

Activities for Lent

Pilgrimages

According to the website of the British Pilgrimage Trust (www.britishpilgrimage.org), pilgrimage is defined as “journeying with purpose on foot to holy places.” There is a long history of pilgrimage in Britain. The pathways started as well-worn tracks which became processional paths for pagan festivals and eventually became journeys undertaken in Celtic, mediaeval and early modern Christianity. Pilgrims from all backgrounds undertook these journeys – The Canterbury Tales by Chaucer relates the stories of the different pilgrims on a journey to Canterbury – the main focal point of Christianity in England. In 1538, Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell banned pilgrimages and many of the sites visited, fell into disrepair.

According to the British Pilgrimage Trust there has been an increased global interest in pilgrimages. Some of you may have heard of the Camino way in Spain. 350,000 pilgrims walk this every year. The British Pilgrimage Trust, although not specifically Christian, is resurrecting many pilgrimage routes around the British Isles. For a number of years now, one of the BBC’s Easter programme offerings has been a short series during which various celebrities from many faiths or none have participated in a pilgrimage rooted in Christianity. Some of these series are still available on the BBC i-player and there is to be a new series aired this Easter – unfortunately, I could not find the date before this paper had to be produced. If this series is anything like the previous ones, I would encourage you to watch it.

Pilgrimages are something which might be undertaken during the season of Lent. As you read this Lent is upon us. It is a time when, as Christians, we are asked to prepare for Easter. Doing something which enables us to draw a bit closer to God.

A pilgrimage doesn’t have to be a long journey – perhaps you could walk to a local beauty spot and sit and think about God’s wonderful creation. I always find that going to an open church and sitting quietly helps to refresh my faith. For those of you whose church has a God’s Acre, sitting there for a while, thinking about the people who have gone before us may draw us closer to God.

Labyrinths

Another way of “journeying with purpose” is to walk a labyrinth. A labyrinth is not a maze. A maze has several routes through it and is intended to puzzle or confuse. A labyrinth has one path which leads to the centre of the labyrinth and then one turns and follows the same path out of the labyrinth. It seems that people who could not afford to go on pilgrimage, walked a labyrinth instead.

Labyrinths can be found in many Christian places of worship – perhaps the most famous is the one in Chartres Cathedral in France. However, they have been created in many places indoors and out and can be found in many different cultures other than Christianity – for example Judaism and native American tradition. The aim of all labyrinths is the same – it is a place to walk and meditate. The Chartres labyrinth is set into the floor stones of the cathedral. Some labyrinths are mowed into grass and some are portable! They have been drawn on to a large piece of cloth which is laid down for people to use and then can be rolled up and taken somewhere else.



Labyrinth at Chartres

If you are feeling particularly energetic, a labyrinth could be created in your Church or Church grounds by using rope to make the pattern – there are many patterns available online. This could be opened up to the community to use for a period of time.

If however, you are not up to such tasks, you could use a finger labyrinth. Amazingly, you can actually purchase these from etsy and Amazon – is there nothing they don't sell! Alternatively, you can create a paper one. The idea is that sitting quietly, you trace the pattern of the labyrinth with your finger. You might like to focus on something which is particularly bothering you or something you would like to give thanks for. It could be used to reflect on the Daily Watchword.

Below is an example of a finger labyrinth I have downloaded from Google images.



If MWA members are interested, perhaps tech savvy Sisters could download some images which would be big enough for people to use.

I hope some of the ideas and information have given you inspiration for a Lenten activity.

Sr Janet Cooper