

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In a few months we will gather in Denver, Colorado for our Annual Conference. Soon we will begin to consider this trip. What will we need to bring? What will we need to pack? What plans do we need to make as we prepare to leave home to travel to this destination?

In our post 9-11 culture, travel has taken on many new and challenging concerns, especially air travel. It has changed the way we pack, as well as our deportment at airports and among fellow passengers as we are continuously reminded to be alert and aware of our surroundings and the activities of others.

In some ways, similarities can be drawn to the experience of the Medieval pilgrims. Though the history of pilgrimage dates back to ancient times; the experience of spiritual and penitential pilgrimage greatly increased with the cultural, economic and spiritual developments which characterized the Middle Ages. Those who chose to go on pilgrimage, no matter their purpose, faced many dangers and challenges on those journeys that took months or even years to accomplish.

Interestingly, the Assisi Compilation mentions the following required practices and laws for pilgrims: wearing penitential clothing, leaving personal affairs in order, traveling poorly, and receiving permission from the local bishop or religious superior.

Our Franciscan Sources make many references to the early followers of Francis being pilgrims and strangers as they lived a life en via, a new expression of religious life in the world. As the number of friars grew, so did the challenge of housing and structuring the life of the evolving community. In response, Francis “always wanted the law of pilgrims for his sons: to be sheltered under someone else’s roof, to travel in peace, and to thirst for their homeland.” (2 C 59)

*In the same way, our conference theme, **Pilgrims and Strangers: Eyes Fixed on Christ**, invites us to consider our travel to Denver and the journeys of our daily life with different eyes, “Eyes Fixed on Christ.” This pre-conference reflection booklet, the work of the members of the Spirit and Life Committee, is an invitation to begin our journey anew with our hearts aflame with the Gospel and our senses open to encountering God’s presence in the persons and events along the way, knowing that we have a good and faithful guide for the journey.*

Our blessings and prayers are with you for your journey, until we meet in Denver.

Peace and All Good!

*Margaret Magee OSF
Associate Director*



REFLECTION ON THE ARTIST LOGO

Our logo invites us to reflect with a variety of journey symbols: sandals, coiled basket, labyrinth, colors, mountain peaks and the San Damiano Cross.

As Franciscan sisters and brothers, each one of us has our own personal and communal concepts and beliefs about being “pilgrims and strangers.” We glean the spirit of Francis in the guideline of our Rule and Life which states, “the truly poor in spirit, following the example of the Lord, neither appropriate nor defend anything as their own, live in this world as pilgrims and strangers.” (VI, 22) In Scripture, the second verse of the first letter of Peter also translates pilgrims as aliens, exiles and refugees. There is a multitude of contemporary realities that those words evoke!

The core message of our pilgrimage is to keep our eyes fixed on Christ and follow in His footprints. An essential attitude for following includes trust, simplicity and spontaneity. To create the freedom to follow, we are to remove our sandals and set aside our “basket,” the stuff we need to let go of to give focus to the journey.

Removing our sandals implies a risk, a vulnerability and humility. If we choose to follow footprints we can experience the energy of Mother Earth as Holy Ground, an identification with the poor, and the opportunity to wash each other’s feet. (John 13:14)

- Which symbol resonates with your life journey now?
- How does that symbol invite you to deeper commitment?
- In what way does the journey to and from Denver reveal dimensions of being pilgrims and strangers?

Spend some time reflecting on the prayer of Francis in his Letter to the Order:



***“Inwardly cleansed,
interiorly enlightened, and
inflamed by the fire of the
Holy Spirit, may we be able
to follow in the footprints
of Your beloved Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ.”***

(LtOrd51)

Part I:

PILGRIM – PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

When in April the sweet showers fall
That pierce March's drought to the root and all
And bathed every vein in liquor that has power
To generate therein and sire the flower;
When [the wind] also has with her sweet breath,
Filled again, in every [field and forest],
The tender shoots and leaves, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the Ram has run
And many little birds make melody
That sleep through all the night with open eye
Then folk do long to go on pilgrimage.

As found in www.librarius.com

Thus does the author of the Canterbury tales invite us to ponder what stirs our hearts to see life through pilgrim eyes. The idyllic spring setting reflects the human response when awakened to the new, the tender, the gentle, the sweet. It is then that our deepest longings come to the fore and we, once again, have the courage to set out.

Any pilgrimage requires preparation. A common question might be: “*What do I take?*” However, St. Francis’ probing question of “*Who are you, O God, and who am I?*” might suggest some prior and more important questions such as the following:

- Who am I as I begin this pilgrimage?
- What will I take of myself on this journey?
- What am I leaving behind? What do I need to leave behind?
- Why am I making this journey?

Since one does not come on pilgrimage as an empty tablet we might ask:

- How is God already writing the path of pilgrimage on my heart?
- What is being stirred within me at this time in my life?
- What feelings arise as I ponder being immersed in the unknown and the unfamiliar?

We know every journey begins with a single step:

- What is my starting point?
- What does the terrain look like outwardly and inwardly?
- Who are my companions on this journey?
- How will we be in relationship together?
- Where do I hope to go?
- Do I have the courage to take the first step?

Pilgrimage

*When your ship
long moored in harbor
gives you the illusion
of being a house;
when your ship begins to
put down root
in the stagnant water
by the quay
PUT OUT TO SEA!
Save your boat's journeying soul
and your own pilgrim soul
cost what it may!!!
Dom Helder Camara*

For Further Reflection

Scripture:	Genesis 12: 1-8 1 Kings 19: 9-13 Matthew 11: 2-11 John 2: 35-39	Abraham's Journey Elijah hears God's voice in a whisper What did you come out to the desert to see? Come and See!
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TOR Rule and Life:

Chapter I: 2	Life of On-Going Conversion
Chapter II: 5, 6, 7, 8	We Are Always About Living Into the Life



REFLECTIONS

Pilgrim — Preparing for the Journey



Part 2:

THE PILGRIMAGE – ENCOUNTERING ON THE JOURNEY

A labyrinth with an encounter of the San Damiano cross is central to the artistic logo imaging pilgrimage for the 2008 AFC theme. St. Bonaventure describes three stages to a pilgrimage likening a labyrinth:

- the journey inward of purgation
- illumination at the center
- the journey outward where union begins

All too familiar is the art of pilgrimage that we may take the image for granted. Upon gazing, see through the artist's eye how the cross brightens the path, enlightens the pilgrim and is companion through the journey out.

You are invited to journey with your pen along the labyrinth or take a deliberately reflective walk in your area at a park or nature trail. Usually we walk with purposefulness of destination like *getting to work*.

Dare to walk without iPods, GPS tracking, viewing others not as traffic to avoid but companions reflecting God's goodness. Pay attention to every step; be mindful of grace.

- Like Abraham, walk without knowing the destination.
- Like Moses, feel success simply in leading others without crossing the "finish line."
- Like Jesus, stay the course despite setbacks.
- Like Peter, let the path take you where you might not want to go.

As you take your journey consider it in light of your own personal/congregational journey or that of our Federation at this critical moment.

COMPANIONS

- Who am I? Who am I with? Who is the Jesus I meet?
- Who joins me/us and what are the bonds that are created on the journey?
- What is God's WORD arising within me/us?



CONVERSATIONS

- What are the stories, anecdotes, jokes that I share on the travels?
- In what way does discussion and conversation enhance the journey experience for me/ others?
- What significant conversation surfaces regarding the future of the Franciscan Federation?
- What place does humor have along the pilgrim's journey?

CREATION/CREATOR/CREATURES

- How do I immerse myself in the awe of creation?
- How do I heighten my awareness of God's revealing in the universe?
- What is the appropriate carbon footprint of a Franciscan pilgrim?

CELEBRATIONS

- What experiences on the journey are memory-makers?
- How do rituals and celebrations create meaning on the journey?
- How is each step, each mile, each crossroad, each turn the gift of being pilgrim?

CHALLENGES

- How does a pilgrim relate to schedules, detours, and things unexpected?
- How are determination, courage, and flexibility qualities needed on a journey?
- How does "being pilgrim and stranger" (TOR Rule and Life, 22) lead to transformation?

COMMITMENT

- Where are you/ we on the journey?
- How do I/ we claim the intrinsic value of itinerancy?
- What decisions will become evident on the journey?

Consider the advice of Francis,

"Take faithful companions so that during the mountain's ascent you will have their advice and be strengthened by their help. For woe to the one who is alone! If he falls, he will have no one to lift him up. For if anyone falls, he should have someone help him!" (ScEx 11)

Contemplate the words of Clare,

"What you hold may you always hold. What you do, may you always do and never abandon. But with swift pace, light step, and unswerving feet, so that even your steps stir up no dust, go forward securely, joyfully, and swiftly on the path of prudent happiness, believing nothing, agreeing with nothing which would dissuade you from this resolution or which would place a stumbling block for you on the way, so that you may offer your vows to the Most High in the pursuit of that perfection to which the Spirit of the Lord has called you." (2L Ag 12-14)

REFLECTIONS

The Pilgrimage — Encountering on the Journey



Part 3:

STRANGERS NO LONGER – BELONGING ON THE JOURNEY

Evoking the presence of the Great Compassion, let us fill our hearts with our own compassion
— towards ourselves and toward all living beings.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Roberts, E., Ed. *Earth Prayers*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1991)

Creating Hospitality

“The rich experience of immigration to the United States provides us with an opportunity to practice what we profess as a Christian people — to reach out to someone in need, to provide a genuine welcome; and in doing so to become profoundly enriched ourselves.”

From “Called to Welcome the Stranger Among Us”

“One of my favorite expressions that we have in our Latino culture is, ‘Mi casa es su casa.’ That is, my house is your house. Or we also say, ‘Estas en tu casa.’ You are in your house. These words express what we feel when someone is in our house — we feel blest. It is like when we have company over, visitors become family and then our house becomes a home.”

Maria Elena Martinez, OSF

Fact:

“As many as 3.5 million people [in the United States] experience homelessness in a given year (1% of the entire population or 10% of its poor), and about 842,000 in any given week. 40% of these are families with children – the fastest growing segment.”

National Coalition for the Homeless, February, 2008

Reflection:

- How do I open the living room of my heart to others?
- What needs to happen so that our Planet Earth can become a home for the world community?
- How do peoples from diverse cultures and races feel at home with me?

“The presence of so many peoples from such diverse cultures and backgrounds in the United States invites us to profound *Conversion, Communion and Solidarity*.”

From “Called to Welcome the Stranger Among Us”

Would you think it odd if Hafiz said,
"I am in love with every church
and mosque
and temple
and any kind of shrine

Because I know it is there
that people say the different names
of the One God."

Shams-ud-din Muhammad Hafiz
(14th century Persian poet/mystic)

Ladinsky, D. *I Heard God Laughing: Renderings of Hafiz*. (Novato, CA: Paris Printing, 1996)

Reflection:

- What does my heart tell me about my own human desire for *belonging*? If I am a stranger to myself, I will never belong anywhere.
- Is my sense of communion with the human family such that I can say, "For me, no one is a stranger"?
- How do the sufferings, sorrows and injustices suffered by others touch my own?

Facts:

"At the end of 2003, there were 38 different protracted conflicts accounting for some 6.2 million refugees in total." U.N. High Commissioner on Refugees: EC/54/SC/CPR.14

"More than 4.2 million Iraqis have left their homes; some 2.2 million displaced internally, while more than 2 million have fled to neighboring states, particularly Syria and Jordan."

UNHCR, January, 2007

The migrations of some peoples are not of their own choosing. Instead, they come fleeing persecution, seeking a better life; some come with a deep desire to work, others come because they want to provide their children with food.

Reflection:

- What does our Franciscan story say to the migration of peoples?
- How can my **presence** be a source of **peace** in our world of migrating peoples?
- In what way does the *dignity of the human person* and issues related to *human rights* stir my heart to action?

For Further Reflection

Scripture:

- Lv. 19:34 For you, too, were once aliens in the land of Egypt
1 Peter 2:11 We are strangers and refugees in this world
Mt. 25:34-35 For I was . . . a stranger and you welcomed me
1 Cor. 12:13 Whether slaves or free, we were all given the same Spirit
Eph. 2:19 You are no longer aliens or foreign visitors, but part of God's household
Luke 24:13-35 The road to Emmaus – the disciples recognize the divine in the human through the sharing of journey, stories, hospitality, and the breaking of bread.

TOR Rule and Life:

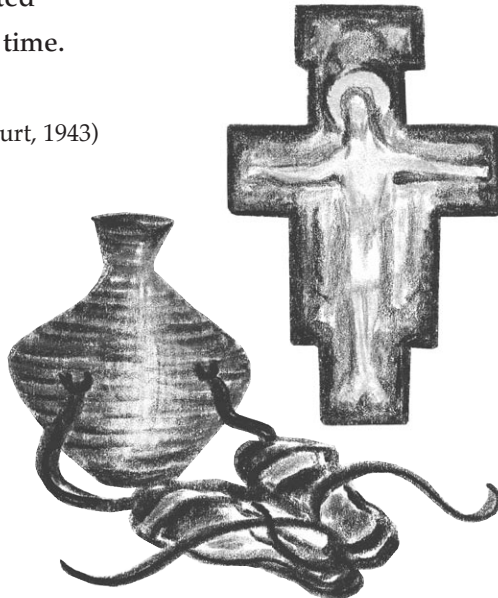
Chapter 6, 22 "Live in this world as pilgrims and strangers."

Franciscan Sources:

Sacred Exchange The world is our cloister

We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of all our exploring
shall be to arrive where we started
and to know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"
T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, 1943)



REFLECTIONS

Strangers No Longer — Belonging on the Journey

