

PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage is the journey to a sacred place usually associated with an important person or event in a religion. Whilst there is no Biblical requirement for Christians to go on pilgrimages it became popular in the middle ages. Pilgrims might go to the Holy Land to Nazareth to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Pilgrimage is an act of religious devotion and is used by Christians to help deepen their spiritual life and connect themselves more with God, Jesus, and other Christians. Some pilgrims might go to a place linked with healing in order to be healed such as



Walsingham

Walsingham became a centre of pilgrimage when in 1061 Richeldis the wife of the Lord of the manor had a dream in which the Virgin Mary appeared and told her to build a replica of the house in Nazareth where the birth of Jesus was announced. A priory was built in 1150 and was visited by many kings of England including Henry VIII. A slipper chapel was built where pilgrims took off their shoes and walked the rest of the way to the shrine in bare feet. The Nazareth house was destroyed during the Reformation. Walsingham remains a Roman Catholic site of pilgrimage and its popularity grew during the 20th century. The Church of England have also built a shrine which attracts Protestants, so Walsingham is now ecumenical centre of pilgrimage. Services are held daily and prayers are said often using the rosary. Mass is held at midday and pilgrims often still remove their shoes at the slipper chapel and walk to the shrine in bare feet.



Taize

Taize became a site of pilgrimage when Brother Roger began a religious community in 1940. One important aspect that made Taize different was that monks who joined came from different denominations Roman Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox making it truly Ecumenical (made up of people from different Christian denominations) The focus was on reconciliation and resolving conflict between the denominations at the time of world war 2. This is something the World Council of Churches also work to establish. Brother Roger said “reconciliation brings springtime to the soul” and that the Taize community would lead to understanding and cooperation. Young people from all over the world come as part of an act of religious devotion, as an act of supplication (asking God for something) and as an act of atonement to pay penance for sins committed. They go to meet others from different Christian backgrounds taking part in the 3 services of reconciliation held daily, to pray with each other, study the Bible and join in the music which is a feature of Taize.



Christianity in Britain in the 21st century

Britain’s religious climate is changing with more Atheists (people who have do not believe in God) and more Agnostics (those who are unsure if God exists). Britain is becoming more secular and fewer people going to church. Britain is also becoming a Pluralist society as different religions coexist side by side . In the 2011 census 5% said they were Muslims and 4% representing other faiths. Even so 60 % of people described themselves as Christian and Britain remains a Christian country the Church of England is the Established religion and has many links with the government of the country and the justice system. Sunday still remains a day of rest with Sunday trading laws, witnesses swearing on a Bible to tell the truth, Hymns being sung at public ceremonies, holidays given for Christian festivals and marriages and funerals taking place in church.

The role of the Church in the local community

The Church remains at the heart of many communities providing first and foremost regular acts of worship. It also is there to celebrate festivals such as Christmas and Easter and mark important life stages with Baptisms, weddings and funerals. The Church offers many other things to the community such as coffee mornings for the elderly, toddler groups, a place to run cubs and brownies, family community centres, messy church often with a meal provided, the church is often the coordinator for food banks, can act as advice centres and emergency shelters. Some church communities provide Street Pastors to those returning from a night out to ensure they get home safely.

<https://www.streetpastors.org/about-us-1/>

The world wide Church and Evangelism

Jesus left his disciples with ‘The Great Commission’, “to go out and preach the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ and convert others to the Christian faith”. This Christians call Evangelism, and they see it as their Christian mission to convert others either by talking to them about Jesus or modelling their faith in their behaviour. As the more traditional model of Church seems to be declining it is the Evangelical Churches such as ‘Hillsong’ that is growing. <https://hillsong.com/uk/> This style of non traditional churches are set up using Church planting and then when they have grown they are split to set up a new church somewhere else. The Church of England in response to this set up a movement called ‘Fresh Expression’ to encourage people into church who would not normally go to church services. They would use ideas like café church set up clubs and even gyms.

Tearfund

Tearfund is a charity whose aim is to put Christian belief and Jesus’ commandment to “Love your neighbour as yourself” into practice. This is an unselfish unconditional love known as Agape. They raise public awareness on issues such as social justice, poverty and discrimination. Campaigns against world poverty, gives practical help and teaches communities to help themselves. <https://www.tearfund.org/>