

Symposium for Pilgrimage Studies
William & Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia, November 7-8, 2025

Changing Meanings of Pilgrimage: Contested Definitions, Competing Perspectives

Call for Papers

The Institute for Pilgrimage Studies invites abstracts that illustrate and examine the changing meanings of pilgrimage from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives, and especially for these encouraged topics:

Changing Language: We welcome panels and papers about the language and terminology of pilgrimage related to therapeutic purposes.

Comparative Pilgrimage: We encourage papers and panels that compare pilgrimage sites (within a region/culture or across different cultures) or the experiences and approaches of different pilgrims at any one pilgrimage site.

Digital Dynamics: We encourage papers and panels that explore the impact of technology on pilgrimage, including pilgrimages mediated by digital tools and virtual reality treks that take place without physical travel.

Layering of Sacred Sites: We welcome papers and panels that explore how pilgrimage sites have been developed over time, drawing from traditional and revised meanings.

Motivations for Pilgrimage: We encourage papers that explore theological, salvific, biomedical, therapeutic, and other motivations behind pilgrimage.

Pedagogy and Pilgrimage: We encourage papers and panels that explore course designs that use pilgrimage practices to foster integrative learning, student well-being, and promote connection to the natural environment.

Pilgrimage and Environmental Change: We encourage research that explores the intersections of pilgrimage and eco-tourism, the impacts of climate change on pilgrimage sites and practices, the environmental effects of pilgrims upon sacred routes and sites, and the importance of the natural environment in the allure and experienced meaning of pilgrimage sites.

Pocket Pilgrimages: We welcome research on specialized pilgrimage destinations treasured by distinct communities, such as the Trinity test site, Shaker and Quaker sites, New Harmony, Indiana, and Swedenborgian sites in Philadelphia.

Politics of Pilgrimage: We encourage papers that explore the political dimensions of pilgrimage, including sites associated with apartheid, migration, civil rights, and LGBTQ+ history. This area might also include how the history or meaning associated with sites may be censored, and how access to pilgrimage sites may be controlled or restricted.

Religious Tourism and Nationalism: We encourage papers that explore the intersection of religious tourism and national identity, with examples from Malta, Serbia, Nepal, and beyond.

Multiple Disciplinary Lenses: We welcome papers examining pilgrimage through multiple disciplinary lenses, and those that address convergences and controversies in method and perspective.

Other: We encourage papers and panels that explore topics related to *Changing Meanings of Pilgrimage: Contested Definitions, Competing Perspectives*.

We encourage submissions of papers involving research on sacred journeys or transformative travel from a broad range of disciplines and perspectives, including religious studies, anthropology, literature, art history, health, classical studies, history, law, sociology, theater, and dance. Faculty who design curricula incorporating pilgrimage as a mentored academic experience are especially welcome, along with their student participants.

Individual presentations will last no more than 20 minutes, with time for discussion between papers. Contributors who assemble three-to-four participants as an integrated panel discussion will receive a \$100 discount on the Symposium registration fee if they attend as presider of that session.

Abstracts of 500 words from faculty, independent researchers, graduate and undergraduate students may be [submitted here](#) by **Friday, June 20, 2025**. Undergraduate students should provide the name and email of a faculty mentor. Students may propose to either present papers or participate in a poster session. Faculty, independent researchers, and graduate students are encouraged [to apply](#) for the **Greenia Fellowship**, which will be announced at the Symposium. Notification of acceptance of Symposium papers will be sent by **mid-July 2025**.