



pil·grim·age

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A Civil Rights Pilgrimage

April 9 - 16, 2016

Justice is a matter of life or death; we can't afford to stay silent and tacitly accept the (mostly) invisible systems that support inequalities, create suffering, and deny human dignity. Rather, we need to have an opening—a time of listening, remembering and learning and being inspired. The Civil Rights Pilgrimage will enable students to experience and confront conversations about the justice issues of our time, including structural racism, mass incarceration, and policy change.

In the words of theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, "All injustice is a breach with God." The Civil Rights Pilgrimage is designed to connect our students with thought leaders -- past and present -- so that they have a better understanding, and are inspired to bring about justice and make a positive impact.

Four decades ago, years before any of our High School students were born, their grandparents struggled to establish and claim equality of opportunity and protection under the law in the United States. Race was the principal issue in this struggle. During the decade of the 60's, places such as Jackson, Selma, Montgomery, Atlanta and Birmingham established themselves as memorials to the struggle for civil rights. The names of Martin Luther King, Jr., Medgar Evers, Viola Liuzzo, and Chaney-Goodman-Schwerer flashed across newspaper headlines.

Organizations such as the NAACP, SCLC, and SNCC, and movements such as The Delta Project, Freedom Summer, and the Selma to Montgomery March became household words for a generation. The 1960's were years of social upheaval in American society as the moral and legal foundations of a culture were shaken by a generation of young people who gave their lives in the struggle for equality and freedom.

In April, 2016, we will journey back in time to reclaim memory and renew respect for those who struggled to secure civil rights often taken for granted today. We will travel from NJ to these cities on a pilgrimage to those "shrines of freedom" across The South; meet people who participated in and witnessed the struggle for freedom, and walk where these recent ancestors gave their lives. Maybe more important, we will spend time with those who are continuing the work for civil rights for marginalized communities and individuals -- young freedom fighters who have taken up the call for equality and justice for other marginalized communities -- those formerly incarcerated and LGBT individuals.

Our Civil Rights Pilgrims will journey to Atlanta, and visit with activists in Atlanta. We will visit the Jackson, Mississippi home of Medgar Evers, whose bloodstains can still be seen on the driveway where he was murdered. We'll meet with the attorney who finally brought his killers to justice and Hollis Watkins a leader in the community. We will walk across Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge toward Montgomery. We will visit monuments and museums that celebrate the hard won political changes in our nation's social and moral structure. In Montgomery, we will visit Dexter Ave. Baptist Church and have dinner with heroes of the movement, those who knew Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as The Equal Justice Initiative founded by Bryan Stevenson. The 16th Street Baptist Church will be the focus of our tour in Birmingham, Alabama where four young girls were killed in a bombing. Turning toward the delta of Mississippi, pilgrims will engage the memory of Goodwin, Cheney and Schwerner in Philadelphia and Meridian and the experiences of James Meredith at the University of Mississippi. Along the way we'll serve alongside those caring for their communities in churches, food pantries, soup kitchens.

A pilgrimage is a journey inward as well as outward. Pilgrims seek to strengthen and renew their faith through travel. Our working definition of pilgrimage is a transformative journey to a sacred center.

That's what makes being a pilgrim different from being a tourist. For a tourist, travel is an end in itself. For a pilgrim, travel is a means to an end. Pilgrims travel with a clear intention, to draw closer to God. They make their journey with a heightened expectation.

Pilgrimage is sacred travel, travel as a sacrament. You may know the definition of a sacrament: "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." Our travel to historical and scenic sites is the outward part, our drawing closer to God is the inward part.

And thus we expect to return transformed or changed or converted from the persons we were when we began our journey. We will not return the same as we were when we left. Pilgrims return from their journey with a "boon," something good that will enrich their lives in the everyday world back at home. We'll experience life differently upon returning. T.S. Eliot in the Four Quartets (1943) put it this way:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.



Tentative Itinerary

Saturday, April 9 - *Atlanta, GA arrival and orientation*

Sunday, April 10- *Atlanta to Birmingham*

Monday, April 11 - *Birmingham*

Tuesday, April 12 -- *Birmingham to Philadelphia and through Oxford/Delta to Jackson*

Wednesday, April 13 -- *Jackson, MS*

Thursday, April 14 - *Marion and Selma to Montgomery*

Friday, April 15 - *Montgomery to Atlanta*

Saturday, April 16 - *Return Flight*

Costs and Deadlines:

Deadline to register: October 25, 2017

Deposit due at registration: \$50.00

Total costs: \$550

Fundraising efforts: Apple Pie sale, Chili sale expected to offset approx. \$300

Anticipated total: \$250 (not including deposit)

