



CROSSING THE THRESHOLD RESOURCES

Crossing the Threshold: National Resource Tour

Workshop Notes: How to use Pilgrimages & Shrines as part of the returning process

Delivered by Fr Alan Williams, National Director, Shrine of Our Lady, Walsingham York, November 2011

Introduction

Pilgrimages to Shrines are more popular than ever. Visitors now include **pilgrims** and **religious tourists**. Catholic Shrines continue to attract large numbers of Catholics, non-Catholics and non churchgoing Catholics (sometimes called 'lapsed'); for example, England's National Shrine at Walsingham is visited by many Catholics who have given up the practice of the faith [number unknown] and by many Hindus and Buddhists [several thousand each year].

At a Shrine it is hoped that pilgrims will find **space to seek, find and love Christ**. Catholic Shrines in the 21st century share a common objective- **evangelisation**.

"Eamon Duffy has pointed out the principal purpose of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages was not the journey itself but the spiritual value of the image or relic, the hope of healing or the gaining of an indulgence. ...What has come to the fore in recent times is the value of the journey, symbolic of the journey through life. 'Journey in Faith' is the popular name for a course of exploration, instruction, and discussion, for adults in the Christian Faith. Going on pilgrimage, especially on foot, is increasingly popular." [Michael Rear, WALSINGHAM, Pilgrims & Pilgrimage, [St Pauls 2011]

[They] "summon and bring together a growing number of pilgrims and religious tourists, some of whom are in complicated human and spiritual situations, somewhat distant from living the faith and with a weak ecclesial affiliation."

[Pope Benedict XVI, September 2010]

"In a climate of widespread secularism [the Shrine is] a privileged place in which the human person, a pilgrim here on earth, experiences the loving and saving presence of God, ... finding space to seek, find and love Christ in his ordinary life in the midst of the world." [Cardinal Piacenza, Letter to Rectors of Shrines, August 2011]

"The main objective of pilgrimages to a shrine is now evangelisation".

"Moments of pilgrimage... are a fertile field for the word of God to take root in hearts... discovering this moment becomes an occasion for the renewal of faith and also for a first evangelization." [Archbishop Veglio, President of the Pontifical Council for Migrants & Travellers, September 2010]

Experiences of Pilgrimage?

Many Catholics [practising & non-practising] have been on pilgrimage to a Shrine or holy place.

*Perhaps pause for a moment to invite contributions and experiences from the group.
“What’s been your experience of pilgrimage to a Shrine of holy place? What did you receive from it?”*

Some examples might include:

Events . World Youth Day

Places Rome
Taizé

Local Shrines? e.g. Birmingham Oratory/Cardinal Newman?

National Shrine Walsingham
Of Our Lady

Often these stories are powerful, surprising and uniquely personal. We can all be challenged by these experiences- “Living religion is conversion or it is nothing at all” [Bernard Lonergan, sj].

Some Background/Input

Shrines and centres of pilgrimage have a rich diversity. Timetables and calendars can be found on websites and elsewhere, however there are some features common to most of them.-

“A Typical Day at the Shrine”

- Proclamation of the Word of God
- Liturgy [Eucharist, Penance]
- Popular Piety [Rosary, Stations, Processions etc.]

There is the freedom to join in all or part of this; sometimes the group experience is critical, for others there is an opportunity for solitude in a holy place.

The Rectors of the European Marian Shrines met in England at Walsingham in 2011. During our exchanges of information and ideas we identified some key aspects of modern pilgrimage-

- Religious tourism is leading to increasing numbers
- Who comes? Dioceses/Parishes/a wide variety of Catholic Organisations/individuals
- Varied size of groups [in Walsingham up to 12,000]
- Varied styles [e.g. Student Cross, Charismatic, Latin Masses, Youth, ethnic groups etc.]
- Religious pilgrims and tourists [RC, Other Christian, Hindu, unknowns]
- Those who wish to find space for themselves

A good general guiding principle for organisers of pilgrimages is that if we have non-Churchgoing Catholics in our group we should **allow the pilgrimage experience to do the work**- Shrines are fundamentally places of decision, prayer and conversion.

A Final Thought

Many Shrines choose a Pilgrimage Theme each year to use as a focus for preaching and pastoral activity. Look at a Shrine's website for the current theme.

In 2013, in the line with the worldwide Church, the English National Shrine at Walsingham had as its theme-

Mary & the Year of Faith

The Year of Faith... is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the Saviour of the world.

Let us entrust this time of grace to the Mother of God, proclaimed "Blessed because she believed" [Luke 1.45].

[Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, Porta Fidei, 2011]

Organising a Parish pilgrimage by coach or by car can be a simple and effective way of introducing non churchgoing Catholics to a special **time and place of God's grace**.

For Discussion

1. What resonates with you in the quotes provided in the introduction (page 1)?
2. Which Shrines is it possible to make a day visit to from your parish?
3. In what ways might the parish use its existing pilgrimage calendar to support evangelisation; e.g. advertising it more widely, focussing on appealing to non churchgoers, including day programme elements helpful to the unchurched?
4. How might you add to or amend your existing pilgrimage calendar to serve better local mission?



For additional evangelisation resources please see: www.cbcew.org.uk/ctt

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