

Holy Land Pilgrimage: A Presbyterian Calling

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Across many centuries, people with deeply held religious beliefs have left home for limited periods in order to visit places that would enhance their faith and practice. Distinct from a mere “trip” or a “vacation getaway,” travel undertaken for religious reasons is usually referred to as “pilgrimage.” A pilgrimage is a religiously motivated journey of limited duration to a place that holds religious meaning or significance.

Christians of all sorts have, in one form or another, engaged in the practice of pilgrimage. Some have gone on pilgrimage to religiously significant places like Wittenberg, Geneva, Rome, Canterbury, or Lourdes. By far, the most favored destination for Christian pilgrims through the ages has been the Holy Land. Because of its importance in relation to the stories, people, and events of the Bible, many Christians have longed to go to see places like Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jerusalem, Hebron, and the Jordan River at least once in their lives.

Presbyterians, too, have often gone on such pilgrimages to learn more about the Bible and to grow in their faith. Because Presbyterians understand Christian faith to occur at the intersection of the divine and the human, the ancient and the contemporary, and the prayerful and the just, we go on pilgrimage both to see the ancient stones like those found at archaeological sites and to meet the “living stones” (I Peter 2.4-5) of the vital Christian communities of the land made holy by the presence of the Holy One.

In addition to enriching our understanding of the Bible, a Presbyterian pilgrimage to the region has the power to shed light on the often perplexing realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Presbyterians believe in loving the Triune God with all of our minds as well as with all of our hearts; therefore, we do our best to study all sides of issues relevant to our faith. Over the years, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has developed outstanding, fair, and informative resources aimed at helping church members understand the challenges, problems, and possibilities of this religiously meaningful and politically complex part of the world. But nothing can compare with actually being there, which pilgrims repeatedly call “transformative.”

We hope that you will consider taking a pilgrimage to the land of the Bible. We want to assist you in making your Presbyterian pilgrimage an occasion for growth in your faith in Jesus Christ, in your understanding of all aspects of the place to which you’ll be traveling, and in the ways you can share your discoveries with others upon your return.

For more, visit the PC(USA) Israel and Palestine Mission Network at www.israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org or email travel@israelpalestinemissionnetwork.org.