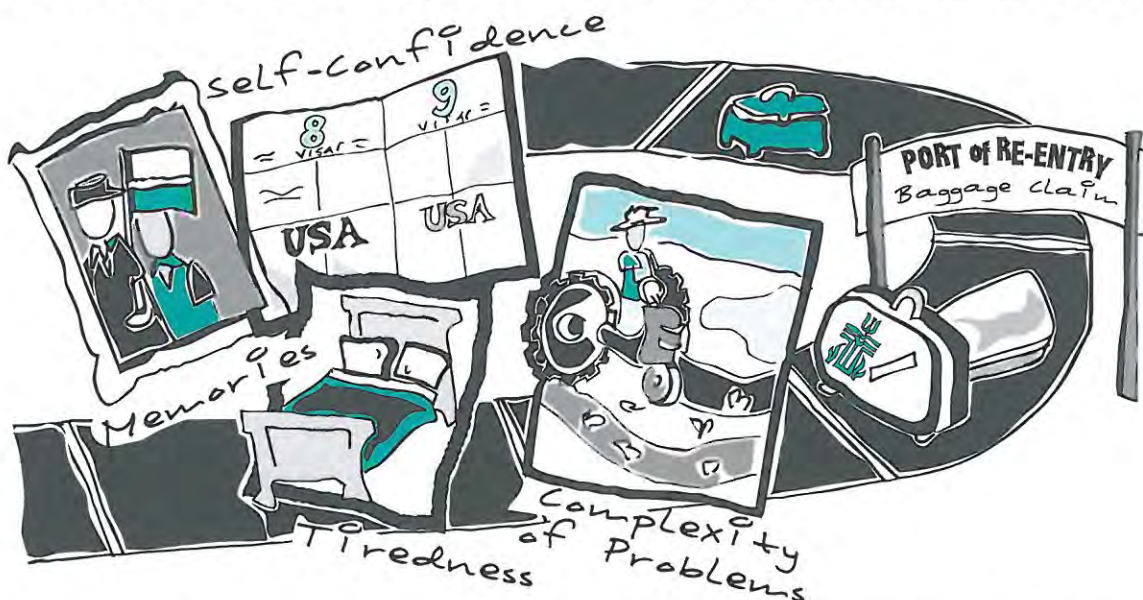


The Journey at Home



■ Encountering God

■ Living with Christ

Read Galatians 2:20.



"It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." The ultimate transformation is that the Christ begins to live in us.

Christ guides our lives and governs our attitudes and actions. Christ, the authentic human, is the reality in which we live. In this ultimate transformation, we indeed become part of the body of Christ as feet and legs, fingers and hands, heart and head, mouth and ears. The peace of Christ emanates from us; the justice of Christ is established through us; the joy of Christ is manifest in us.

The ultimate transformation is not a moment in time, though it may appear as

a momentary conversion. Rather, it is a journey to one moment and a longer journey to the next moment of perceivable growth and decision, and longer still to the fullness of Christ, until literally we are so full of Christ that there is nothing left of our small ego; there is only our "person-ality," our full personhood complete with skills, talents, wisdom, gifts, the WHO of us. What is primary is the "holy who" in us who is available to the presence of God in all times, places, and people, able to discern the call of God in each moment, ready to respond by offering the particularities of one's personality, ready to lead further and learn even more of what it means to be a holy human in the world God created and loves. The holy who in us is always ready to wait or willing to act, to be patient or to be pushy, as the Spirit gives counsel to us. The holy who in us is willing to give something as small as a smile or as large as one's job

or friends or family or life, if that is the cost of discipleship.

Not many of us are wholly holy whos. The journey made to a place of the world's need or pain has no doubt revealed something of how far away we are from being completely holy whos. In this measuring of the distance between who we are and who we may become, we may have stretched ourselves onward toward the Christ. However, the growth process is different for each of us. What was a painful stretch for one will be a tiny, easy step for another. As you and the participants return to your home places, work places, church places, community places, you may discover that you have made larger steps than you knew. Perhaps you mention to the folks at home something that became obvious to the group about an injustice they encountered, the source of that injustice, and their complicity in that injustice. When you voice this new wisdom back home, you may be met with stares of disbelief, with conflicted conversation, with challenge and with anger. You may experience anew the cost of Christ being resident in you, body and soul.

■ Reflection Questions

1. As you are in the process of returning home, not just geographically, but spiritually, mentally, emotionally, what changes do you perceive in yourself?
2. As you become aware of those changes, are you also aware of others sensing you have changed? What is

their response to you and the changes they see in you?

3. How costly are the changes or transformations in your life? Will change or transformation cost you a relationship, employment, or other benefits of your life?

Take a moment to ask yourself these questions:

- How has this experience moved me along on the journey of transformation?
- How has this experience opened me up and created more space for Christ in my life?
- How has this experience invited Christ to infuse my life with holy Spirit, to seep into even the hardest stone of myself, to permeate my being to the very core of who I am?

You may want to offer the questions to participants also.

■ The Journey at Home for the Scattered Group

Nelle Morton said, "The journey IS home."

As a trip leader, you have two primary follow-up responsibilities. One is to encourage the prophetic ministries of the participants through interpretation and action when they return. The second is to offer support and comfort through the initial re-entry process. It is hoped that you will read this section before you leave, that you will read this whole manual and

9. Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1985. Emphasis added.

understand the leadership you offer on a continuum of before, during, and after the trip. To carry out the follow-up responsibility, you need to observe, get acquainted with, and listen to the participants before you go and during the trip so that you can begin to know who is stretching in what ways, and for whom the experience was a deepening, and for whom it was diving into the living waters of God's justice. In fact, you may have discovered yourself doing more extensive stretching than you had anticipated. It may be good for you to find a friend, a pastor, a spiritual director who will encourage, support, and comfort you through re-entry, and possibly help you see new directions as well.

■ Group Journal

Duplicating the group journal, if that was part of the experience, may or may not be your responsibility. If it is, do it as quickly as possible. First read through it and correct the spellings of names and places, if necessary; then send it to participants while they are still re-entering their home lives. The journal will not only provide a continuing connection with the group and the experience, which can be supportive and affirmative, but will also serve as the source of names and places a participant may have missed along the way or forgotten.



■ Personal Notes

Write a personal note to each of the participants. Spend a few moments recalling each individual, his experiences, her contributions, the insights, worries, and joys of each. Read the individual's observations, comments, and insights in the group journal on the day when she or he was the writer. Personalize each note expressing gratitude for certain contributions, affirming specific gifts, or highlighting specific experiences. You might mail the notes out with the group journal, or mail them separately, perhaps within the first two weeks following the return.

■ Group Letters

After you send out the journal and the personal notes, you may want to write a letter, or a short series of letters, to the group as a whole. Lifting up group memories, conversations, and appreciations for the group reconnects participants and keeps those experiences fresh and alive for people as they live into their home routines.

This might be the time to copy and send out things the group wrote on the trip such as ideas for interpretations and the covenant for continued connection. These letters also might contain copies of materials sent to you by participants relating to interpretation of the trip (sermons, articles, workshop outlines, or other resources

pertinent to the trip that may be used for interpretation). You may want to share some personal reflections about your own stretching and growing during the trip. To do so would model for the group the idea of continuing reflection and remind them that the journey is not over simply because they have returned home.

Another letter (short is better, not more than a page, perhaps), may include some specific questions for people to think about as they move further away from the experience. Things can begin to look and feel different as people meld into their home environment. We are forgetful people (which must be one of God's continuing concerns for us); we forget so easily what we once learned hard and well. It may also be time to ask the group to send copies of written materials used in interpretation or a list of activities in which they have engaged. This request serves two purposes: to continue group sharing of resources and ideas, and to nudge people along in their interpretation and action responses to the trip.

■ Love the Questions

Here are some sample questions that you may include in the letter(s).

- What is most challenging about your interpretation of the trip?
- What is most rewarding about your interpretation of the trip?
- Is there one person or group who has responded with unusual enthusiasm to a presentation or conversation?

- How have you assisted—or how can you assist—persons in making a personal connection to the stories you have told or in committing to work on the issues you have raised?
- What action steps have you taken in response to the trip yourself? How have you felt about your involvement?
- What questions have come up for you since the trip that you would like to share with the group?
- As you have continued to reflect on the trip, have you gained further insights which you would like to share with the group?
- What question (or questions) remains unresolved and continues to nibble at your mind, heart, or spirit? How patient are you with this question?

Keeping in touch for a couple of months following the trip is a healthy way to end the trip and continue the journey. However, it is difficult for some people to end the trip. They may seem to need to continue to live in the trip experience and resist moving forward on the journey. While it is important to honor the community that may have formed on the trip and to maintain contact and support, co-dependence is not desirable. In a second or third letter it may be necessary for you to include a final paragraph encouraging the journey while ending the trip. From then on trip participants may choose to keep in touch with each other, but without your facilitation.

Here are some questions for your own reflection. You may choose to share them with participants.

1. What has been the most difficult adjustment to being home, at work, at church, and in the United States culture again? How hard has it been to resume your routines?
2. In entering another culture at the beginning of the trip, some things may have seemed strange. In returning home from that culture, what part of our culture now seems strange as you look at it with fresh eyes?
3. Are there things in our culture for which you have a new appreciation? a new gratitude? a new understanding? How has being away helped you give thanks for people, material things, and intangible things? According to Brother David Steindl-Rast, "Gratitude is the heart of prayer."¹⁰ How are you praying your gratitude?
4. In your prayer time since your return, what has been the most frequent petition or intercession for the place and people you met on the trip?
5. Are there ways in which your prayer life has changed because of this experience? Do you continue to "read the morning headlines with a prayer" (Avery and Marsh), rather than just reading them?
6. In his letter to the Roman church, Paul says, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). What have you sighed about since your return? Have you found yourself with "sighs too

deep for words" as you remembered events or people you met on the trip? Do you notice yourself sighing when you look at things here at home? You may want to record those moments of sacred sighs and see if there is a pattern. If you discover a pattern, it may give new direction to your prayer. If the sighs redirect your prayer, you may want to ask further questions of God's Spirit, questions of discernment: "What am I to do with the sighs, the prayers? Am I called to a particular response? Am I called to change my life in some particular way?"

7. Since returning home, where have you noticed injustice? What group or individual have you noticed working for justice?
8. Which issue from the trip are you committed to work on? How do you see this issue playing out in your daily environment? Who is already working on this issue? How can you get involved?
9. If you are already involved in working on an issue, what are your short and long-term goals?
10. What is the relationship between your faith and your commitment to work on an issue?
11. How is your congregation involved in mission partnerships? Are there areas in which you could nudge the congregation toward partnership or some other form of deeper commitment to God's mission in the world?

¹⁰ See *Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer: An Approach to Life in Fullness*, by Brother David Steindl-Rast (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), for an expanded reflection on this thought.