

More Information about the International Pilgrimages of the Pilgrims of St Francis

The following explanations describe the nature of our pilgrimages.

You will find specific information about the current pilgrimage in the Invitation written by the Companions who are hosting the current pilgrimage in a specific year.

We, the Pilgrims of St. Francis, are an ecumenical Christian movement with branches in several European countries. In addition to national pilgrimages, we have been organising international pilgrimages for over 90 years.

The organisation is done in turn by volunteers in our member countries. They choose a region in their country or in another country. Traditionally, the pilgrimage takes place every ten years in the area of Assisi, the home of St. Francis, in Italy.

In the spirit of Francis of Assisi, we spend nine days walking through the countryside, preparing our meals together, staying in simple lodgings and sharing our faith. On the way we will talk about our responsibilities in society and for the environment, peace and justice and other issues that concern us. Singing, playing, laughing and adventure - that too should not be missed. We try to develop more understanding of each other and practice tolerance so that we may continue this in our daily lives.

The week's structure

On the first day of the pilgrimage, all participants come together and, after an act of worship, they leave in small groups for their first night's accommodation. For nine days the different groups are 'en route'. On the last day, everyone comes back together at lunchtime, joins in an act of worship, eats together and enjoys the final evening. The next morning there is breakfast. Everyone is asked to leave by 10:00. It will usually be possible to arrive one night before the start. This will cost a little extra for adults (see the details on the Invitation Form); for the young there is no charge. The night before everyone has to cater for themselves. There are usually local shops and restaurants. The first meal organised by the Companions is the evening meal on the starting day

In the groups

The important components of the day in the groups are:-

The walking It is not the length of the walk that is important but that everyone is included, whatever their ability, in order to enjoy the countryside, to discover new places, to be exposed to the weather, and to arrive at the next destination together. The distances planned vary according to the different kinds of group.

Meals Each group has to cater for itself. Taking turns, 2 or 3 pilgrims shop and cook for the group. Where there is no kitchen, kitchen equipment with gas cookers is provided. All other household activities must be shared out (according to ability) by the whole group including the children.

Times for discussions We aim to find a time each day to talk about the theme of the year. For this purpose, texts and methods for activities have been prepared in advance.

Sharing faith Spirituality finds a place in morning or evening prayer, in times of meditation or in the sharing and contributions of the group. Usually, in the course of the pilgrimage, once or twice there may be an opportunity to share in a service with a local church or celebrate a eucharist within the group.

Singing and having fun Fun and creativity are also part of the pilgrimage. Often people sing or play - depending on their mood. You are welcome to bring musical instruments or games with you if they fit in your luggage.

Sleeping arrangements

With the exception of the Senior Centre, everyone usually sleep on the floor. The venues where we spend the night are mostly community rooms, sports halls, churches or schools -rooms that do not, often, meet the comfort and hygiene requirements that we are used to in our normal life. Often there are no showers, no adequately equipped kitchen and only a few toilets.

Group composition

The groups usually consist of between 15 and 22 people. Participants come from different European countries and a variety of backgrounds. They belong to different denominations or are simply exploring their spirituality. There is a wide age range - from the toddler to the senior. This diversity will be found in all the groups as far as is feasible.

The different types of groups

Usually there are three different types of walking groups and a Centre group. The chosen option can be ticked on the application form.

If you cannot carry your baggage, you must register for the Star Group or the Centre Group.

1. Walking groups

For people who can walk 10 to 18 km a day at about 3 km/h. The groups sleep in different venues every night. Those who cannot carry their entire luggage should state it on the application form. Then their sleeping mats and sleeping bags can be put in the car, nothing more! The walking groups are accompanied by a car to carry the kitchen material, food and some baggage.

2. Star groups

For people who cannot carry their luggage, but can still walk up to 15 km per day at about 3 km/h. They walk with a day bag. Their venues only change 2 or 3 times during the week. The star groups are also suitable for children who are not used to walking long distances carrying luggage.

3 Adventure groups

For people who can walk 12 - 18 km per day at about 4km/h. The group has to carry everything. Usually there is no support vehicle and there may be a hand cart to carry the kitchen equipment and the shopping.

4 Centre Group

For pilgrims who are older or have physical limitations and cannot sleep on the floor there are beds in shared rooms. Participants usually bring sheets, duvet covers, pillow case. The group go out on walks, according to each person's ability and the catering is shared by the group. There is, usually, one venue for the whole week

5 Family Centre

If 4 or 5 families apply, a special family group will be organised, where all sleep in the same place and go walking or make excursions planning their own days. They would usually sleep on the floor. To support the parents, people who enjoy working with children are also welcome to sign up for the family centre.

6 Cycling Group. Sometimes, especially in The Netherlands, there may be a group which travels by bicycle - Everything is carried by bike!

Group leaders

In each group, volunteers are sought to perform a specific task: **Guardian** (Group Leader), **Mère** (Housekeeper), **Troubadour** (for playing and singing), **a Spiritual leader** and **someone to lead the Discussions** (often called Chapters). Their task is to guide, accompany and coordinate group **activities**. Because these are special tasks, they deserve respect and support. Nevertheless, the success of the pilgrimage depends on every individual and everyone's contribution.

Participants who have been on pilgrimage more than once and think they can take on one of these responsibilities can indicate this on the application form. If you do not want to take responsibility on your own, you can offer to be an "assistant".

Support vehicles

With the exception of the Adventure group, vehicles are needed in the groups. The kitchen equipment and the food are transported by car together with some baggage. For this we depend on some participants making their vehicles available. If you wish to do this please check that your car insurance offers sufficient cover - and tell us whether or not others are allowed to drive it.

Baggage Everyone must bring their own equipment: Plate, bowl, cutlery, cup, water bottle, sleeping bag and sleeping mat. Our aim is to be 'en route' with as little luggage as possible. To live in simplicity in every group. So the weight of the luggage should not exceed 10 kg per person. In the Centre group or Star group, the bedding may be a bit heavier. Those choosing Star groups must pack their luggage in small, soft bags that can be easily stowed in the car, no suitcases.

Luggage that is not needed during the pilgrimage will be stored in a secure place.

Insurance cover

The "Pilgrims of St. Francis" cannot be held liable for any accident or damage resulting from the action or misconduct of a participant or any third party. The volunteer group leaders are covered in their work under a public liability insurance. Each participant is responsible for his/her private accident, health and liability insurance. In addition, the movement cannot be prosecuted for possible damage or accidents that occur whilst travelling to or from the pilgrimage.

Privacy and Personal Rights

The data provided on the application form will be stored for the purpose of group planning and statistical purposes. Your details will not be passed to third parties. Under certain circumstances it may be necessary to pass on information if insurance liabilities are incurred. Further information on data protection can be found on the privacy policy on our website "pellegrinifrancesco.eu".

Photos or video taken during the pilgrimage may be used for publication on the website, on flyers or in newspaper articles. On the application form you can indicate whether or not you wish your photo to be published. We expect all participants to respect each other's personal rights and not to publish photos on the internet on Facebook, Instagram etc. without the consent of the persons photographed.

Costs - see this year's pilgrimage details on the 'Invitation'.

In order for everyone to be able to participate, we try to keep the participation costs as low as possible.

There are discounts for schoolchildren, students, trainees and the unemployed, as well as for children aged 4-12. Children under 4 are free.

A deposit must be paid when registering. This serves to finance the preparation of the pilgrimage.

Where there is a good reason for later cancellation (e.g. illness), half of the amount paid will be refunded.

The remaining amount must be paid in cash at the beginning of the pilgrimage in the currency of the country where the pilgrimage is taking place.

Applications Details of where to send the registration form and how to pay the deposit are in the details of this year's pilgrimage information.

Fill in a separate form for each participant including children.

To avoid errors when transferring the data please fill in the application form on-line if possible and send the completed PDF file by e-mail to (the address named on the details for this year's pilgrimage).

Alternatively post it to the address named on the details for this year's pilgrimage.

Registration is not binding until the deposit has been paid.

Children will be placed in the same group as their parents, if no other request is made.

Adolescents under the age of 18 who are not in the same group as a parent must be accompanied by a named adult who is in their group.

This must be authorised by the parents on the application form.

In addition, those asked must also confirm on their application forms that they have accepted responsibility.

For legal reasons, such forms involving these older children must be printed, signed and sent to us as paper copies.

The acceptance of late applications is at the discretion of the organisers.

If you have to cancel your application, please let us know as soon as possible.