

PEAK WESLEYAN WAY

DISTRICT LEADING TEAM 3 MAY 2022

THE VISION

The Peak Circuit believe we could create contemporary opportunities for people to engage with the ancient spiritual practice of pilgrimage within the Peak Park.

People will hear of and be inspired to walk the trail. They will book their overnight stays in our chapels via an easy to use website, and will be provided with information, prayers and reflections for the clearly signed paths (in downloadable, leaflet, mobile app formats).

In each chapel the pilgrims will have exclusive access to accommodation that is warm and comfortable, but not luxurious, and still obviously a chapel. This will usually include camp beds which can be folded away, a microwave, basic breakfast and a shower. The pilgrimage will be priced to be as affordable as possible.

Where possible walkers will receive a personal welcome, and blessing if they wish, otherwise well presented information about the chapel and the village will be available. For those wishing to purchase food, directions to recommended local pubs will be provided. If their visit coincides with something happening in the village they would be invited to join if they wished – a festival such as well dressing, a relevant group or activity in the chapel, an act of worship.

The following morning after the pilgrims have moved on, the chapel will be professionally cleaned, and be ready for local community and church activities taking place during the day.

The project will be professionally overseen by a staff member, with profits supporting wider mission.

HOW PILGRIMS BENEFIT

Pilgrimage is not just a walking holiday, “it is journey, it is community on journey, it is spiritual reflection and practice on journey, and it involves a destination that has thin-space character to it. On the journey, something utterly unexpected inevitably happens, and life is never the same for anybody”¹ Could this happen here and now in the Peak Park?

- Journeying – we live in a beautiful place that we know many people already travel to experience, a place that can be walked with some effort, but within the capabilities of most people.
- Thin places – we are perhaps over-familiar with our chapels and the practicalities of maintaining them. Presented well they can be obviously sacred places, places created by and for extra-ordinary ordinary Peak people. Places to gather and shelter, and sing, be encouraged and be challenged. We can tell the spiritual stories of these places, the communities they are belong to, the people who have worshipped in them. This can be through an app, printed resources and displays in the chapels. Through these means we can also give contemporary testimony of Peak Methodists, what God is doing in our twenty first century lives.

¹ p.117-8, Estock & Nixon, Weird Church: welcome to the twenty-first century

- Spiritual reflection – As well as telling stories we can provide prompts for reflection and prayer. These can be sent out as emails in advance of people arriving and after they leave, for use at key points on the route, and in the chapels. Where time permits we can engage further, through local chapel members greeting pilgrims, listening to their experiences and offering prayer.
- Community - As an extension, if we have someone with the time and gifts to do so, we could invite pilgrims to join an online community or receive occasional email reflections to maintain connection with us and others who have participated in the same pilgrimage.

HOW LOCAL COMMUNITIES BENEFIT

Pilgrimage income would pay for chapels to remain open and in good condition for years to come for use as community spaces during the daytime, rather than becoming yet another holiday let.

Pilgrim walkers will arrive without cars in most villages, and will spend money in shops and pubs unlike day visitors and holiday lets.

HOW LOCAL METHODIST MISSION BENEFITS

Financially – from initial estimates we believe that reasonably priced pilgrimage accommodation could provide enough income to more than cover the utilities and maintenance costs of smaller chapel buildings, even after costs of contract cleaning and a staff member to oversee the pilgrimage. Surplus income could support mission and ministry costs across the circuit.

Fewer property chores – the pilgrimage manager could take on some of the property maintenance and administration currently undertaken by chapel members, releasing valuable time for mission.

Starting new conversations – setting up the pilgrimage is an excellent opportunity to spend time with local people, collecting local historical stories, asking about best routes, enquiring whether local businesses would like to be mentioned. People will be reminded that The Methodists are a group of people interested in and seeking the best for their community, and not just a building. These rekindled relationships give us a chance to hear what matters in people's lives, and from this to explore what new forms of connection we can build and invitation we can extend. We have already seen this starting in Great Longstone.

Telling stories – collecting and writing the stories of our chapels and forebears is an easy way into telling our own stories of what God is doing in our lives today. It will help us to become confident to share these stories with each other, with visiting pilgrims, and with our friends, neighbours and families. Many Methodists admit to being out of practice at talking about where we have experienced God, but it is an essential part of the life of all growing churches.

Living hopefully – if the Wesleyan Way takes off it will be talked about as a major life experience: in our communities, by Park authorities, by walkers, across the UK, across other churches, possibly even on TV. Could it be a step on our journey to rediscovering hope in the future that God wants for our communities?

JOURNEY AND TEAM

Some of our circuit stewards have been exploring these ideas for some time. Over the last six months our CLT has been actively developing this vision with support from Lorraine Brown, Neil Harland and Tom Rattigan.

The vision was enthusiastically received at our Circuit Meeting in March, and see it as a significant part of the future mission of our circuit which will continue to be owned by CLT.

Over the coming months we will be undertaking further research, consulting with village communities and members in each chapel, and inviting volunteers to test the pilgrimage experience in and between our chapels.

We will seek to strike a balance between bold to create an impactful experience, maintaining momentum and wisely stewarding our financial and people resources.

COSTS

We currently anticipate that the first chapels in the pilgrimage will include Great Longstone (capital works and fit out of £30k required) and Baslow (less than £5k costs). Other chapels and costs will be clarified in the coming months.

We also intend to employ a part time Pilgrimage Manager to oversee the pilgrimage, and to incur some other start up costs.

We will be seeking grants to get started, but intend the pilgrimage to be a self-sustaining ministry once established.