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Family Pilgrimage: An Introduction

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Editorial: Family Pilgrimage

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The study of pilgrimage often takes the perspective of individual pilgrims, neglecting experiences of pilgrimage with a group or significant others. However, going to a holy place with friends, a community, or as a family implies a different configuration of pilgrimage. Groups travelling to sacred sites have a particular impact on local tourism and structure through demands on gastronomic, hotel, and museum facilities. Such travel also shapes the nature of spiritual-religious experience.

Many couples, after completing the Camino de Santiago together or with their children, have suggested that making the pilgrimage strengthened relational bonds in moments of crisis and before making important decisions. There is also a growing tendency among young people to honeymoon on the Camino. How might family and group pilgrimages differ from individual pilgrimage? What obstacles and facilities await such walkers on the Camino de Santiago? Are churches, tourist agencies, and local governments prepared to support families in their walking to shrines? What forms of family pilgrimage take place on Camino paths in different countries? What results do they bear in the short and long term for localities and family relationships?

These questions are answered by the articles collected in this issue, which analyse, from different perspectives, the phenomenon of group pilgrimages made by people linked by family ties. The authors take a comparative perspective, as they cover many of the countries through which the modern Camino de Santiago runs. They also seek to show the various forms of family involvement: from the family in the strict sense to groups that, by

virtue of their origin, such as those formed by students of the same university, constitute a family in the analogical sense.

The key to defining this phenomenon remains to indicate the forms in which contemporary family pilgrimage is expressed. Two texts in particular are devoted to these issues, dealing with this phenomenon observed in Spain and Poland. These two case-studies show perfectly the differences in the approach to the Camino depending on the distance from Santiago De Compostela, but also the common orientation. In the case of Spain, there are initiatives both to support families in their individual pilgrimage effort and organised forms. The article by P. Roszak and J. Tanco presents the importance of such pilgrimages from a historical as well as a theological perspective, proposing a systematic reflection on the effects of family pilgrimages: as the pilgrims point out, this influences the healing of their bonds, the strengthening of their values and the practice of a specific asceticism (detachment from electronic devices and focus on relationships). On the other hand, a text by F. Mróz, S. Tykarski and M. Gazda about Polish initiatives of family pilgrimages on the Camino in Poland shows the forms of family pilgrimages in this country and the ways of organising such trips. The authors, based on material acquired during their research, present the motivations of families to take part in such a pastoral proposal.

In this context, the text by A. Rucquoi, who presents the phenomenon of family pilgrimage to Compostela from a historical perspective, should be considered extremely interesting. She points out that, unfortunately, this aspect

is often overlooked in research, focusing attention on the main figure, often the men, and forgetting, for example, the children who accompanied the adults on their pilgrimage. They appear in the context of many stories about, for example, miracles on the Camino, thus revealing the true nature of the pilgrimage, in which sometimes whole families took part.

The family character of the pilgrimage to Compostela, on the other hand, is not only the fact that families choose to walk the Camino routes in different parts of Europe, but this family feature of the pilgrimage is expressed in the '*communitas*' they create, i.e. the community between those walking to the same shrine. This means building family-like bonds; in fact, since the Middle Ages pilgrims have seen themselves as a kind of 'state' within the Church. S. Brumec's use of references to contemporary sociological analyses in her text sheds new light on this phenomenon.

The question of initiatives within the wider academic family and their long-term effect is addressed in Douglas Challenger's text. He analyses the practice of staying

for a semester in Spain and making a pilgrimage as part of this stay along one of the Camino routes in northern Spain. The longitudinal research carried out by the author sheds much light on the motivations and the fruits of pilgrimage in the lives of young people.

This special issue has drawn attention to a phenomenon that is often overlooked in the study of pilgrimage. The configuration of the expedition is important for understanding the motivations of those who set out on the journey. Instead of taking time away from family to find balance, many undertake the pilgrimage with immediate family members to build positive relationships. The nature of such pilgrimages is different from individual trips. Pastoral programs should take into account the particular needs of family pilgrimages. In addition, considering how families may be impacted when a member walks alone would also be beneficial. The intent of this issue has been to open a conversation on family pilgrimage and to encourage empirical research that might support and help build understanding of the therapeutic effects of this practice