

Good morning. My name is Karen Moseley-Mattox, and I am the youth minister here at Holy Comforter. This past summer, our J2A class traveled to Costa Rica on pilgrimage. Our group included 11 teens and 2 adults. We arrived on a Sunday in San Jose and traveled by minibus to the Gunacaste region where we spent 4 days at the YWAM (Youth with a Mission) base as we explored the surrounding areas. Gunacaste is in the northwest part of Costa Rica. Later, we traveled to La Fortuna in the Arenal volcanic region and finally returned to San Jose to have dinner with Bishop Monterosso and St John's youth group, who had just arrived for a week of missions. We spent the Saturday night at a different YWAM base just outside San Jose and returned to Charlotte the next day.

One of the best ways to explain what pilgrimage IS is to describe what pilgrimage is NOT. It is not simply a vacation or site-seeing tour, or a trip to see and do as many things as possible. Nor is it a mission trip. Although, you might use some elements from each of those types of trips for a specific purpose on pilgrimage. For example, we were able to spend time caving in Barra Honda National Forest and used that experience to talk about the dark times and place in our lives and how God brings light to them. Pilgrims spent time in the rain forest on a "canopy tour" or "zip line" – we used that experience to question what the next "leap of faith" might be for us in our spiritual lives. We began each day with a devotional as a theme to think about through that day's activities. We also closed each day with a devotional and reflection about where we saw or experienced God that day. Pilgrimage is a journey with a spiritual goal or theme. Our class decided upon Costa Rica because they wanted to explore the concept of God and nature and get an introduction to our companion diocese. They spent two years in planning, preparation and fund raising along with their advisors and parents for this journey. Along the way, they were challenged and reminded that pilgrimage is not just a particular trip at a particular time. It should be the way we approach our daily lives. We should look for those small moments of God in each day.

One particular challenge that was given to each pilgrim was to focus on experiencing the moment at hand. This was quite difficult for many of us, since we are so accustomed to having a planned schedule and deadlines. But the value of letting go has the ability to free us – to let us pay more attention, more deeply to the experiences at hand. This idea is articulated beautifully by Evelyn Underhill when she advises: *"God is always coming to you in the sacrament of the present Moment. Meet and receive him there with gratitude in that sacrament."*

Now I invite you to be present in this moment as our pilgrims share their experiences with you.

Genevieve:

For me, visiting the high school in our local town in Guanacaste was among the most memorable and meaningful experiences of our trip. The entire group was more than a bit apprehensive about

going, excited for sure, but nonetheless, apprehensive. What would these kids think of a bunch of American teenagers? The truth was, we had no idea, but upon arriving at the school, we were welcomed by everyone that crossed our path. It seemed like every student wanted to be your friend or wanted to ask you a question. The language barrier made it a bit difficult for most of us to communicate; but honestly, we didn't need to speak the same language to have a good time. Our group shared with them about life in Charlotte; about schools, church, families, you name it. In return, the Costa Rican students taught us how to dance, and they definitely put us to shame! We only could spend a few hours at the school, but that was enough for everyone to realize just how similar our group and the Costa Rican kids are. We have the same interests and similar experiences as we go through high school. Our experience at the school was truly a god-sighting for everyone, I think. It reminded us that we are all children of God, no matter where we're from.

Nathan Mynatt:

After we left the high school, Diego drove us into Nicoya, the nearest town. When we stopped at a grocery store, Mike stood up and asked us if anyone know the story of the stone soup, and Tori raised her hand and said yes. Mike then asked her to tell the story, and it went something like this:

A soldier was traveling along by himself in a time of great hunger when he got to a town. All of the villagers had been hoarding their food in order to protect it from others, because everyone was hungry. The villagers told the soldier that there was nothing to eat, and to keep moving, but the soldier replied that he had everything he needed for a great meal of stone soup. With everyone else watching skeptically, the soldier took out a cauldron, put it on top of a fire, filled it with water, and ceremoniously dropped an ordinary stone into it. While he stirred the pot, the villagers began to get hungry. The soldier said "mm I do love me some stone soup, but it's even better with some cabbage, and a few minutes later, a villager came back with some cabbage, asking if he could have some soup. The cabbage was thrown in and the villager was promised a portion. This process continued until a soup fit for kings was thrown together, and all of the villagers feasted on stone soup that evening. The next morning the soldier collected his things and moved on to the next town.

Mike asked us to think about what this story meant, and then gave Austin 3000 colones, which we were supposed to use to buy enough for a meal in the grocery store. After deciding that we were going to have tacos, the whole group spread out across the grocery store, using broken Spanish to find the ingredients that we needed. After making our purchases, we went back to the YWAM center and cooked a delicious meal for not only our group, but all of the YWAM staff as well, showing that if we all come together, we can make something much greater than if we worked alone.

Alexander Herndon:

During the Senior High Pilgrimage to Costa Rica, the youth and adults who attended all experienced a transformation of some sort along the way. Whether it is testing faith in the cave, nerves at the local high school, or patience with everyday activities, everyone came back from Costa Rica changed. My “ah ha” moment in Costa Rica was when we went to the waterfall for part of the day. I remember the anxious and excited feelings that were squirming around in my stomach as the group walked down the narrow cobblestone steps to the waterfall. Glancing up as we descended, the nature astounded me. The lush green trees, birds flying over head, the rays of sunlight spotting the leaf-covered ground; the nature was unreal to me. As we slowly made it down to the bottom, the waterfall was as loud as ever. Big boulders surrounded the pool of water just below the waterfall. I could already see people leaping off of the boulder and landing into the rocky, green water. Looking up, the waterfall drop was about 100 feet long, and the water coming down from the top was mesmerizing. I stood for a moment absorbing the view. The pool of water led into a stream which continued down until it turned right, escaping from sight. Several of us decided to venture down past the turn and explore. While jumping, scooting and sliding my way down the stream, I had a revelation in my mind. God created all of this beauty. The crystal water rushing across the various shaped boulders, the squishy sand that shimmering fish swim above, and the deciduous forest on either side, filled with God’s love and beauty. It was a very serene and eye-opening experience for me, and I wish I could have stayed there longer.

Austin Shaw:

On our J2A Pilgrimage to Costa Rica, we experienced many different things, and each day was a new adventure. One of the days that we were there, we went to a boy named Ivan’s house. He was born with a growth defect and a brain tumor. He couldn’t walk and he couldn’t move his arms or legs that well. While we were there, some of the group painted his room and other parts of the house, while the rest of the group played games with Ivan. The people playing games played board games with him and talked to him. He couldn’t speak but could obviously understand and loved the company. While we were there, somebody blew up some balloons and started bouncing them back in forth with Ivan. He really loved bouncing the balloons back and forth, and he didn’t stop smiling the entire time. It was really amazing to see someone in his situation have such high spirits. We also learned that Ivan attended school three days a week, which I thought was really cool. When we finally had to leave his house, we all got a picture with Ivan and we all said goodbye. He was sad to see us leave, and we were all sad that we had to leave. We had had such a great time with him.

Also while in Costa Rica, I was in a full leg cast and was on crutches. I had broken my leg playing rugby about a month before the trip, but I was glad that I was still able to go. Not being able to walk while in Costa Rica wasn’t always easy, and it taught me a great deal on being

patient. While I was there, there were a few things that I couldn't do. Most of the time, while the other group was doing something adventurous, I had to sit and wait for them to get back. I knew that I would be missing out on certain things before the trip, so it wasn't a surprise for me, but it built my patience up because there was nothing I could've done about it.

Karen Moseley-Mattox:

As you've heard, we had some amazing experiences in Costa Rica. We thank you as a parish for your prayer and support during our fundraisers. I would also like to thank the parents for entrusting us with their teens as we traveled out of the country...without cell phones. We thank the vestry for their support and partial funding. And also to all of the advisors who spent two years helping us prepare: Tim & Jennifer Everhart, Rob & Jennifer Laquerre and Karen Rogich, who also traveled with us as a pilgrim.

Thank you for all of your support. In closing I would like to leave you with this quote from Mother Teresa:

What I do you cannot do; but what you do, I cannot do. The needs are great, and none of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful.