



Pilgrimage Prayer Day

OVERVIEW

This extended activity takes prayer and the young people into the streets. Using the theme of pilgrimage, the young people embark on a journey that leads them to stop and pray outside specific locations in a town, such as a hospital, a church, a jail, and a social-service agency. This activity is ideal for complementing a service or outreach day, or it can enhance a road trip or retreat journey.

Suggested Time

This is an extended prayer activity that could be spread out over the course of a day or an afternoon. The actual gatherings at locations can be as brief as 2 or 3 minutes. However, additional time will be required for traveling between sites, providing explanations, and guiding the young people through the process.

Group Size

Five to twenty people, because groups of any larger size can be a distraction and can block public access at the prayer sites. If your group is larger than twenty, it may be necessary to split it into several smaller groups that each take turns praying at the chosen sites.

Special Considerations

This prayer presents some logistical challenges. Preparation, planning, and adequate adult support are all important. If your group is large, it may be necessary to inform the local authorities of this activity and obtain permission to hold it. Some young people may be self-conscious about praying in public. This can be addressed by standing in small, closed circles and praying quietly.

Materials Needed

- ☀ a local map
- ☀ a copy of resource 3, "Pilgrimage Prayer Day"
- ☀ a Red Cross sign or medical items from a first aid kit
- ☀ a rubber stamp, a manila folder, or a binder
- ☀ a key, a chain, or a padlock
- ☀ a candle, a Bible, or a church bulletin
- ☀ a blanket, a can of food, or silverware
- ☀ a baby blanket or a child's toy
- ☀ a Bible
- ☀ sidewalk chalk

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Use a map of your area or of a nearby town or city to locate your prayer sites and establish a route. Preferably create a walkable route; otherwise make arrangements to drive the young people from site to site. Choose one place from each of the following bulleted lists of landmarks. Feel free to use fewer than six sites or to add sites of your own.

- ☉ a hospital, a clinic, a medical center, or a nursing home
- ☉ a government agency, such as a county, state, or federal office building
- ☉ a police station, a sheriff's office, a county jail, or a courthouse
- ☉ a cathedral or a church
- ☉ a shelter, a community kitchen, a thrift store, or an outreach ministry site
- ☉ a day-care center or an agency that serves the needs of children

Refer to resource 3 and gather the symbolic objects related to the sites you chose. Read the resource and plan which scriptural passages you will use at each site. Mark up the resource to reflect your decisions and bring it along to guide you on your trip.

1. Before the group departs, invite the participants to view the objects you have collected and challenge them to guess what each one signifies. Briefly introduce the concept of pilgrimage prayer with comments along the following lines:



Pilgrims are people who undertake a spiritual journey to holy places in search of God's presence. In the past, and still today, a great many people have made pilgrimages to holy sites all across our world. On the road pilgrims gather to pray and invite God to bless the people and places they encounter. By inviting God to be present, our prayers of blessing make people and places holy.

Inform the young people that they will be making a pilgrimage and explain where it will be held. Tell them that at a few specific locations, they will stop, gather in a circle, and offer prayers for the place and for the people who work or live there.

2. Start the pilgrimage on the steps of your church or school by gathering everyone in a circle and reading Jer. 29:7,11–14. (Work and pray for the welfare of the city. When you seek God with your heart, you shall find God.)

As the group departs, remind the young people that this is a prayerful activity and challenge them to be respectful and reverent even as they travel between sites. Take with you the map locating the prayer sites, the symbols, resource 3, a Bible, and sidewalk chalk.

Each time the group members arrive at a site and gather together, place the symbol related to that site in the center of the group and invite one person to mark a cross on the sidewalk using the chalk. After reading your chosen passage from the Scriptures, allow a few moments of silent prayer and then invite the group members to name people they wish to bless or to offer their intentions for the place and those it serves.

If the pilgrimage takes place during business hours, ask one of the adults in your group to enter each building to inform the staff of the purpose of the gathering.

3. Conclude the pilgrimage by returning to the starting point and marking that spot with a cross. Take a few moments to invite the young people to share their reflections on the pilgrimage experience. Close by praying together the Lord's Prayer or another familiar prayer.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊗ Enhance the pilgrimage experience by inviting youth groups from other parishes or different denominations. In this case you might wish to begin the pilgrimage together at one church and end with a prayer service or youth gathering at another church.
- ⊗ Make the pilgrimage a family event by inviting parents and family members to join the group at the end for a picnic in a local park.
- ⊗ Make a seasonal pilgrimage. Adapt this prayer format into a Good Friday procession, a stations of the cross event in a downtown area, or a Christmas caroling trip.
- ⊗ Let the young people select the sites to visit and bless with prayer. For example, they might plan a pilgrimage to the sites most frequented by young people, such as movies theaters, theme parks, malls, skating rinks, and bowling alleys. Or they might plan a pilgrimage to schools in a district or to all the local churches.

**SCRIPTURAL
CONNECTIONS**

These additional scriptural passages may be included in this prayer activity:

- ☉ Exod. 3:5–6 (Moses stood on holy ground.)
- ☉ Psalm 84 (How lovely is God's dwelling place.)
- ☉ Isa. 55:6 (Seek the Lord and call on God who is near.)
- ☉ Isa. 58:6–9 (Set free the oppressed and homeless, and God will answer you.)