This past January, while studying and teaching in India with Sandra Looney and 15 Augustana students, I found myself in the midst of pilgrims, the majority of them Hindu and Buddhist. Hindus take daily pilgrimages to the waters of the Mother Ganga to cleanse and purify themselves, to connect with the gods, and, in the evening, to put the Mother Ganga to bed with lively music, pungent incense, marigolds and coconut, candlelight and prayer. In Bodhgaya, where the Buddha received his enlightenment, we stood beneath the Bodhi tree (or at least one of its offspring) where the Buddha once sat, watched pilgrims prostrate themselves in embodied prayer to express their devotion to the Buddha and his teachings. When we traveled to Sarnath, the holy city where the Buddha delivered his
first sermon, we knew ourselves to be in the company of thousands who were traveling to be in the presence of the spiritual leader of the Buddhists—the Dalai Lama. Together, we would sit at the feet of this great spiritual leader and contemplate the nature of compassion as an aspect of right ethical conduct. We would learn about and practice the mental discipline known as meditation—a practice meant to lead to enlightenment and to understanding of the human condition.

I wonder: What did it mean that we walked in the Buddha’s footsteps? The Buddha took himself from a life of luxury to one of deprivation and suffering. In a tiny, tiny way, we Augustinians were doing the same: we came from lives that know no desperate need and found ourselves walking streets carved deep with the dirt of monsoons, walking in our well-shod shoes alongside children, in the midst of children wearing frayed, ripped shirts, their worn scarves draped around them for warmth in the cool Indian winter. The hands of many of these children were employed in the work of the
day, one hand reaching out for money, the other making the universal sign for “I am hungry.” They carved their voices into the air around us: “Madam, Madam.” Their cries echo within me.

Immersed in India, we, too, became pilgrims—our own kind. Throughout the first days of our journey, my mind, my heart, my spirit and my body were engaged in a massive effort to conquer culture shock and make room for defining India through attention to something other than the tragic poverty that neither heart nor mind could make sense of. We owed it to the people of India to know its depth and breadth, its beauty and its pain.

As is so for most pilgrims, we had brought ourselves voluntarily to this place. For each of us the journey was both private and communal. I don’t know yet what to do with all that I saw; I do know that I know the depth and breadth of my own humanity better now. The question is: What will I do with such knowledge?
The pilgrim’s journey may or may not require physical travel. It may or may not be a journey to a shrine or any other specific location. It might be a mental or psychological journey to wellness. It might be a desire to know oneness with the divine or simply the desire to move the spirit. No matter the impetus for the journey, pilgrims share in common, I think, the desire to know the depth of their humanity. The pilgrim understands that the journey to knowledge of self and other requires connection with the world in ways that are beyond the routine of everyday life. It is not possible to stir the interior life, to evolve spiritually, to know fully what it means to be a human being without choosing—deliberately—to challenge the mind and the body, the heart and the soul. We must separate ourselves from the quotidian life—the average, run-of-the-mill moments—even as we draw closer to them.

The pilgrim’s call to connect becomes, ultimately, the call to live deeply in the places we know best. For this reason, Paul and I are hoping you will emerge from your private spaces on April 15
and walk with us in the spring air as we find ways to know our fullest humanity on this campus we love but sometimes walk through and neglect to engage with.

On this day, we hope to encounter Augustana as a work of art and an ongoing experiment that can be known through its past, its present, its people, the landscape itself and the artifacts that sit upon it. The artist’s way of knowing is an essential, not a luxury. The desire for deep engagement with the world is the artist’s way—and the pilgrim’s way as well.

Here’s the thing: Paul and I are quite smitten with this pilgrimage, and we hope you will join us and the students, faculty, staff and administrators who are participating in its creation. We need not travel great distances to stir the interior life.

Paul defines pilgrimage as “a departure from daily life in hopes of sacramental encounter.” I would add that a pilgrimage can lead one onto a path that encourages contemplative practice. Anthony Gittins, professor of theology and culture at Catholic Theological
Union, in an article titled “My Pilgrimage in Mission,” wrote that “[h]istorically, pilgrimages were communal undertakings, and their value—from long before Chaucer's Canterbury Tales to long after—owed as much to one's faith and one's company as to the shrine at destination's end. Pilgrims would certainly know where they were bound, but relatively little else. They believed that grace did not depend on completion or arrival but on the firmness of intention and singleness of purpose, whether one actually arrived or died en route.”

Those led by religious purpose travel to destinations such as Lourdes, France, where the Mother Mary is said to have appeared 18 times to a girl named Bernadette. The Mother of Christ asked that a chapel be built on the site and bid the girl drink from a fountain that did not exist until Bernadette dug in the ground of the grotto. The water that flowed forth flows yet and is said to possess curative powers. Many travel to sites where the Mother of God is said to have visited—or is said to be visiting yet.
Christians from around the world visit the Holy Land, imagining that in doing so they might open their hearts to a deeper experience of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

In January more than 3 million members of a Sufi Muslim sect declared themselves pilgrims and set off on a ritual journey to Senegal’s holy city of Touba in western Africa to honor their movement’s founder—Cheikh Amadou Bamba, a mystic, poet, and religious leader who opposed French colonialism. A pacifist, he injected into his legacy his dedication to freedom and peace-making, and it is to honor that way of being that pilgrims take themselves to Touba, a journey marked by physical exertion, mental devotion and a deep desire for spiritual awakening.

Oftentimes, the journey brings danger—maybe physical, maybe psychological, maybe spiritual. A recent news report makes clear what some are willing to risk: New York Times, January 21, 2011: “BAGHDAD -- Suicide bombers launched a series of deadly assaults on Thursday against pilgrims marching toward a shrine
sacred to Shiite Muslims, the police said, and dozens were killed in a third straight day of attacks against an array of targets. The annual pilgrimage, banned under Saddam Hussein, is expected to draw as many as 10 million people this year to the city of Karbala over 10 days.”

In a Reuters article, dated Nov. 14, 2010, a reporter wrote this:

At least 2.5 million Muslims began the annual haj pilgrimage on Sunday, heading to an encampment near the holy city of Mecca to retrace the route taken by the Prophet Mohammad 14 centuries ago.

Traveling on foot, by public transport and in private cars, the pilgrims will stream through a mountain pass to a valley at Mina, some three km (two miles) outside Mecca. The path is the same as the Prophet himself took on his last pilgrimage.

The haj, one of the world’s biggest displays of mass religious devotion lasts for five days. In the past it has been
marred by fires, hotel collapses, police clashes with protesters and deadly stampedes.

Sometimes, on the other hand, danger sets one on the path.

In an article in the Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences (2008), Arne Rehnsfeldt and Maria Arman, consider the journey an individual who is suffering from illness, perhaps a terminal illness, takes toward understanding. They write that a “pilgrimage is the person’s own inner decision to reach new insights and meaning.” Their work reveals what many of us believe to be true: We need not walk through such suffering alone; the pilgrim shares “time and space” with others and is willing to move from the “unbearable to the bearable.”

In the Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health (2009) William Schmidt also described internal spiritual practice as pilgrimage—the sort that can restore and renew an individual who has suffered or may suffer great loss. To enter into such a pilgrimage, he says, is to make possible transformation.
Like these scholars, our Augustana students wrote eloquently of the way in which their lives were changed forever by their encounter with India, and with their permission, I am able to share with you their reflections on the nature of pilgrimage.

Jenny Lockhart tapped into the initial reality of an unknown culture. She wrote, “Since this journal is a safe place, I have a confession: I did not initially love India.” She wrote of the tragic poverty that seemed never to be beyond the scope of her gaze, she spoke of the ceaseless honking, the overwhelming street life, the confusion she felt upon seeing a porter carry her 40-pound bag on his head, of being transported via bicycle rickshaw and wondering if she should be happy to contribute to the driver’s income or ashamed to be “carted about by a struggling worker”? She was lost in the landscape, lost in culture shock, and she wrote: “The ethical dilemmas here are never-ending, and something we will struggle to deal with well beyond January 27.”

Hal Thompson described Delhi, the first stop on our journey:
“In no other city that I’ve been to has there been such a presence of life. Here the people line the streets as if out on display. The trees hang over the streets, and animals are left to roam freely. Life—palpable and bursting forth—separates Delhi, in my mind, from any other city I’ve seen.” He went on: “Maybe I’m still coming to terms with the idea of being so far from home. But I understand where we are. I saw the flight path move laboriously along the screen. . . . It is like returning to a forgotten childhood. You observe the world as if all things were new. And you get the feeling that there’s so much to see and take in that one life will never be enough.”

“Much of this trip,” he said, “is about feeling displaced but not disowned.”

Some time after returning to the United States, Thad Titze said something that resonates, I think, with many of us: “As I think about the pilgrimage we went on,” he wrote, “I think about it as both a ‘journey’ and a ‘coming home.’” It is, he said, “a journey because in many ways it tells you more about yourself than the physical place
you go. What you endure and learn from the journey makes the physical place even more of a holy ground for the individual.”

Erin Schoenbeck took stock of her life as she grew closer to the lives of the people of India. “Our pilgrimage,” she wrote, “allowed us to see people whose conditions are drastically worse then our own, which caused me to rethink the trivial aspects of my life. I learned that a large majority of the conversations and worries I have within my life are rather pointless compared to what many families and children are facing in India. Everyday they are worrying about receiving enough food to survive, while my everyday worries go about as deep as making sure I do not miss the new episode of *Glee* on Tuesday nights. The sights of our pilgrimage reshaped my view of the world.”

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What compels a person to take the first step on the path of the pilgrim? The wounded travel to a place they hope will take them from the “unbearable to the bearable.” The secular traveler seeks to
shift his or her interior life to new consciousness, a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. Many seek to follow in the footsteps of a prophet or an individual who showed humanity how to live, match footstep to footstep, hoping that Christ’s path, the Buddha’s path, Mohammed’s path becomes theirs. The faithful travel as an act of devotion, not knowing how the experience will shape the self. I believe we who traveled to India grew closer to the “me in you, you in me” philosophy that is woven into virtually every religion known to humankind.

In the end, all pilgrims seek to open their lives to a deep interior or spiritual experience. No matter the yearning that gives rise to the journey, the pilgrim knows that sometimes you have to open the door to depth, step out into the ocean of the unknown. The pilgrim resists sitting in his or her office or dorm room all day. On April 15 at 3 p.m. we will gather on the east side of Old Main and begin our journey. We are hoping you will join us and the many who are helping us shape this pilgrimage: our cheerleaders, scientists,
and musicians, for starters. Through a pilgrimage such as this one we will affirm all that is Augustana.
HOLY COMMUNION
Wednesday, March 16, 2011

Prelude  “Fanfare”  from Also Sprach Zarathustra
Richard Strauss  arr. David Marlatt
Augustana Brass Choir

Welcome

Invocation

Confession and Forgiveness  ELW p. 95


Prayer

Hymn  “Bless Now, O God, the Journey”  ELW #326 v. 1

Message  Janet Blank-Libra
Chair of Mystical Values

Hymn  “Bless Now, O God, the Journey”  ELW #326 v. 3

Holy Communion

Distribution  “Wachet Auf”  from Cantata 140
J.S. Bach arr. Kenneth Bray
Augustana Brass Choir

Blessing and Benediction

Postlude  “Amazing Grace”  Traditional arr. William Himes
Augustana Brass Choir

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

A GUIDE FOR JOURNAL WRITING.  On Tuesday March 29 at 10 AM in the 3:1 room, Pastor Paul will present his doctor of ministry project. Pr. Paul prepared a guide for journal writing for students who travel. It was tested on several chapel trips and 5 2010 J term courses. Using pilgrimage theology it applies not only to travel, but to integrating faith in all the changes of all our journeys. EVERYONE IS WELCOME! There will be a brief presentation and then question and discussions.

MONDAYS IN LENT - chapel will be organ and poetry reflections on the theme Ubi Caritas: Where Charity and Love Are, God is There.” March 28 we will welcome Pr. Kathryn Timpani and Jack Mohlenhoff from First Congregation Church. Their poetry and music will center in “What Wondrous Love.”

CAMPUS MINISTRY STAFF applications are available! Ministry is supported by staff leadership as ambassadors, ecumenical leaders, and musicians! If interested, see Pr. Paul or Carol. Applications are due Wednesday!! Interviews will happen the week after spring break.

LOOKING FOR A GREAT SUMMER JOB? - The camping network for Lutherans Outdoors is still looking for summer camp counselors. If you are interested, stop by the Lutherans Outdoors office (located in the chapel building, next entrance east of the main chapel doors) or email www.shetek.org and www.losd.org

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Wednesday (16th)  Holy Communion, 10 am - Janet Blank-Libra; Senior Academy; Brass Choir
Friday (18th)  Morning Worship, 10 am - Annalisa Todt, Sr. Spkr

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