

## PILGRIMAGE: Now What?

### I. Rationale for follow-up to PILGRIMAGE...

The purpose of the Pilgrimage event is: *A weekend event for UMYF and local church youth groups in which youth and adult advisors are challenged to a new or deeper faith in Jesus Christ.* In order for that new or deeper faith commitment to grow and be more than a moment in time for a young person, intentional follow-up to the Pilgrimage event is needed by local churches and local church youth leaders. Conference connectional ministries seeks to strengthen and equip effective local church ministry and that must happen beyond an event. The Pilgrimage planning team hopes that this resource will begin to assist local church youth ministry leaders in strong, intentional follow-up to the Pilgrimage weekend event.

Pilgrimage and other Conference youth events are only a piece and a part of the Christian spiritual formation for youth. So much more comes of a young person's time and experience within their local church! Pilgrimage might be a spiritual marker for a youth, an Ebenezer (I Samuel 7:12). All of us are on spiritual journeys and we make many decisions along that wandering path - on those occasions when we don't "feel" God, we can remember and look back to our "Ebenezers"—spiritual markers. We need those spiritual markers but we don't stay there - the journey takes us further. Consider the name of the event "Pilgrimage." A recent article in the NC Christian Advocate by Patty Meyers was titled "Pilgrimage" and had this to say. ... *"Pilgrimages are journeys made to places of spiritual significance in order to ask for spiritual help ... Pilgrimages are sacred acts of vulnerability in which people literally step out in faith."*

Christian discipleship in very basic terms is about two things: making a commitment to Christ (conversion) and transformation as we live in that commitment (spiritual formation). A recent interview in *Christianity Today* with Richard Foster and Dallas Willard said this about spiritual formation:

"Spiritual formation in a Christian tradition answers a specific human question: *What kind of person am I going to be?* It is the process of establishing the character of Christ in the person. ... You are

taking on the character of Christ in a process of discipleship to Him under the direction of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. ... Spiritual formation is for developing a heart that is one with God..."

Pilgrimage (the specific weekend event) can only be on piece or part of this process!

**CAUTION:** Be sensitive to the individual faith journeys of youth in the midst of the community experience. Be aware of what is appropriate for various age level and maturities in response to this experience (for example: young middle schoolers will be more concrete in their thinking and more affected by the communal experience while older, more mature senior highs will be able to articulate in more depth their own understanding and application of the experience to their lives).

Several books and curriculum resources (many of which will be available at the Cokesbury store at Pilgrimage) to assist you in follow-up to Pilgrimage are listed below.

### II. So What? Possibilities to process PILGRIMAGE...

Ø Talk with your youth group about what they heard/learned/experienced (of God and content, not just social/fun) at the event. Ask open-ended questions such as:

- What did the speaker say that stuck with you? (Touched your heart? Made you think?)
- Which youth testimony did you relate to/identify with the most?
- What song best expresses where you are in your Christian faith/relationship with God right now? See the caution above - after some initial discussions in a total group, dividing into smaller groups (by age level or by maturity=readiness to go deeper) might be more beneficial.

These conversations/discussions should take place immediately after the event and be ongoing for several weeks as seeds of the Word of God may be planted that weekend but need time to germinate in a youth's heart and mind before making an impression or bringing meaning or question to a youth.

Ù Continually be on the lookout for tie-in opportunities: when reference can be made to or a connection made with something the speaker said, Scriptures read, youth testimony given, youth group offering to worship leadership, or lyrics to a song. [Hint: one of the adult leaders with the group may serve as the designated note-taker for reference after the group returns home from Pilgrimage.] Ongoing tie-ins and references will enable the experience to continue with the youth rather than stand alone.

Ú Determine what next steps are needed (there may be a variety of next steps needed depending on individual faith maturities and journeys). Even if much of the youth ministry program is planned for a time after Pilgrimage, consider ways these next steps might be incorporated into that plan. For future planning take these next steps into consideration or at least leave enough flexibility for needed next steps to be incorporated.

Next step possibilities:

Cautious, Curious Youth = still not sure of or ready for a personal faith commitment, most impacted by the social/fun/community...

Next step: What are ways to keep them coming and participating in the youth group/ministry?

Fun, active, group building activities; service projects

Additional "seed sowing" (gentle, subtle, non-threatening)

Devotions, group reflections (voluntary sharing) on activities, studies

Committed Youth = have made some sort of personal faith commitment and profession of faith but this is still very new for them...

Next step: What are ways to build-up and undergird this faith commitment? Growth opportunities

Bible study groups, service projects, small groups to study/practice Christian practices,

ongoing programs and group opportunities, personal devotions, positions of leadership

"Peter and Mary" Youth = more mature in their faith, their spiritual journey has moved beyond an initial commitment and profession of faith to the ups and downs of living that out and renewals of that commitment...

Next step: What are ways to go deeper?

What are avenues of leadership and outreach, faith sharing?

Student-led small groups (Christian accountability, covenant, spiritual formation, Christian practices), *Disciple* Bible Study, leadership positions (including within the larger church), one on one with adult faith friend or mentor, ongoing programs and ministries, service projects and extended missions

### III. Share your stories - we want to hear from you!

We would like to be able to offer testimonial stories as to the difference Pilgrimage makes in the lives of youth, adults and local churches. This is not evaluation or planning feedback. We want to be able to tell the story and show others that the purpose in Pilgrimage is being met.

Individuals or churches are invited to send stories of the impact Pilgrimage has had on individuals (first names only needed), the youth group, the local church. Accounts of how churches have followed-up on the Pilgrimage experience are welcome as well. Thank you for helping us share Pilgrimage beyond that weekend itself!

### IV. Resources for follow-up

Now What: Next Steps for Your New Life in Christ (By Fasig, Bonner, Kirk) - Abingdon Press

Fuel for the Journey by Lowell McNaney & Andy Lambert

Your students can become ROARING LAMBS (Youth Specialties)

Starting to Go Where God Wants You to Be (By Doug Fields & Brett Eastman) Youth Specialties

*The Disciple Experiment* (Youth Specialties) Leader's Guide and Student Journal Sacred Bridges by Mike Raliff

Faith-Forming Junior High Ministry by Drew Dyson

Deepening Youth Spirituality by Walt Marcum

**Twists of Faith** by Kevin Witt and Marcey Balcomb