park?
4. Access to public transport – timings, hourly service?
5. The pathway—rough underfoot?
6. Suggested level of fitness needed for your stage?
7. Steep hills—up hill, down dale?
8. Kissing gates?
9. Stiles?
10. Width of gates, any locked gates?
11. Wet: need to cross a ford or stepping stones? Muddy/slippery?
12. Any toilet facilities along the way—or use a bush?
13. Close to overnight accommodation? Other B&Bs close by?
14. Pick up points along the way in the case of injury/fatigue? (needed approximately every 3 miles)
15. Nearest hospital with A&E?
16. Mobile reception?
17. Suitable lunch stop?
18. Any local shop/pub to sell lunches/drinks?
19. Estimate of time taken to walk, from start to finish?
20. Mileage to and from St Stephen’s church (or time taken to drive to starting point)?
21. Any places of interest, eg pilgrim churches, nature reserves? (Please note opening/closing times/costs/restrictions)
22. High and low points of your stage?
23. Anything else you think might help or you notice along the way?
**Accommodation and costs**

**WALKING THE PILGRIM’S WAY: FROM WINCHESTER TO CANTERBURY**

Here’s a summary of each day of the walk and where we stayed (or would have stayed, in the case of the temporarily closed Puttenham camping barn) and prices, excluding meals except where indicated (* indicates special Christian places; ~ means breakfast included).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ROUTE</th>
<th>DIFFICULTY</th>
<th>MILES</th>
<th>ACCOMMODATION</th>
<th>PRICE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 21 May</td>
<td>Winchester-Alresford</td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Old Alresford Place*~</td>
<td>£38/45pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, 22 May</td>
<td>Alresford-Alton</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>St Lawrence Church, Alton</td>
<td>FREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, 23 May</td>
<td>Alton-Farnham</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Puttenham camping barn</td>
<td>£14pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday, 24 May</td>
<td>Farnham-Guildford</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>St Saviour’s Church, Guildford</td>
<td>FREE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, 25 May</td>
<td>Guildford-Westhumble</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Tanner’s Hatch youth hostel</td>
<td>£18pp</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, 26 May</td>
<td>Westhumble-Merstham</td>
<td>Moderate/Difficult</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>St Katharine’s Church, Merstham</td>
<td>FREE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, 27 May</td>
<td>Merstham-Oxted</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Oak Hall Manor, Oxtford*~</td>
<td>£28/38pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, 28 May</td>
<td>Oxted-Otford</td>
<td>Moderate/Difficult</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Oak Hall Manor, Otford*~</td>
<td>£28/38pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, 29 May</td>
<td>Otford-Cuxton</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>St Michael &amp; All Angels, Cuxton</td>
<td>FREE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, 30 May</td>
<td>Cuxton-Detling</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Aylesford Priory*~</td>
<td>£35/37pp</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Difficulty Details</td>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>Location Details</td>
<td>Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, 31 May</td>
<td>Detling-Lenham</td>
<td>Difficult (first 4 miles) Easy (last 5 miles)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Palace Farm hostel, Doddington</td>
<td>£15pp~</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday, 1 June</td>
<td>Lenham-Chilham</td>
<td>Moderate (first 12 miles) Difficult (last 6 miles)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Brenley Farm Bunkbarn, Boughton</td>
<td>£14.50pp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday, 2 June</td>
<td>Chilham-Canterbury</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>None required</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Prayer Booklet

A prayer booklet was given to each member of St Stephen’s to use during our time of pilgrimage. The following excerpts show the themes, reflections and bible readings we used each day. We used the theme of the day and bible verse as our prayer focus during our 15 minutes of silence.

Day 1: Setting out into the unknown

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.” Genesis 12:1

Prayer suggestions:

Where am I starting out from? Do I want to move into fresh places with God?

Pray for a common sense of purpose and unity for all, for those walking the whole pilgrimage, for those joining part of it, for those making this journey at home.

Urged on by faith may we be like Abraham, who when he was called, obeyed, and went, even though he did not know where he was going (from Hebrews 11:8).

Day 2: Fellowship

Now that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. Luke 24:13-14

Prayer suggestions:

Pray for a common sense of purpose and unity for all, for those walking the whole pilgrimage, for those joining part of it, for those making this journey at home.

Pray for family members or those you live with. For relationships and forgiveness where needed.

Day 3: Recognising what prevents us from seeing God

As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. Luke 24:15-16

Prayer suggestions:

Pray to see God in the ordinary things and the people you encounter today.
Earth’s crammed with Heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.
(Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

Day 4: What things do we reflect on?

He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”


Sometimes God asks us to reflect on what has happened so far but his prompts also point forward to see what is happening now.

Prayer suggestions:

A time to reflect on what has happened recently and in the past that is still unfinished.

Pray to see where God has been and is at work.

Day 5: Disappointments and delays

About Jesus of Nazareth, they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.” Luke 24:19-21

Prayer suggestions:

Ask God to show you where he has been during disappointments and delay.

Ask for hope and faith in the waiting.

Pray for those doing the whole pilgrimage as they are several days in and settling into the pattern of pilgrimage.

Pray for endurance.
Day 6: Rumours of glory

In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus. He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” Luke 24:22-25

Prayer suggestions:

Ask for faith to believe all the bible tells us and we experience ourselves.

Give thanks for those who have shared their faith with us.

Ask for the courage to share with others how we have met with Jesus.

Day 7: Believing the promises of God

“Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:26-27

Prayer suggestions:

Ask for a fresh understanding of the mystery of the gospel, of a God who comes alongside and suffers with his people and yet is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Pray for those who translate and distribute the scriptures.

Day 8: Hospitality to the stranger

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. Luke 24:28-29

Prayer suggestions:

Pray that we would be a welcoming church.

Pray for the hospitality team, welcomers, and coffee volunteers who offer hospitality week by week.

Pray that we would find ways to be welcoming to all, wherever they are on their journey of faith.
Day 9: Recognising God’s presence

*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”* Luke 24:30-32

Prayer suggestions:

Pray for those you know who do not know Jesus.

Pray that their eyes would be opened and they would recognise Him.

Pray that the Holy Spirit would open the scriptures to you, that all of our hearts would “burn within us”.

Day 10: Encouraging one another

*They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread. While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”* Luke 24:33-36

Prayer suggestions:

Pray for homegroups.

Pray for those who need God’s peace at this time.

Pray for those taking communion to care homes.

Day 11: Doubts and joy

*They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. Luke 24:37-43

Prayer suggestions:

We all have times when doubts and fear take over. Ask for faith and courage at those times.
Pray for any others you are aware of who are struggling with their faith at the moment.

**Day 12: Being witnesses of the Good News**

*He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”*

*Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24:44-49*

Prayer suggestions:

Pray that we would be good witnesses.

Pray for courage, wisdom and empowering.

**Day 13: Praising God**

*When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God. Luke 24:50-53*

Prayer suggestion:

Give Thanks!
Morning prayer

This prayer was used at the start of each day.

_O Lord open my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise._

_Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning
is now and shall be forever. Amen._

_Aleluia_

_Lord, be with me this day,
within me to purify me;
above me to draw me up;
beneath me to sustain me;
before me to lead me;
behind me to restrain me;
around me to protect me._

_Lord, whatever this day may bring,
Your name be praised._

_Guide me in Your truth and lead me_

_For You are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long_

_Amen_
Evening prayer

This prayer was said at the end of each day.

O God, make speed to save me.
O Lord, make haste to help me.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning
is now and shall be forever. Amen.

Alleluia

Lighten our darkness O Lord,
and by Your great mercy defend us
from all perils and dangers of this night;
for the love of Your only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is night after a long day
What has been done has been done;
What has not been done has not been done;
Let it be.

The night is quiet, let the quietness of your peace
Enfold us and all those dear to us.
The night heralds the dawn,
Let us look expectantly to a new day, new joys,
New possibilities.
Amen
Resources

We found these books and other materials to be most helpful in preparing for our pilgrimage.

Online resources

Canterbury Cathedral has a useful Pilgrim’s Way website that provides helpful information on which route to take, places to eat and sleep and points of interest in an interactive map that covers the three main pilgrim routes to Canterbury. It also provides background on the history of pilgrimage to Canterbury, the reasons to go on pilgrimage and how making your pilgrimage ‘green’ helps to honour our call to be stewards of God’s Creation. See www.pilgrimswaycanterbury.org

There is also a useful (secular) website on walking the North Downs Way which covers its pilgrim history, as well as lists of places to stay. See http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/north-downs-way

Maps and guidebooks

*St Swithun’s Way* maps, showing the 34 mile route from Winchester to Farnham are available for £2.99 from Hampshire County Council, Countryside Service, Countryside Service, Castle Avenue, Winchester SO23 8UL. These colourful maps also give information about the pilgrim history, local sites and places to eat and drink. http://www3.hants.gov.uk/longdistance/st-swithuns-way.htm

*North Downs Way*, Colin Saunders, Aurum Press (2011). This invaluable guidebook contains Ordnance Survey maps as well as detailed descriptions of each day of the route, from Farnham to Canterbury. We closely followed the day walks, and their start and end points, suggested in this guidebook.

*Harvey maps: North Downs Way (West and East)*. These waterproof maps are an extremely useful supplement to the North Downs Way guidebook and give very detailed route markings, including pubs, public phones and public toilets. Very handy! www.harveymaps.co.uk

Pilgrimage books

*Pilgrimage: a spiritual and cultural journey*, Ian Bradley, Lion (2009). This richly illustrated book looks at the biblical roots of pilgrimage and its history. It also looks at some of the world’s most famous pilgrim routes, including the Pilgrim’s Way to Canterbury. The section on ‘Pilgrimage Today’ and ‘How to be a Pilgrim’ are especially helpful in making pilgrimage relevant to today’s interests and lifestyles and suggesting ways to engage people with pilgrimage.
Pilgrimage of a soul: contemplative spirituality for the active life, Phileena Heuertz, IVP Books (2010). This very personal book examines the value of pilgrimage for the too-busy individual. It contains some useful reflections on the often neglected value of contemplation for evangelical Christians.

Pilgrimage: the journey to remembering our story, Andrew Jones, BRF (2011). This book explores pilgrimage from a theological perspective, linking it especially to the book of Exodus and seeing our Christian lives as being ‘in the world but not of the world’. It is an especially helpful book in helping to explain why people go on pilgrimage, what they may discover and what blessings it can bring. It also contains some moving testimonials.

Pilgrim stories: on and off the road to Santiago, Nancy Louise Frey, University of California Press (1998). This book, written by an anthropologist, examines the impact that pilgrimage has on individuals. It is especially helpful in examining the difficulties of returning home and how individuals have kept the flame of pilgrimage alive.

The Pilgrim’s Way: fact and fiction of an ancient trackway, Derek Bright, The History Press (2011). This book examines the history of the Pilgrim’s Way and the authenticity of the different routes that could have been taken by medieval pilgrims. It is not a religious book but useful for those who would like to try where possible to take the original Pilgrim’s Way in preference to the North Downs Way.