

A Pilgrimage of Remembrance in Montreat

Since ancient times, humans worldwide have intentionally traveled to sacred places for purposes that have, at their core, religious faith and personal transformation. As we may think about a loved one now deceased, the idea of making a “pilgrimage” to one of their favorite and sacred places may come to mind. This page offers some guidance on why and how one may arrange such a journey to Montreat, North Carolina, in hopes that the “pilgrim” may find more readily the presence of God.

In particular, the opportunity for a “Pilgrimage of Remembrance” to the Nancy Holland Sibley Memorial Garden of the Montreat Conference Center (entrance pictured at right) is presented here. Secondly, the Prayer Path encircling the former reservoir at the Walk Jones Wildlife Sanctuary also is suggested, as a place with Scripture-based meditations.

Of course, persons long familiar with Montreat will have their own sacred spaces, however they define them. The thoughts presented below may be helpful.

By leaving behind daily concerns and the ordinary of life, the pilgrim seeks a deeper connection with what is sacred. Below, brief descriptions of stages of traditional religious pilgrimages are given, including passages from the Holy Bible that may serve as inspirations for meditation and prayer.



“What Do You Seek?”: The Yearning to Remember

The first words recorded as spoken by Jesus in the Gospel of John (chapter 1, verse 38) are, “**What do you seek?**” In thinking about a deceased relative, friend, mentor or family member, what is it that we might wish to remember about that person, to the degree that we even consider devoting time and energy to carry our remembrance and relationship to a specific physical location? In doing so we might remember a loved one through the experience of celebration, joy, reconciliation or restoration, for example. Maybe you feel the time is overdue for some new or deeper connection. What do you seek?

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:8-9

Context for the Journey

As distinguished from “ordinary” travel to Montreat, say for annual summer vacation or a group retreat at another time, typically a pilgrimage would have not only a focused, spiritual, highly personal purpose but also some significant advance prayer and preparation in body, mind and spirit. While we think of pilgrimage as ordinarily involving travel over a great distance, such as to Rome, Italy, one certainly could walk out the door and across the cove from their Montreat residence. Either way the pilgrim can enrich their experience with advance reflection on the person who is the object of their travel, and their expectations for being on-site and beyond. Consider the path you will take for this journey,

He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.— Psalm 23:3b

"The act of pilgrimage is an opportunity to 'walk through' issues that we may have on our minds. Often, people go on pilgrimage when they are at a crossroads in their lives, when undergoing a change in their life's direction or relationships. Some may be in search of a deeper spirituality, healing and forgiveness. For some it may mark a special birthday, retirement or other occasion for giving thanks. For others, it is simply a journey with God."-- Canterbury Cathedral, England.

At the Sacred Site

Tranquility. Water. Woodland. Path. Two places of special meaning in Montreat and of a more formal setting, where the pilgrim can find space for reflection and remembrance, are the Memorial Garden (accessible), along lower Flat Creek (Assembly Drive), pictured above; and the Prayer Path, pictured here, adjacent to the pond at the wildlife sanctuary (upper Graybeard Trail). (A booklet of meditations, and posted signs, for the latter provides inspiration for both locations:

<https://montreat.org/visit/spirituality-exploration#prayer-path>.)

Here is sacred space, as you define it, for deeper reflection on the one deceased and your relationship and what brought you here at this season. Consider how inspiration might come for this time and place,



I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.— Psalm 16:7

Afterwards

Pilgrimage includes the opportunity for change in the pilgrim, perhaps in unexpected ways. During this time of pilgrimage there will have been opportunity for self-reflection, in addition to the aim of remembering the deceased. As a Christian organization, Montreat Conference Center wishes that the pilgrim goes forward having explored, renewed, and connected with personal faith and with faith beyond. Consider,

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

A Suggested Prayer for Pilgrimage

Thank You, O Lord, for the opportunity--perhaps even a deeper calling--to make a sacred journey of remembrance. May Your counsel guide the preparation and completion of this journey, whether short or long in distance and time, please. I remain open to the mysteries of such a venture and revelations that may arise, as inspired by Your Spirit.
In Jesus' name, amen.

A Few Resources

Bodo, M. 2004. *The Place We Call Home: Spiritual Pilgrimage as a Path to God*. Paraclete Press, Brewster, Massachusetts. Travels to traditional sites such as Assisi and Rome and also journeys of memory. 116 pages.

French, R. M. (Translator). 1954. *The Way of a Pilgrim* (pages 1-104), and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way* (pages 105-207). HarperCollins, New York. First published in 1884, the chronicles of an anonymous Russian Christian traveling through mid-19th century Russia and Siberia.

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<https://www.wm.edu/sites/pilgrimage/>. "Interdisciplinary research and teaching on pilgrimage as transformative travel in every time, territory and tradition."