



**Pilgrimscentrum
Vadstena**

THE PILGRIM'S CENTRE - of the Swedish Church in Vadstena

WHAT IS A PILGRIM?

As early as in the first days of the church, the friends of Jesus walked to holy places. The Christian belief sees God's whole creation as holy. There is no place beyond God's attention and presence.

That did not stop the first Christians from coming to see the graves of the martyrs and to partake of the Communion there. The martyrs had been publicly degraded and generally despised. Right there, by the grave of the violated man or woman they wanted to gather in order to share the belief of the resurrection and to show God's presence by song of praise.

The first Christians were called "the road". They walked the road leading to heaven, the road of life. Throughout the whole history of the church Jesus' friends have been walking and they have seen the walk as a way to illustrate the secret pattern of Christian belief: To walk through death to life. The walk made them to one with Jesus and thus they walked with him.

On an early stage it became important to go on pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Gradually these pilgrimages degenerated and during the 16th century they were forbidden by the reformers. In the 90s the motives of the pilgrims increasingly have gained ground in our country.

SO WHAT IS A PILGRIM?

In Christian tradition each Christian has been called a pilgrim, to whom the whole life has been seen as a road to the joy of heaven. In the movements of the pilgrims the real walk has now gained new life. It is about to walk during a limited period of time from one spot to another meanwhile one is praying, an inner journey and at the same time a journey in the outer landscape.

One can recognise the following characteristics of a pilgrim:

1. The pilgrim starts out from what symbolises the christening, the beginning of life.
2. The pilgrim walks meanwhile he or she is regularly praying.
3. The pilgrim walks in silence but also in conversation with the fellow wanderers.
4. The pilgrim illustrates a life style of simplicity.
5. The pilgrimage is protest against the unfair distribution of the world's supplies.
6. The pilgrim walks towards a goal, often a church, where the pilgrim lays down his or her staff as a symbol of the death that passes over in resurrection and new life.

PILGRIM'S ROUTES

In Vadstena there are convent churches, churchyards and crossroads for prayers and meditation. In Blåkyrkan, the big convent church, pilgrims are regularly gathered for prayer and reflection. There is a special pilgrim's altar, St Bridget's relics etc. Pilgrimages are organized in and around the town.

In the diocese of Linköping in the province of Östergötland there is a new convent route to Vadstena, the town of the Bridgettines, but also from the Cistercians' Alvastra, the Benedictines' Vreta the Franciscans' Linköping and the Dominicans' Skänninge as well as to other holy places and buildings.

In the North, Trondheim, in former times Nidaros, is the principal destination of the pilgrims, apart from Vadstena. St Olav died in 1030 in Stiklestad north of Trondheim and his life still represents a Christian life, which is worth learning from. Outside the North Jerusalem and Rome together with Santiago de Compostela are the most important historical destinations of the pilgrims, but many more places have been added through the centuries.

THE SEVEN KEY WORDS OF THE PILGRIM

SLOWNESS tells us about the importance of take it easy in a stressed culture. Our *shoes* are symbols of following Christ on our inner and outer pilgrimage.

FREEDOM in a time-compressed world. The *staff* is the symbol of the guide that shows us the way.

SIMPLICITY in a time when consumption and materialism have become prestige words. The *tent* is a symbol of needing little.

SILENCE is in short supply in the bustling society. The *coat* is the symbol of the silence that encloses the pilgrim in a quiet room.

LIGHT-HEARTEDNESS in leaving our worries to God. The *hat* is the symbol of the light-hearted life as our Lords tramps.

SHARING between the fellow wanderers, with both bodily and spiritual food. The *rugsack* is the symbol as the whole larder of the pilgrim.

SPIRITUALITY has for the pilgrim the *cross* as the identity disc and tells us about our need of deepening our relation with our self, our fellow pilgrims and God.

THE PILGRIM'S CENTRE

In Vadstena the Pilgrim's centre has an office and a visitor's centre.

It is located in the former bakery in Övre Munkträdgården (the Upper Garden of the Monk). Here one can find a pilgrim's guest house, a café, a library and information service which are open all the year round. In the Pilgrim's centre separate congregations and groups can be offered shorter or longer pilgrimages, breathing and seminars about the ideology of the pilgrim.

The mission of the Pilgrim's centre is in an ecumenical spirit educate pilgrim's leaders, to arrange meeting places and to encourage people to go on a pilgrimage as a part of both national and international exchange.

VADSTENA

During the Middle Ages Vadstena was an important location for pilgrims. Millions of people came to visit Klosterkyrkan (the Convent Church) with St Bridget's relics as well as her convent. The environment of the convent with Blåkyrkan (the Blue Church) as Klosterkyrkan (the Convent Church) traditionally is called, Munkträdgården (the Garden of the Monk) with Örtagården (the Herb Garden) and the old buildings of the convent are all rich inheritance to keep alive for our generation.

More and more people come to Vadstena as pilgrims of today. The pilgrim's centre is a centre for the pilgrims of the whole country and is run by the Swedish Church through the diocese of Linköping in close co-operation with the congregation of Vadstena.

The ecumenical spirit is reflected in the co-operation with the Catholic Church, the both convents and the Free Churches. Vadstena folk high

school and the town district of Vadstena among others participate in the project as well.

THE SYMBOL OF THE PILGRIM

The symbol of the pilgrim consist of five red wound marks, a white pilgrim's cross and a blue St Hans-cross (the sign for a thing worth seeing) on a golden circle. You can find the symbol in the information, along the pilgrim's routes and on different pilgrim's destinations.

ST. BRIDGET

Bridget Birgersdotter, 1303-1373, is the only canonized person in Sweden. Bridget founded the only medieval convent that originated from Northern Europe, Our Holy of Holies Saviour's Order, O.Ss.S. (Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris), also called the Order of St Bridget. Bridget's revelations became world famous, already during the Middle Ages. She went on a pilgrimage to Nidaros in Norway in 1339, to Santiago de Compostela in 1341-42 together with her husband Ulf. After his death, she lived in Alvastra and Vadstena, of which castle she received in 1346 from king Magnus and queen Blanka as a ground for the future convent.

In 1349 Bridget went to Rome to be sanctioned by the Pope to found her Order.

Not until 1370 the new rule was approved. Bridget was allowed to follow in the Master's footsteps on her most important pilgrimage – to Jerusalem – the year before her death in Rome on the 23rd of July 1373. Bridget is also called the pilgrim of the pilgrims.

Bridget's prayer can be the prayer of all pilgrims:
- Lord, show me your way and make me willing to follow it.



Pilgrimscentrum

Café opening hours: 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. on weekdays
Office: 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. on weekdays

Pilgrim's prayers in Klosterkyrkan during weekdays at 9, 12, 3 p.m.

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