



Creating Local Pilgrimages or Contemplative Walks
A Manual

This document was created by us, Lyn and Ylva, to try and hold fast some of our learning during the last few years, as we developed and lead a series of shorter and longer contemplative walks in our Benefice of Benenden and Sandhurst.

To create a local reflective walk, these are some of the steps that we have found useful.

Team

Create a small team. Two is a minimum, maybe three or four is the maximum. You need to be able to bounce off each other with ideas and take responsibility for different parts of the process. It also makes the reflection part of the walk both more manageable and more creative. Different voices and perspectives are enhancing.

Theme

Start by thinking of an overall theme, such as Spring, Summer, Autumn, Water, Trees or Rocks, or Remembrance, Joy or Grief. Anything that is spiritually meaningful and works in your context. Sometimes the theme emerges as you walk the route or work on the script. At other times you may have a certain theme as a starting point and fit everything around that.

Choosing the route

Choose a circular route, most likely with the help of the OS Map or a local Footpath Map. Take into account the country roads, bridle paths and footpaths that you are hoping to walk, and the state of them. Are they busy? Are they in a good state of repair? Are they safe to walk?

Decide on the length of the walk and the time that you would like to walk. Who are the people likely to take part? What age are they and how fit are they? We have generally found that 3.5 – 4 miles and around 3 hours is a good average in our context. This includes quite a few stops for reflection and is not too taxing for people who are reasonably used to walking.

Walk the route at least twice! Measure how long it took you, then double that. If you yourselves (leaders) are reasonably fast walkers, and you add in a number of stops for reflection, this works out quite well.

Think about the route – is it steep? Has it got many stiles? Is it uneven? Be prepared to alter the route or even abandon it all together and start your planning again, if you encounter obstacles or find that you have chosen an unsuitable route.

Research or bear in mind practicalities like toilet facilities at the start/ finish and/or along the way. Are there places to sit down enroute, or could you ask people to bring a 'shooting stick' or folding stool, or a blanket?

Things to bring (Leader)

- First Aid kit
- Mobile phone (charged and switched on)
- Water
- Extra walking poles
- Sun screen

Food and drink

Think about refreshments. Would you like to offer some, or not? At what point? At the end of the walk or in the middle? Would you invite people to bring their own snacks or packed lunch, or do you provide something, such as homemade cake and a hot drink at the end? If so, have you got a suitable space for this, with a kettle, some mugs and seating? In the church or a hall? Who is responsible for providing this, and are they willing to put that extra effort in? Or, is there a local café or pub enroute or at the end to stop off for lunch or tea? If you choose this option, can everyone afford to partake, or will some people not come at all because it is too expensive?

Waking the route in preparation

All the leaders should walk the route together and make a record of any potential stop-off points for reflection. These could be landscape features such as vistas, hills, meadows, woodland or valleys, significant trees, water in any shape or form (stream, river, pond, well, lake, etc.), or any type of buildings, archaeological features or manmade structures. Literally anything that catches the eye and sparks a thought or a connection. See these as 'jumping off points' to get the imagination flowing for leader and participant alike.

An easy way to remember the feature and the thought it sparked, is to take a photo and make a note, often just a phrase or word. Back at home this can be turned into a scaffolding script to then be populated with reflections and readings by each person who is leading that particular segment of the walk.

Developing the script

First, take a look at the script's narrative. Does it make overall sense? Is it balanced between the leaders? Does it contain different types of reflection, such as Scripture readings, poems, mindfulness exercises, personal reflection. Has it got enough stop-off points for reflection – at least seven or eight – but not too many – say, no more than ten or twelve.

With this first, rudimentary script created and the different reflection points divided up between the leaders, it's time to develop the Reflections. This is where the photos and

recorded phrases help, as they can trigger the memory of the thought or sensation that struck one at that particular point in the walk. This can then be built upon, by finding a piece of Scripture, a poem, a song, a mindfulness exercise or a personal musing to develop this into a Reflection Point. Keep it quite brief, no more than 5-10 minutes.

Mindfulness exercises can be very simple. Listen. What can you hear? Look around to find something (plant, stone, acorn, etc.). The old favourite “Five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can smell, two things you can touch, one thing you can eat” is still very good. It sharpens the senses and brings us into the present moment.

Singing together out of doors is a particular joy. Choose a well-known hymn or worship song and make sure everyone has sight of the words.

Some essential parts of every walk

We start every walk by explaining the ‘housekeeping’ rules. These are things like confidentiality, making others feel welcome and included, as well as giving each other space, the benefits of chatting to our companions, but also to remember to be quiet and attentive as we stop for our Reflections. If dogs are present, to lay down some ground rules for them.

Next, we set our intentions for the day. This is individual for everyone. It can be as simple as ‘Today I’m going to enjoy walking with others/ by myself.’ Or perhaps “I will bring a question or dilemma on this walk”, “I will look to meet with God on this walk” or “I will have a conversation with at least one new person on this walk”. There is no need to speak our intention out loud, or to share it. It is for us alone.

The walk always starts with a prayer and finishes with a blessing. A member of the clergy or a lay person can both do this; the blessing just needs to be in the appropriate format (“Bless you/ us...”).

Consider walking a part of the way in total silence. We have most often done this as the last segment, before we return to the starting point, but other points, such as the middle could also work. The silence is very powerful and brings something unique.

Please find attached script of a recent walk as a guide.

Every blessing on your own journey to create a walk!

Revd Ylva Blid-Mackenzie and Lyn Hayes ALM



Spring Pilgrimage Saturday 29 April 2023

Welcome and Introduction – “House Rules” - Ylva

Setting our intentions - Lyn

A pilgrimage is a special journey with a specific intention

Although the original description of a pilgrim is one who seeks to travel to specific Holy places or spiritual sites etc. it is now becoming more widely used to describe any journey that has a specific intention, whether or not the person undertaking the journey has a religious faith. A pilgrimage need not take place in an exotic, faraway location. It need not take a whole week or two. It can take place in our backyards, in our neighbourhoods and around our churches. A pilgrimage does not depend on your individual wealth - you just simply need to have a purpose and place in mind where one can go. A pilgrimage is more than *just* a hike, a walk, a run, a bike ride, a holiday, or a journey.... Pilgrimage is the state of mind *and* heart or spirit that changes that individual quest.

So, all we wish is that you enjoy the walk, the reflections & times of quiet that we are going to introduce throughout the journey and hopefully at the end you would have achieved your intention for the day - and with that in mind, I would like to invite you to just take a few moments of silence and set our own personal intention for the day - it can be anything - just to enjoy the walk or to try new things or to mull over something that you would like to explore - perhaps a question you have that you haven't found an answer for - it can be as simple or as complicated as you like and, most importantly, it is your own personal journey so there won't be a question and answer section at the end!!!

Pilgrim Prayer – Ylva

Creator God, on the palm of whose hand we journey,
Hold and guide us gently, we pray.

Incarnate God, whose earthly pilgrimage is our inspiration, Walk with us
at every step.

Companion God, whose wisdom kindles our hearts,
Give us strength and courage, now and always.

Amen

Song of Solomon, Chapter 2

My beloved speaks and says to me:

'Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;

for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.

The flowers appear on the earth;

the time of singing has come,

and the voice of the turtle dove
is heard in our land.

The fig tree puts forth its figs,

and the vines are in blossom;

they give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one,

and come away.'

The Oak Trees - Lyn

Passage of time:

Ancient Connections

These two oak trees have been here for a very long time - and that got me thinking about ancient connections and the passage of time.

In the ancient past celestial bodies – the Sun, Moon, planets, and stars – have provided us a reference for measuring the passage of time throughout our existence. Ancient civilizations relied upon the apparent motion of these bodies through the sky to determine seasons, months, and years.

The earliest Egyptian calendar was based on the moon's cycles, but later the Egyptians realized that the "Dog Star" in Canis Major, which we call Sirius, rose next to the sun every 365 days, about when the annual inundation or flooding of the Nile began. Based on this knowledge, they devised a 365 day calendar that seems to have begun around 3100 BC, which seems to be one of the earliest years recorded in history.

A quote about time:

"Time is an equal opportunity employer. Each human being has exactly the same number of hours and minutes every day. Rich people can't buy more hours; scientists can't invent new minutes. And you can't save time to spend it on another day. Even so, time is amazingly fair and forgiving. No matter how much time you've wasted in the past, you still have an entire tomorrow." - **Denis Waitley, "The Joy of Working"**

Crossroads in the middle of field - which way to go? – Ylva

Here the path has almost vanished – one is especially faint and barely there. Often our road is pretty clear – we follow the line stalked out by many before us, secure in the knowledge that others found it good, or worthwhile, or safe.

But what if it isn't ours? What if we are just going along because we are too insecure, or too timid, or too lazy to make a different choice?

Sometimes we only find the right path as we almost stumble upon it – then it is especially important to pay attention!

Reflect on what roads you took – and which ones you didn't take – could you make a fresh choice or change direction?

Orchard rows – Lyn

When Ylva & I did our first reccy of this area we looked at the wonderful rows of trees in this orchard and I instantly had this vision of order, uniformity, things being placed in a certain pattern etc. but then it became quite apparent that this orchard had not really been looked after as well as it should and when we were here back in the early part of this year - there was evidence of decay, neglect and being totally unloved!

So my thoughts then went down the route of - what happens to ourselves when we neglect our daily order, our routines and how important are those routines to our physical and mental health.

What things do you do on a daily basis to give you structure and when you are juggling so many balls in the air which ones do you let fall to the floor like these apples?

So I thought I would share this piece of scripture that you may find helpful in focusing on what is important

Philippians 4:8-9

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (NLT)

Stream & bridge –Ylva & Lyn

Spring

By Gerard Manley Hopkins - (Ylva)

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring –
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden. – Have, get, before it cloy,

Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

The Bridge *by Shel Silverstein*
(Lyn)

This bridge will only take you halfway there
To those mysterious lands you long to see:
Through gypsy camps and swirling Arab fairs
And moonlit woods where unicorns run free.
So come and walk awhile with me and share
The twisting trails and wondrous worlds I've known. But this bridge will
only take you halfway there-
The last few steps you'll have to take alone.

Bend in the stream - just listen (5 Things – Lyn)

Notice:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can hear
- 3 things you can touch
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Strawberry wood - culvert and iron /cloth industry - Lyn

Strawberry Wood is an example of a High Weald woodland. It is ancient woodland and designated as a Local Wildlife Site. There are many tree species, but sweet chestnut and hornbeam are especially abundant. It is a coppiced wood which creates a good

habitat because it is very beneficial for wildlife and plants. The main feature we find here is the Culvert - which is a structure of historic importance - an ancient manmade stone structure believed to have been constructed to withstand heavy traffic for possibly transporting raw materials for the iron industry and the cloth industry throughout the 15 - 17th centuries.

It was badly neglected over the centuries but was restored back in August 2009 by skilled craftsmen using locally sourced stone.

Top of the field, by the horse – Lyn & Ylva

Lines Written in Early Spring

By William Wordsworth

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,
Their thoughts I cannot measure:—
But the least motion which they made
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,
If such be Nature's holy plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?

We walk back in silence (see sign below)

Return and Blessing - Ylva

May the blessing of the rain be on you—
the soft sweet rain.
May it fall upon your spirit
so that all the little flowers may spring up,
and shed their sweetness on the air.
May the blessing of the great rains be on you,
may they beat upon your spirit
and wash it fair and clean,
and leave there many a shining pool
where the blue of heaven shines,
and sometimes a star.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father....

**We are on a silent
pilgrimage to St.
George's Church**