

GROWING *Together*

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THE SPIRITUALITY OF TRAVEL

It's early morning. The first light of day creeps silently through the bedroom window. I lie there peacefully, enjoying the last moments of sleep. Then an unfamiliar sound. What is it? I wake, wipe the sleep from my eyes, and gaze out the window. Outlined against the horizon is a minaret and from it echoes the sound of the Muslim call to prayer. "Now I know where I am, miles away from home." I listen attentively. "What an amazing place!"

Through the ages, people of faith have found travel to be an enriching experience. From biblical saints, to pilgrims in the Middle Ages, to modern tourists who journey with relative ease to places our ancestors never dreamed of going, travel can broaden our perspectives and deepen our faith.

It can be unsettling to find oneself in unfamiliar places. The traveller forsakes the security of recognizable landmarks. Time zones shift, sleep patterns change. Routines are broken, plans made on the fly. "Where am I going and how will I get there? What if someone tries to take advantage of me?" The clash of strange language, customs, culture and geography can be quite bewildering. Yet for those prepared to take a risk, there are great rewards.



When we are genuinely open to it, travel can become a Spirit-filled adventure in faith. More than pseudo-travel – another vacation behind the walled confines of a luxury resort – Spirit-filled travel calls us to venture into what is new and unknown, trusting that our lives are safe in the hands of God. It calls for openness of mind, an eagerness to discover and learn from our surroundings. It calls for openness of heart, reaching beyond ourselves.

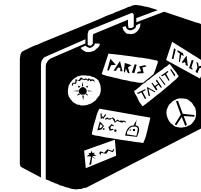
Each stop can be a holy feast with many delights to be tasted – some quite literally. Every place is different, every encounter unique: a shopkeeper in the marketplace, a fisherman who shows you his catch, a child who plays some unknown game with her friends.

We learn to appreciate strangers – people whose skin colour, life experience, religious practices are different from our own. As we reach out, we ourselves receive many gifts of hospitality. Something as simple as a handshake and a smile can form the beginning of a deep and lasting friendship. We discover what it means to live together as guests upon our planet.



Travel doesn't have to involve long distance or great expense. It may simply mean taking a bus to another part of the city and going for a walk. Taking a drive to a nearby town in the country. Or getting to know a neighbour who lives down the street. Refugee centres need volunteers. Schools and other organizations offer exchange programs. Visiting groups require billets.

Spirit-filled travel reminds us that in life, as in faith, it's not just arriving at the destination that counts. It's the process of getting there. When we're willing to take the risk, open our eyes and ears to God's presence, open our minds to new perspectives, open our hearts to new relationships, our world is enlarged and our lives are blessed. Faith invites us to share this great adventure!



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