



## Thought for the Month of November 2021 by David Legh, Chair of DRC's Steering Group

Jane and I have been thinking about *pilgrimage* recently. Here are three examples:

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July was Mission Sunday. It was the week before our daughter's wedding, and two weeks before Jane's retirement as priest-in-charge of the Longford Eight benefice. So, we embarked on a mini-pilgrimage taking in five of her eight churches and with a short act of worship in each. We started with a service of Holy Communion at Boylestone, went on to say Lammass prayers at Church Broughton, formed a ring and encircled the building for church *clipping* at Longford, joined in Songs of Praise at Long Lane and concluded by attending Morning Prayer at Sutton-on-the-Hill.

For Jane's Lent course in 2020 we considered the truly remarkable film 'The Way', where an American ophthalmologist, Tom, goes to France following the death of his adult son, Daniel, killed in the Pyrenees during a storm while walking the Camino de Santiago. Tom's purpose is initially to retrieve his son's body, but in a combination of grief and homage to his son, Tom decides to walk the ancient spiritual trail where his son died, taking Daniel's ashes with him. The film captures perfectly the frailties of human nature, the bonding through unified purpose and the rekindling of spiritual awareness through shared experience.



My brother John, who died earlier this year, was a latter-day pilgrim. Whilst in cancer remission a few years ago and following a conversation with his oncologist on the need to take plenty of exercise, he embarked on a series of linked walks. Over the course of two years, John walked to every one of England's 43 cathedrals before finishing with the Welsh ones. I undertook three of the walks with him – Lichfield to Derby, Derby to Southwell and Southwell to Lincoln. John was more than a decade older than me so to spend a total of six uninterrupted days with him was an unforgettable experience; we laughed a lot, discussed our priorities, explored our faith, reminisced about our parents and siblings and celebrated our good fortune. In each case we attended Evening Prayer at the end of the walk.

I sang 'To be a Pilgrim' at John's COVID restricted funeral. By the time you read this, a large congregation will have joined in the same hymn at his memorial service:

*There's no discouragement shall make him once relent  
his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim* John Bunyan

Pilgrimage is about taking oneself out of one's comfort zone. Traditionally this meant undertaking a physical and spiritual journey to a particular place of faith, such as Jerusalem. I think we all have it in us to embark on a pilgrimage, even one that stretches us whilst we remain in our own settings. What might yours be?

