**Suggested format for a Pilgrim Walk**

The route is planned prior to the walk. Six or seven ‘stations’ are identified. A narrative is developed linking each station to an aspect of the chosen theme. The narrative which follows the pilgrim walk is developed around the theme of Creation with a number of stations along the way. The emphasis is on an experiential ‘body-mind-spirit’ approach. The beginning of the walk sets the context for the whole experience so it is important to set some ground rules.

* Follow the designated leader at all times (no one should be in front of the leader who wears distinctive clothing – high visibility vest for example).
* Two people are designated to travel at the end of the pilgrim group. No one should be behind those designated to be here.
* Explain what will happen. We will have different ‘moments’ during our pilgrim walk, sometimes walking and talking, sometimes taking moments of silence. We will stop at some designated points along the way (pre-arranged) and reflect together.
* Ask the group to turn off their mobile phones while they are on this journey.

**Beginning the Walk**

* Body Awareness – short time of becoming aware of body, awareness of stress, tiredness etc in the body. Awareness of standing on the earth.
* What do I need to let go of to be fully present? What do I need to set aside so as to be fully here?
* Bringing to mind an intention for the walk. Perhaps taking a stone as a reminder of something going on in my life that I want to walk with, a question I am living with or a difficulty I have. Allowing it to be with me. But also letting go of it enough not to be preoccupied.
* A time of prayer to begin – a reading (see *Walking in Solidarity* handout for an example) or a blessing such as the following may be used:

**Walking Blessing**

That each step may be a shedding.

That you will let yourself become lost.

That when it looks like you’re going backwards

You may be making progress.

That progress is not the goal anyway,

But presence

To the feel of the path of your skin,

To the way it reshapes you

In each place it makes contact,

To the way you cannot see it

Until the moment you have stepped out.

*“Walking Blessing” Jan L. Richardson from ‘In Wisdom’s Path: Discovering the Sacred in Every Season’*

The following blessing is another suggestion:

“A Dhia, beannaigh an ceimin abhfuil me ag dul, beannaigh an cre ata faoim chos”

Bless us, O God, the earth beneath our feet. Bless us, O God, the path whereon we go. Bless us, O God, the people whom we meet. Amen (The Carmina Gadelica)

**Stations Along the Way (1): Becoming Aware of the Earth**

Becoming aware that the ground on which I stand is holy. Encourage the group to become aware of standing on the earth.

‘I think of earth as the floor of a cathedral where altar and Presence are everywhere.’ George Russell

Even half a minute of becoming aware of the earth beneath our feet will aid pilgrims’ attentiveness.

Leader: Take some time to be still in the presence of God in this place with an attentive spirit. Be aware of your senses; sight, sound, touch, smell, hearing. Be aware that God is present to you through the many sounds and sights around you. Be aware of the presence of God as you sit silently or walk on holy ground, with God in creation beneath your feet, by your side and in the cosmos beyond.

*Holy Ground* by Liam Lawton could be played/sung before moving on.

**Stations Along the Way (2): A Favourite Place in Nature**

Artist Paddy Graham talks about his favourite place in nature – Monaghanstown Bog in County Westmeath:

*I would sit here as a boy and have a primal experience of the deep, rich, luscious, bog land. I had a sense of being rooted in it. I would look up at the sky, with the larks hanging there, and then back down to earth in a great circular sweep. I understood nature and God like that for years. The meeting of earth and sky – that horizon appears in all my paintings, locking everything together…*

Leader: Do you have a place in nature that is special to you? Is there a place that holds special memories, or one that you would like to revisit, a place where you feel ‘rooted’, a place that ‘earths’ you? Think about this favourite/special place in nature and what it means to you.

Time is given for pilgrims to **Think** about the questions above before inviting them to **Pair** and **Share** about their favourite place and its meaning for them.

Leader invites the group to think about being on a time machine and going forward twenty years from now. Will these favourite places in nature be available in the same way for you then, or your children?

**Stations Along the Way (3): Walking Barefoot on the Earth**

Celtic Spirituality Scholar John Philip Newell points out that our Western Culture has made us heavy footed, and deadened our capacity to touch the earth. He suggests an intentional practice of walking barefooted on the earth to sensitise us.

He quotes Carl Jung: “When you walk with naked feet, how can you ever forget the earth? Think of walking barefoot in the grass.”

“Think of placing our bare foot in the coolness of a refreshing stream. When we do, we see in a new way. Doors of perception are opened to us… a heightened sense of the earth on which we walk is not just about pleasurable experiences. It is about knowing and reverencing the creation of which we are a part.” John Philip Newell

*Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground – Exodus 3:5*

*Earth’s crammed with heaven,*

*And every common bush afire with God;*

*But only he who sees, takes off his shoes –*

*The rest sit round it to pluck blackberries.*

*Elizabeth Barret Browning (Aurora Leigh)*

At this station we are invited to take off our shoes and walk or stand barefoot for a few moments on the earth. If that is not practical, place our hands on the earth for a few moments. Have a sense of being connected and in touch with the earth as we do this in silence.

**Stations Along the Way (4): The Crucified Earth (Symbol – a Cross)**

At this station we call to mind ways in which the earth is being crucified today. From the perspective of the western business world, all of us are ‘consumers’ and the more we can be encouraged to consume the better, from their point of view. Yet any relationship which is all ‘take, take, take’ is not sustainable. Our consumption is having an enormous impact on the rest of creation. The Cree Native Americans have a prophecy which says –

*Only after the last tree has been cut down, only after the last river has been poisoned, only after the last fish has been caught, only then, will you realise that money cannot be eaten.*

(You will need to have prepared cards in advance for the following)

Two members of the group read examples of how the earth is being crucified:

1. There are approximately ten million species of living things with whom we share this planet. The human is only one of these species, and indeed among the most recent. Currently species are diminishing at the rate of one every twenty five minutes.
2. The world’s forests, most of which are in the Developing World, are disappearing at an alarming rate. One third of the planet’s total forests will be destroyed in the next fifteen years, causing the disappearance of species as well as medicinal herbs. The air we breathe will be seriously affected.

(For further examples, you could take a look at the Trocaire Lent 2015 resources, by logging onto <http://www.trocaire.org/education/lent2015>)

You are invited to remember places that have been destroyed by ecological accidents or by industry. Share with the group how people or other living things have been affected by this incident.

If the surrounding environment allows, make a cross from twigs or long grasses as a symbol of the destruction of the earth. This or another appropriate prayer may be used:

Reader: O God, Your fertile earth is slowly being stripped of its riches.

ALL: **Open our eyes to see.**

Reader: O God, Your living waters are slowly being choked with chemicals.

ALL: **Open our eyes to see.**

Reader: O God, Your clean air is slowly being filled with pollutants.

ALL: **Open our eyes to see.**

Reader: O God, many of Your creatures are slowly dying.

ALL: **Open our eyes to see.**

Reader: God, our maker, so move us by the wonders of Your Creation.

ALL: **That we may care for it more deeply.**

Reader: So move us to grieve the loss of life.

ALL: **That we may learn to walk with gentle footfall upon Your earth.**

**Stations Along the Way (5): What’s my footfall on the earth?\* (Symbol – Hiking boot or other footwear with a heavy footprint)**

*\*Before setting out on (or indeed perhaps following their return from) the walk, invite participants to calculate their carbon footprint online –* [*http://www.foe.ie/justoneearth/carboncalculator*](http://www.foe.ie/justoneearth/carboncalculator)

The footprints of humanity have damaged the Earth; resources destroyed, forests cut down, oceans polluted. Not all humanity treads with a heavy footfall. Some of us wear hiking boots while others walk barefoot. If we were to use resources sustainably and fairly, our ecological footprint would not damage the Earth.

*Invite someone to demonstrate what it looks like when we walk with hiking boots on the earth. Reflect with the group on other ways we leave our mark.*

Ask the group to consider what positive actions they can take to show they care for the environment and to reduce their footprint on the earth? Each pilgrim is given a piece of paper with a specific action suggested such as using cars less often, walking to school, recycling more faithfully, becoming a supporter of Care for the Environment campaigns etc.

The group is invited to walk slowly and prayerfully for the next part of the pilgrim trail as a sign of their commitment to live more sustainably on earth and to work towards reducing their carbon footprint. Before moving off, the leader can read the following scripture text:

*This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this: to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God – Micah 6:8*

**Stations Along the Way (6): The Gift of Water**

If the route includes a well, this is ideal. If not, find an alternative source of water – a river, stream, lake, pond. If no natural source of water is available, bring some along with you or have it placed at a specific location beforehand.

‘Water is one of the most beautiful elements. It has a whole depth of meaning. In the Irish tradition, there is a great respect for water and a lovely sense of how the water element can bring protection. People put bottles of holy water in the walls of their farms to keep away evil and sickness. Some carry it in their cars to prevent accidents. Others sprinkle it at night for the holy souls and for absent friends and loved ones. A huge percentage of the human body is water. (The average adult: 55 – 60%) Blessing with water is beautiful; it is as if the innocent water of the earth which has flown wild and free in rain and ocean comes to bless its embodied human sister.’ John O’Donoghue

*For a time, invite the group to think about what water brings to mind for them. What images or memories have they of water? What words do they associate with it? Do they know any poems or stories about water? The leader explains how powerful a symbol water is in the Bible. Give examples. Water is also a powerful symbol used in Baptism.*

Each member was invited to take a stone with them before setting out as a symbol or reminder of a prayer or intention they had in mind for the walk. Invite the walkers to place these stones in a ‘cairn’ near the well (or in a central position if there is no well).

Traditionally, people brought something that represented their prayer to the well and took away a blessing; using a small bowl of water, invite members of the group to bless each other. They may use a simple formula of words, such as: ‘May God walk with you’.

Invite the group to think of other people who may need our prayers at this time and to add stones to the cairn as they name specific intentions.

**Stations Along the Way (7): Receiving from the Earth and Blessing Prayer (Final Station)**

Take a moment to recall what you have received from the earth as you walked today. What dod you notice? What sounds, sights, smells were you aware of? What stays with you from the different moments of our walk together? The group is invited to share any reflections they may have.

**The Prayer of the Four Directions concludes the Pilgrim Walk – face towards each direction in turn, while saying this prayer:**

Reader 1: We face the direction of the East, the direction of the rising sun. we open our hearts to the gifts of newness, of hope and encouragement in our lives. (Pause for a moment) We pray in silence that we will have a sense of hope about the future.

Reader 2: We face the direction of the South, the place of growth, and abundant life. We ask for gifts of vitality and new life. We ask that we may grow to become the best person we can be, the person God calls us to be.

Reader 3: We face the direction of the West, the place of the setting sun, the ending of the day. We ask for the gift of courage to let go of anything that does not bring us life. We pray too for people we know who have had to let go of friends or family this past year, those who are sad because they have lost a loved one.

Reader 4: We face the direction of the North, the place of the North Star, the star that is looked to for guidance and direction. We ask for a sense of meaning and purpose, of vision and direction in our lives. We pray that we will always have wise people to guide us, that we will have the wisdom to ask for help when we need it.

We conclude with the ancient prayer of the Celtic Church called the Caim Prayer or Circle Prayer. This is a way to surround oneself with the protection and blessing of the Triune God. To perform the Caim Prayer, you pray standing, point your right index finger and turn in a clockwise circle. The prayer is said, line by line, at different positions on the circle: Imagining your circle is a clock face, turn and pray as follows:

‘Circle me Lord, keep protection near, and danger afar.’ (12 o’clock position)

‘Circle me Lord, keep light near, and darkness afar.’ (3 o’clock position)

‘Circle me Lord, keep peace within, keep evil out.’ (6 o’clock position)

‘Circle me Lord, keep hope within, keep doubt without.’ (9 o’clock position)

Returning to the 12 o’clock position, you pray:

May you be a bright flame before me,

May you be a guiding star above me,

May you be a smooth path below me,

And a loving Guide behind me,

Today, tonight and forever. **Amen.**

Further notes on Pilgrimage from Maureen:

‘Love all God’s creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the Divine mystery in things.’ Fyodor Dostoeysky

‘The new awareness that I sweeping our planet reminds us that we are so interconnected with the air we breathe, the trees of the forest, the flowers of the field, the mountains and rivers, that their diminishment is our diminishment, their destruction is our destruction. Not only the beauty and majesty, but also the chaos and power of the natural world inspire our poetry, our art and our spiritual life with a sense of wonder. When we fan the flame of wonder in our hearts there is a new meaning in our lives. Our hearts expand in care of those who journey with us and for our planet Earth which is our home. To be aware of the caress of a summer breeze, the beauty of a flower, the smile of a friend, or the sparkle of a wave in flight, is a gift beyond price. It is the gift of wonder enfolded in awe.’ Jacinta Shailer SGS (Journey Prayers)

‘In photographs taken from space, our planet looks like a bright blue marble, swirled around with white clouds, floating against a background of endless black space. It is a precious little spot that alone among all the planets, moons and asteroids we have explored to date, is covered with a membrane of life. Astronauts who have seen this view with their own eyes speak of its power to change their deepest feelings. Saudi Arabian astronaut Sultan bin Salman al-Saud, part of an international crew, recollected: “The first day we all pointed to our own countries. The third day we were pointing to our continents. By the fifth day we were all aware of only one Earth.” Astronaut Rusty Schweigert, who walked on the moon, noted from that vantage point that Earth is so small, you can block it out with your thumb. “Then you realise”, he mused “that on this beautiful warm blue and white circle, is everything that means anything to you, all of nature and history, birth and love. And then you are changed forever.” ’ Elizabeth A Johnson (Quest for the Living God, 2007)

*But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you: Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being – Job 12:7-10*

‘Our home, Planet Earth, God’s creation, is an extraordinarily beautiful and fruitful place. It is appropriately called ‘the garden planet’ of the universe. We humans, with every other species, depend totally on the proper functioning of the planet for the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food that sustains us and the multiple other ways in which the earth supports us and every other creature. Though the earth appears very robust, we know that it can be quite fragile and that small changes, over time, can have enormous consequences for life.’ Cry of the Earth; Irish Bishops Pastoral on Climate Change (Pg 6)

Prayers to complement:

Creator of the Universe,

We pray in gratitude and praise.

You were there at the beginning of all things,

Shaping our world and preparing it for us.

You have provided the mountains and the trees,

The waters and the earth.

Help us to be caretakers of your gifts,

Protecting the land from abuse,

And ready to share with all in need.

Show us how to use our science and technology

In creative, not destructive ways.

Deepen our awareness of our connectedness

With all your Creation,

So that future generations will also enjoy every blessing. Amen.

(Michael Gormly SSC)

Prayer with response, the response is: **Creator and Redeemer, hear our prayer.**

We pray for your wisdom, to safeguard the earth,

its soil and all that grows in it. (Response)

We pray for your understanding, to cleanse the air

and all that breathes. (Response)

We pray for your knowledge, to find ways to preserve our waters

and all that lives in them. (Response)

We pray for your guidance, to protect all living beings

with whom we share our planet. (Response)

We pray for your compassion, to reach out to all those

affected by extremes of weather, changes in climate,

and the destruction of the earth. (Response)

We pray for your insight, to use the resources

entrusted to us wisely and well. (Response)

Leader: Creator God, in the lives we lead and the choices we make, help us to be mindful of our impact upon your world and its people, near and far, now and in future generations, so that we may be faithful stewards of all that you have entrusted to us. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

*A Prayer for Peace of Mind*

Almighty God,

We bless you for our lives, we give you praise

for your abundant mercy and grace we receive.

We thank you for your faithfulness

even though we are not that faithful to you.

Lord Jesus, we ask you to give us peace

in our mind, body, soul and spirit.

We want you to heal and remove everything

that is causing stress, grief, and sorrow in our lives.

Please guide our path through life and

make our enemies be at peace with us.

Let your peace reign in our family, at our place of work,

Our friends; every part of our lives.

Let your angels of peace go ahead of us

when we go out and stay by our side when we return.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

*A Prayer to Heal Stress*

Heavenly Father, please grant me peace of mind

and calm my troubled heart.

My soul is like a turbulent sea.

I can't seem to find my balance so

I stumble and worry constantly.

Give me the strength and clarity of mind to find my purpose

and walk the path you've laid out for me.

I trust your Love God, and know that you will heal this stress.

Just as the sun rises each day, after the dark of night.

Please bring me clarity with the light of God.

In your name I pray. **Amen.**