

2020

## The Long Pilgrimage of 2020-21

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KARA BAYLOR

# The Long Pilgrimage of 2020-21



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**Pilgrimage** (n.) 1. Intentional dislocation, for the sake of transformation, where the body teaches the soul.

*Definition by Martha Stortz, Professor Emerita, Augsburg University*

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It was the second or third time that I attended the gathering of the ELCA Campus Pastors. There, I heard Marty Stortz give this definition of the word *pilgrimage*. Words usually have to be put to music for them to stick in my head, but her words have stuck with me for years; no need for a melody. Maybe it is because they are so true for the work we all do on college and university campuses.

Intentional dislocation—that is what students always do when they come to college. They intentionally make the choice to pick themselves up from their homes to be a part of a new community in a new location. The academic year of 2020-21 has had more dislocation than we could have ever imaged. It has also made all of us more intentional, including students. Just moving to campuses this year demanded more intentionality than usual. Facing a global pandemic, students had to make the difficult choice about whether to suspend their college pilgrimage, to take online classes, or to return to our campuses.

Wherever and however they go to college, they do so for the sake of transformation. They do not come to college in the hopes of staying the same. They come to college to

learn, to take in new ideas, and to discover more about their gifts and skills, and how each can be leveraged for the flourishing of communities.

Each year, they grow and change and push themselves to try new things. Each year, they seek deeper understanding of themselves and others. They do all this for the sake of themselves and all those around them: friends, family members, and future colleagues they have yet to meet and cannot yet imagine.

The 2020-2021 academic year is like no other in the modern era. The college pilgrimage this year can feel desolate and interminable, with too many mundane days leaving us little energy for coping with mountainous terrain. Many of our classrooms mix virtual students with others sitting six feet apart. Many of them are moving in and out of quarantine. Many are finding it difficult to make friends with the people down the hall because everyone's doors are expected to be closed; this is especially hard on first year students. Student organizations are primarily meeting online; energy for additional time on Zoom is very low. Opportunities to meet others who may see the world differently, and who would otherwise play a vital role in a student's transformation, aren't readily available.

**The Rev. Kara Baylor** is the Director of the Center of Faith and Spirituality at Carthage College in Kenosha, Wisconsin, where she provides direction for campus ministry, works with the Division of Student Affairs to develop spiritual programs and service activities, and assists with crisis intervention and grief support.

This year calls us to be more intentional. Where will we put our energy while on this pilgrimage? This year asks us to listen even more closely to what our bodies are telling us about the state of our souls. Where will we find transformation despite and because of the dislocation?

The discomfort of this moment may be a sign that things need to change; it may also mean growth and transformation. Discomfort may mean you need to move away from an expectation, idea, or activity. It may also indicate growing pains that students need to push through as they start to see the world in a new way. When students—as well as educators—are worn out, they should stop and think about what is essential to each day.

“This year calls us to be more intentional. ”

All of us should be learning to say “yes” to the things that are life-giving and “no” to things that deplete us. Ask questions that will help you be discerning in these moments. You will need those questions for your entire life.

The long pilgrimage of 2020-21 is unlike any other journey any of us have been on. It is calling us to be even more intentional with each step we take. We are called to be more open to the ways we can be transformed.