

Lancaster Theological Seminary

**Walking the Camino as a Spiritual Practice:  
A Grounded Theory Study of the Impact of the Camino Experience  
on the Practice of Ministry in Protestant Churches**

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by

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Walking the Camino as a Spiritual Practice: A Grounded Theory Study of the Impact of the Camino Experience on the Practice of Ministry in Protestant Churches  
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## **Abstract**

The Camino de Santiago is an ancient pilgrimage path. In recent decades, the popularity of the Camino has been growing. There are Protestant pastors who walk the Camino. This research studies the impact of the Camino experience on the practice of ministry for Protestant pastors, and its goal is to develop a theory of how the Camino pilgrimage revitalizes the practice of ministry in Protestant churches. A grounded theory study is conducted for this research, and the research methods employed for this study include administering surveys to Protestant pastors who have walked the Camino and conducting interviews with them. The theory emerging from the analysis of the collected data is that the Camino experience primarily affects their personal inner spiritual lives, which includes spiritual renewal, changes in self-understanding, and deepened spiritual connection to God, and that their inner spiritual transformation naturally flows out into their practices of ministry. While in most cases there are not substantial changes in what they do in their practices of ministry after returning from the Camino, they are revitalized to minister with new intentionality. The results of this research also indicate that pastors with a strong spiritual relationship with God will be more effective and resilient pastors than those lacking such a relationship and that the Camino pilgrimage is a powerful tool for cultivating such a relationship for Protestant pastors.

To all who walked with me on this pilgrimage journey

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

I do not exactly remember how I came to know about the Camino de Santiago, but, in January 2013, when I was a pastor for a congregation of a Protestant church in Tokyo, Japan, I happened to watch *The Way*, a famous 2010 film on the Camino, in a small, independent movie theater near the church.<sup>1</sup> *The Way* is a story of a middle-aged father who walks the Camino, carrying and scattering the ashes of his adult son who died while he was walking the Camino. It is a heartfelt and deeply moving story. After watching this Camino film in the late evening, my heart was burning, and my passion was kindled. I realized that I longed to walk the Camino. Four years later, I ended up ministering to a Japanese speaking congregation in New York. Unlike the previous congregation in Tokyo, the congregation in New York was relatively small, and I could have more flexibility for my work schedule. It was time for me to realize my dream of walking the Camino.

I first walked the Camino de Santiago in summer 2018, from Sarria to Santiago de Compostela, the last one-hundred-kilometer section of the Camino Francés, with my family for a summer vacation. Thereafter, I walked the Camino several times by myself as a part-time pilgrim from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, a small village at the foot of the Pyrenees on the France-Spain border, to Santiago de Compostela, and then I continued to walk to Finisterre and Muxía, coastal towns on the Atlantic Ocean, about ninety kilometers away from the city of Santiago.

Why am I fascinated with the Camino? It is like a calling, and so it is hard to explain, but the Camino somehow keeps captivating my heart. I am an ordained clergy person in the United Church of Christ in Japan, an interdenominational church of several Protestant traditions. It

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<sup>1</sup> *The Way*, directed by Emilio Estevez (Filmax, 2010).

might sound strange to some that a Protestant pastor walked the Camino and is writing about pilgrimage, since Protestants usually do not go on a pilgrimage. They often have a sense of uneasiness with the idea of pilgrimage.<sup>2</sup> Some of them react negatively toward pilgrimage, and others are just indifferent to it. Yet, many Christian believers over the centuries have made a pilgrimage to various holy sites and other historical destinations. Thousands of people have walked the Camino since the Middle Ages. I believe that pilgrimage is part of the Christian faith. It belongs to our faith tradition.

Pilgrimage is a rich metaphor for life and the Christian faith. Our faith journey is often compared to a pilgrimage. The metaphor of pilgrimage is abundant throughout the Scriptures. The book of Genesis tells the story of Abraham, who left his father's house and went to a foreign land. His life was like a pilgrimage, always on the move. The book of Exodus tells the story of the people of ancient Israel wandering around the desert for forty years before entering the Promised Land. Their journey in the wilderness was also a pilgrimage. Although the practice of pilgrimage has been mistrusted in Protestant churches since the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, it is not totally foreign to Protestantism. This research studies pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago through an investigation of Protestant pastors' experiences of walking the Camino and their impacts on their practices of ministry. Before conducting this research, I was not sure of what I would be able to learn from it; however, through this research, I found out that walking the Camino was a transformative spiritual experience for Protestant pastors as well. I was also excited to discover the spiritual potential of this ancient spiritual practice for the practice of Protestant ministry today.

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<sup>2</sup> Graham Tomlin, "Protestants and Pilgrimage," in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2004), 110.



## Research Topic

There are many Protestant pastors who walk the Camino de Santiago today. My research studies these pastors' practices of ministry and their spiritual lives; its purpose is to examine the impact of the Camino experience on the practice of ministry for these pastors and explain how their spiritual transformation obtained through the Camino pilgrimage affects their practices of ministry and the spiritual life of the community they lead. The final goal of this research is to develop a theory regarding how the experience of the Camino pilgrimage revitalizes the practice of ministry in Protestant churches.

In recent decades, pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago has become very popular in the United States as well as globally.<sup>3</sup> Although making a pilgrimage to Santiago is considered a traditional religious practice of the Catholic Church, many people today are interested in this ancient religious practice. As the statistics from the Pilgrim's Reception Office in Santiago de Compostela indicate, the motives of pilgrims for walking the Camino are not exclusively religious.<sup>4</sup> An ethnographic study of the Camino pilgrimage conducted by Nancy Louise Frey and other more recent research studies reveal that the motives of pilgrims are generally categorized into a framework of spiritual seeking rather than into a specifically religious one.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Statistics," Pilgrim's Reception Office, accessed August 9, 2023 and February 6, 2024, <https://oficinadelperegrino.com/en/statistics-2/>. Pilgrim's Reception Office in Santiago de Compostela issues the Compostela, an official certificate for completion of pilgrimage. The number of pilgrims who collected the Compostela: 440,328 in 2023; 438,307 in 2022; 178,914 in 2021; 54,144 in 2020; 347,566 in 2019. The number of the Compostela issued in 2021 and 2020 is significantly lower in compare to other recent years due to travel restrictions related with the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>4</sup> "Estadísticas," Oficina del Peregrino. Santiago de Compostela, accessed February 23, 2024, <https://oficinadelperegrino.com/estadisticas-2/>. According to the statistics of the Pilgrim's Reception Office in Santiago de Compostela, the motives of pilgrims in 2023 are as follows: 42.61 % for religious; 37.4 % for religious or others; 22.69 % for non-religious.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Louise Frey, *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Lluís Oviedo, Scarlett De Courcier, and Miguel Farias, "Rise of Pilgrims on the *Camino* to Santiago: Sign of Change or Religious Revival?," *Review of Religious Research* 56, no. 3 (September 2014): 433–42,

Pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago is a journey of self-exploration and self-discovery for many. Many people on the Camino are exploring their inner selves. It would be reasonable to assume, therefore, that Protestant pastors are also seeking something deep inside themselves as they walk the Camino.

Today, there are countless books and digital media on the Camino de Santiago: fiction, non-fiction, travel guides, travel blogs, movies, websites as well as scholarly articles. Spiritual writings on pilgrimage are flourishing, and personal accounts of the experience of walking the Camino have been written by many authors. Among them, there are several accounts written by Protestant clergy persons as well. In *Without Oars: Casting Off into a Life of Pilgrimage*, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, a Protestant minister, who served as General Secretary of the Reformed Church in America and Director of Church and Society for the World Council of Churches in Geneva, reflects back on his personal life and ministry career through the lens of his Camino experience and articulates how it has impacted his understanding of the Christian faith.<sup>6</sup> In this memoir, he repeatedly tells that he has come to understand that religious faith is an embodied practice. He also shares spiritual insights gained on the Camino, such as the practice of letting go and the practice of being in the present moment. Another Protestant pastor's memoir of the Camino is *The Way Is Made by Walking: A Pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago*, written by Arthur Paul Boers, an ordained minister in the Mennonite Church USA and a professor at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto. In this memoir, Boers describes how the Camino experience has

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<https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-013-0131-4>; Miguel Farias et al., "Atheists on the Santiago Way: Examining Motivations to Go On Pilgrimage," *Sociology of Religion* 80, no. 1 (January 9, 2019): 28–44, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/sry019>; Patrick Heiser, "Pilgrimage and Religion: Pilgrim Religiosity on the Ways of St. James," *Religions* 12, no. 3 (March 5, 2021): 167, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12030167>.

<sup>6</sup> Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *Without Oars: Casting Off into a Life of Pilgrimage* (Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2020).

changed his views on life and ministry.<sup>7</sup> By walking the Camino, he discovered the act of slow walking as a Christian spiritual practice, suggesting its possible application to the practice of ministry to revitalize its evangelism. These two memoirs are inspiring for spiritual nourishment; however, these accounts do not necessarily address how the Camino experience impacts the practice of Protestant ministry in the congregational setting directly.

I have thus far found no qualitative research that directly studies Protestant pastors who have walked the Camino and the impact of their Camino experiences on their practices of ministry. Furthermore, I have found no qualitative research that examines the spiritual benefits of walking the Camino for the practice of Protestant ministry. In the existing literature, in other words, there is no theory available to explain how the practice of the Camino pilgrimage could enhance the practice of ministry in Protestant churches. Since the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, the spiritual potential of pilgrimage has been undervalued among Protestants. The recent popularity of the Camino de Santiago implies, however, that it would be a very rich spiritual experience for many. Hence, there seems to be a need for research into what meaning these Protestant pastors ascribe to their participation in this ancient spiritual practice of the church.

My research question is how the experience of walking the Camino has impacted the practice of ministry for these Protestant pastors. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the Camino experience on their practices of ministry, this central research question is divided into several sub-questions: (1) how they learned about the Camino; (2) what motivated them to walk the Camino, and/or what inspired them to walk the Camino repeatedly; (3) what

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Paul Boers, *The Way Is Made by Walking: A Pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 2007).

they experienced on the Camino; (4) how the Camino experience has affected their spiritual lives; (5) how they incorporate their Camino experiences into their daily lives; (6) how their practices of ministry have changed after walking the Camino; and (7) how they share their Camino experiences with others in the congregation.

The target audience of this research is Protestant pastors who have never thought of walking the Camino or those who dreamed about it but never had a chance to realize it. At the same time, this research is an invitation to all people, regardless of one's knowledge and experience of the Camino de Santiago. I truly want to share the joy of walking the Camino with others because it is part of my ministry and calling.

The significance of this research is that the recent popularity of the Camino might teach clergy persons about the spiritual lives of people today and give them some hints for reaching out to the wider community. Furthermore, inquiring into Protestant pastors' experiences of walking the Camino and their impacts on their ministry practices might help other Protestant pastors better understand the spiritual potential of this ancient practice of the church and utilize these pastors' insights and strategies to revitalize their own congregational ministries. As an open invitation to the Camino de Santiago, this research might also become a helpful tool for Christian believers in any ecclesiastical tradition to realize the possibilities of having a pilgrimage experience in their daily lives, since pilgrimage could happen in any place without traveling halfway around the globe to Spain or other foreign destinations. It would be available even in one's neighborhood.

## **Type of Project**

This research conducts a grounded theory study for its qualitative research in order to delve into the research questions delineated above. The reason for using the grounded theory approach for this research is the absence of theoretical explanation in the existing literature regarding how the experience of walking the Camino impacts the practice of congregational ministry in Protestant churches. The grounded theory approach is an inductive research method that formulates a theory based on the data gathered from people who share a common phenomenon, in this case, Protestant clergy persons who have walked the Camino de Santiago and have some kind of transformational experience in their spiritual lives as well as in their practices of ministry. Hence, this research provides a description that more accurately reflects their spiritual lives and their practices of ministry after they return from the Camino. The research methods adopted for this study include administering surveys to Protestant pastors and conducting in-depth, one-on-one interviews with them. The data gathered from the research participants has helped me gain insights into the impact of the Camino experience on their practices of ministry and develop a theory of how the experience of the Camino pilgrimage revitalizes the practice of ministry in Protestant churches today.

## **Assumptions**

There are several theological assumptions I bring into this research. These assumptions arise out of my own experience of walking the Camino as well as my professional experience as a Protestant pastor.

## Walking the Camino Transforms One's Spiritual Life

The first theological assumption is that walking the Camino is a life-changing experience that transforms one's spiritual life. On the Camino, people can learn many lessons about life, such as hospitality, simplicity of life, sharing, letting go, courage, humility, gratitude, hope, resilience, harmony with nature, and others. One of the lessons I learned on the Camino is mindfulness. On the Camino, pilgrims usually walk between twenty and thirty kilometers a day. Unlike a motor vehicle or an airplane that could make us travel far and fast, walking is a slow movement, and thus we have plenty of time for self-reflection as we walk the Camino. The constant rhythm of walking—putting one foot in front of the other—slows down our cognitive activities and helps us go deep within ourselves.

In his book, *The Long Road Turns to Joy: A Guide to Walking Meditation*, Thich Nhat Hanh, a world-renowned Zen Buddhist monk, talks about the practice of walking meditation, inviting readers to stay in the present moment through meditative walking.<sup>8</sup> He notes, “Most of the time, we are lost in the past or carried away by the future. When we are mindful, deeply in touch with the present moment, our understanding of what is going on deepens, and we begin to be filled with acceptance, joy, peace, and love.”<sup>9</sup> He goes on to write, “Walking in mindfulness brings us peace and joy, and makes our lives real.”<sup>10</sup> According to his teachings, the present

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<sup>8</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Long Road Turns to Joy: A Guide to Walking Meditation* (Berkley, CA: Parallax Press, 2011); Alison T. Smith, “Walking Meditation: Being Present and Being Pilgrim on the Camino de Santiago,” *Religions* 9, no. 3 (March 15, 2018): 82, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9030082>. In this article, Smith discusses Thich Nhat Hanh's practice of walking meditation as a practice of being in the present moment and encourages pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago to incorporate this Zen practice into the practice of walking the Camino to enhance their pilgrimage experiences. I am indebted to her discussion for my articulation of the similarity between the practice of meditative walking in Zen Buddhism and the practice of slow walking on the Camino.

<sup>9</sup> Nhat Hanh, *Long Road Turns to Joy*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Nhat Hanh, 11.

moment is the only moment we are alive.<sup>11</sup> We live neither in the past nor in the future because the past has already gone and the future has not yet come.<sup>12</sup> Hence, he encourages readers not to be carried away by the past or be anxious about the future but to stay in the present moment, “here and now.”<sup>13</sup> The practice of walking meditation cultivates mindfulness in us; it invites us to stop thinking and look more deeply into things as they are.<sup>14</sup>

In *The Long Road Turns to Joy*, Thich Nhat Hanh also talks about the unity of mind and body attained through the practice of meditative walking. He writes, “For the Buddha, walking is a way to remind oneself that mind and body are two aspects of the same thing.”<sup>15</sup> It is often said that walking is a physical activity that connects our minds, bodies, and souls. Walking the Camino is a spiritual practice with our whole beings; it brings our minds, bodies, and souls together. On the Camino, we experience God’s grace through our physical engagement, such as physical pain after a long walk, the resilience of our bodies, and the hospitality we receive and provide. Through these tangible experiences, we learn that the Christian faith is not only a belief system but also an embodied practice as well. Walking the Camino is an embodied spiritual experience that sharpens our awareness of the presence of God in our daily lives; it helps us see things with the eyes of the heart.

In addition to an encounter with God, we also encounter our inner selves as we walk the Camino. Pilgrimage to Santiago is not a luxurious vacation tour but a challenging endeavor. On the Camino, many unexpected things happen to us. Sometimes no lodging is found for the night;

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<sup>11</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, (New York: Bantam Book, 1992), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Nhat Hanh, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Nhat Hanh, 11-12.

<sup>15</sup> Nhat Hanh, *Long Road Turns to Joy*, 7.

sometimes relentless rain suddenly drops; sometimes we overlook the yellow arrows and lose our ways. As things do not unfold as anticipated, we have to face our own physical as well as emotional limitations. We also have to overcome our own fears.<sup>16</sup> Through these experiences, we are invited to see who we are. To admit one's own limitations, weaknesses, and fears is a painful process; it often makes us feel vulnerable. But, as John Brierley notes in his popular guidebook of the Camino, "Finding the courage to face our fears and step outside our comfort zone can lead us to Self-discovery."<sup>17</sup> As we come to know our true selves, we encounter God who dwells in the depths of our souls.<sup>18</sup> Walking the Camino de Santiago is a transformative spiritual experience for many. It shapes us into a new person and renews our perspectives on life. This self-transformation could occur as we deepen our relationship with God and understand ourselves more deeply through an encounter with others and various occurrences along the way.

### **Protestants' Suspicion of Pilgrimage as a Catholic Practice**

The second theological assumption is that Protestants are suspicious of pilgrimage as a Catholic religious practice. In Protestantism, the significance of the practice of pilgrimage has been underestimated since the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. In his article, "Protestants and Pilgrimage," Graham Tomlin describes the characteristic reactions of Protestants toward the practice of pilgrimage as follows:

Protestants do not go on Pilgrimages—at least that is the common perception. In fact, many Protestants do go on pilgrimage, although they do not tend to call it that. The majority of visitors to the Holy Land, for example, are Protestants from North America,

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<sup>16</sup> Rosanne Keller, *Pilgrim in Time* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 6. In this book, Keller describes her experience of encountering fears while walking the Camino, summarizing the spirit of pilgrimage in the following sentence: "Living without fear is at the heart of pilgrimage."

<sup>17</sup> John Brierley, *A Pilgrim's Guide to the Camino de Santiago: Camino Francés* (Forres, Scotland: Camino Guides, 2018), 6.

<sup>18</sup> David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 21-22, 101. I am indebted to Benner for an insight into the interdependence of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self.



Great Britain or Europe, yet many of them feel uncomfortable with the word ‘pilgrimage’ to describe what they are doing. Confronted by the language of ‘holy places’, ‘shrines’ and the tendency to erect ornate churches on any spot with a claim to Christian antiquity or significance, many Protestants feel a little awkward, choosing politely to ignore the ideology of pilgrimage, calling their trip instead a ‘study tour’ or something equally neutral.<sup>19</sup>

In the same article, Tomlin further analyzes the theological backgrounds of their negative reactions toward pilgrimage, tracing them back to two prominent sixteenth century Protestant reformers, Martin Luther and John Calvin.<sup>20</sup> He says of the lasting impacts of these two reformers’ criticism of the practice of pilgrimage as follows: “Faced with such an apparently total rejection of the practice, subsequent Protestantism has inherited a deep suspicion of the idea, which is hard to shake off, and persuaded many to avoid pilgrimage altogether, as at best unnecessary, at worst downright dangerous.”<sup>21</sup>

According to Tomlin, Luther criticized the practice of pilgrimage primarily because it was related with work righteousness and was considered a meritorious work among believers in his time.<sup>22</sup> Tomlin argues that Luther’s objection to the practice of pilgrimage was grounded on his central theological principle, that is, the doctrine of justification. Luther stressed that we were saved by grace through faith alone. Unlike the theological systems of the medieval church that upheld the notion that “justification was the result of some form of cooperation between God’s grace and human endeavour,” justification was solely the work of God for Luther.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Tomlin, “Protestants and Pilgrimage,” 110.

<sup>20</sup> Tomlin, 110.

<sup>21</sup> Tomlin, 110; Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, “Hungry for Physical Places: The Post-Pandemic Call of Pilgrimage,” *The Christian Century* 138, no 15 (July 28, 2021): 34, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=37de8d2e-1710-3b4c-b5d3-51385a01c57f>. In this article, Granberg-Michaelson also identifies both Martin Luther and John Calvin’s objections to the practice of pilgrimage, arguing that “the effect [of their rejections] was a retreat from embodiment.”

<sup>22</sup> Tomlin, 112-113.

<sup>23</sup> Tomlin, 113.

Likewise, Tomlin argues that Calvin's objection to the practice of pilgrimage was rooted in his central theological principle, the sovereignty of God, and that Calvin was concerned with true worship of God and where it could take place.<sup>24</sup> Calvin renounced the practice of pilgrimage because it was a human attempt to approach God.<sup>25</sup> For Calvin, the Word of God and the sacraments were the primal locations where God chose to make Godself known to us.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the pilgrimage sites, which often displayed relics of saints, were human constructions to meet with God that could deflect our attention from the true worship of God.<sup>27</sup>

As it is commonly perceived, in Protestant churches, preaching the Word of God is the center of their worship service, and their Christian faith is articulated in dogmatic creeds and various confessions. These approaches to religious life imply that Protestants are inclined to underscore the cognitive aspect of the Christian faith and that their spiritual lives tend to concentrate on "words and thoughts," as Wesley Granberg-Michaelson points out in his memoir of the Camino.<sup>28</sup> As a result of this emphasis, the Christian faith tends to become a belief system in Protestantism, and the embodied dimensions of religious experience are often overlooked in their congregational life and theology.<sup>29</sup>

In Protestantism, furthermore, atonement is considered to be the center of the Christian faith. The belief that God redeems humanity from sin through the death of Jesus Christ on the

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<sup>24</sup> Tomlin, 117.

<sup>25</sup> Tomlin, 117.

<sup>26</sup> Tomlin, 117.

<sup>27</sup> Tomlin, 117.

<sup>28</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, *Without Oars*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 77-80.

Cross is emphasized.<sup>30</sup> As a result of this emphasis on the theology of the Cross, the incarnation tends to be subordinated in their theologies. This tendency is related with their theological emphasis on the transcendent God who can be perceived outside ourselves.<sup>31</sup> The notion that pilgrimage is an embodied spiritual practice is deeply rooted in the doctrine of incarnation. It is firmly grounded on the belief that God is immanent. On the Camino, we encounter God through material realities, which are permeated with divine grace. We also enjoy harmony with nature, which is also infused with divine grace. Furthermore, we encounter God who dwells within ourselves. God is both transcendent and immanent; God graciously makes Godself known to us in the deepest parts of our beings. We listen to the Word of God in the depths of our hearts. The Christian church throughout the centuries upholds that the second person of the Trinity became flesh and dwelled among us, as it is testified in the Gospel of John. Furthermore, the church has faith in the resurrection of the body. As Jesus was resurrected from the dead, it is our ultimate hope that we will be resurrected from the dead at the consummation of the world with resurrected bodies.

Here, I am not objecting to the Protestant emphasis on words and thoughts in their spiritual life and theology; rather, as a Protestant pastor, I strongly advocate the importance of listening to the Word of God for one's spiritual life. I believe that God saved us through the

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<sup>30</sup> Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 71-75. Volf and Croasmun argue that the center of the message Jesus proclaimed is "an alternative vision of flourishing life—of the kingdom of God itself—rooted in God's character as universal, unconditional, and omnipotent love." They further write, "Redemption, or the repair of the human condition, is the Christian faith's subsidiary theme, contingent on the actuality of brokenness. Its two primary themes are creation (expressed paradigmatically in the image of the garden of Eden) and consummation (expressed paradigmatically in the image of new Jerusalem)." I agree with their argument that redemption is not the final goal of salvation history and that "the vision of life established through creation and promised in consummation sets the destination." Following their theological argument, I assume that the core belief of the Christian faith lies not in a negative vision of removal of sin but in a more positive and larger picture of flourishing life that encompasses from creation to consummation.

<sup>31</sup> Lauren Artress. *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice*, revised and updated ed. (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 136.

death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. What I am suggesting here is a more holistic approach to the Christian faith and its practices, since the Christian faith is a way of life that shapes our whole beings. It concerns all aspects of our human existence. In other words, the Christian faith is a spiritual experience of the sacred that is not simply to believe in God intellectually or assent to a dogmatic confession but to seek encounter with God through our whole beings in our everyday lives.<sup>32</sup>

Protestants would need help to overcome their suspicion that pilgrimage is a Catholic practice of devotion. Martin Luther and John Calvin's objections to the practice of pilgrimage were reasonable in their own times, and some of their objections would still be relevant today. But more than five hundred years have passed since the Protestant Reformation, and the theological, social as well as cultural contexts in which the church is situated have significantly changed since then. Therefore, we need to re-evaluate the significance of the practice of pilgrimage and re-investigate its spiritual benefits for the ministry of the church in light of the religiosity of contemporary societies, since pilgrimage does not contradict the central beliefs of the Christian faith, but it is grounded in them.

Tomlin offers several implications of the practice of pilgrimage for the practice of ministry in contemporary churches. According to Tomlin, one of its spiritual implications is its rich metaphor for the Christian life.<sup>33</sup> Our faith journey can be considered a pilgrimage journey. The themes of journey, exile, pilgrimage, wandering, and sojourn are found throughout the

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<sup>32</sup> Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path*, 128. Artress writes, "In the past, Christianity has disregarded the need for a spiritual path. It urged people simply to believe intellectually, rather than seek experiences of the Sacred. ... Consequently, Christianity has retained only part of its content. It has lost sight of the process teachings that guide us along a sequenced, nameable pathway to discover God within ourselves."

<sup>33</sup> Tomlin, "Protestants and Pilgrimage," 123.

Scriptures, as Arthur Paul Boers points out.<sup>34</sup> As mentioned earlier, for example, in the Hebrew Scripture, Abraham left his father's house behind and went to an unfamiliar land. The people of Israel experienced a long journey in the wilderness after they had left the house of bondage in Egypt. In the New Testament, Jesus traveled throughout Galilee without having a place to lay his head, proclaiming the good news, healing the sick, and feeding the hungry. He made a trip from Galilee to Jerusalem to complete his mission on earth. His disciples left their home to follow him. In the history of the Christian church, it has often been considered that the church is on a pilgrimage, moving toward the kingdom of God, which has been breaking into this world in the person of Jesus Christ. Christian believers throughout the ages are all pilgrims; they are sojourners on earth.<sup>35</sup>

The practice of pilgrimage is not foreign to Protestantism. The legacy of the sixteenth century reformers' criticism of pilgrimage is still enduring among Protestants; however, the spirituality of pilgrimage is not totally forgotten in their spiritual lives; rather the spirit of pilgrimage has been retained among Protestants as a form of piety. Arthur Paul Boers argues that the focus of their spirituality has been shifted from an outer practice of going to a sacred site to an internalized spiritual journey, pointing out that this internalization of the practice of pilgrimage can be attested in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, written by John Bunyan, a puritan preacher

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<sup>34</sup> Boers, *Way Is Made by Walking*, 40-41.

<sup>35</sup> André Brouillette, *The Pilgrim Paradigm: Faith in Motion* (New York: Paulist Press, 2021), 126. Brouillette writes, "In recent decades, the Church has eagerly embraced her identity as the 'Pilgrim Church.' ... Despite the apparent newness of the image, its roots run deep, since it draws on the biblical version that portrays God's people as wanderers. It presents the image of a Church in movement, on a quest, opening its windows to the realities of the world surrounding her. In time, 'Pilgrim Church' would become one of the most beloved ways to talk about the Church."

in the seventeenth century England, which focuses on the interior journey of pilgrimage rather than an outer one.<sup>36</sup>

Protestants go to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, where Jesus walked, preached, and died. As Tomlin notes, this kind of trip is often called a “study tour.” This designation seems to imply their tendency to focus on words and thoughts in their religious life. What it is called depends on each participant’s perception of the trip; however, it is more reasonable to assume that, for many of them, the purpose of their trips to the Holy Land is not only sightseeing or acquiring historical knowledge but also a deeply religious one, intended to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. The idea of pilgrimage is not easily embraced by Protestants, but their trips to the Holy Land actually embody the spirit of pilgrimage.

Protestant pastors who walked the Camino de Santiago would have made this pilgrimage not only for sightseeing but also for spiritual or religious reasons. It would be more likely that many of them checked the box for religious or spiritual reasons for their motives as they applied for the Compostela, an official certificate of completion of pilgrimage given to pilgrims who walk at least one hundred kilometers on foot or ride two hundred kilometers on bicycle, at Pilgrim’s Reception Office in Santiago de Compostela. As they set out on a pilgrimage to Santiago, following in the footsteps of millions of pilgrims over the centuries, they stepped across the boundaries of their religious traditions and embarked on a theological and spiritual exploration of their Christian faith.

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<sup>36</sup> Boers, *Way Is Made by Walking*, 43.

## **Pastors' Own Spirituality Shapes Their Practice of Ministry**

The third assumption is that pastors' spiritualities and ministries are inseparable. Pastors' spirituality shapes their practices of ministry and affects the spiritual life of the faith community they lead. It is assumed, therefore, that, as pastors' relationship with God is deepened through the experience of walking the Camino, their practices of ministry are enhanced, and the ministry of their congregation is revitalized.

## **Central Terms**

### **Pilgrimage**

According to Ian Reader, "Pilgrimage is a global phenomenon found almost universally across cultures."<sup>37</sup> People make a pilgrimage to a sacred site, such as a shrine, a temple, and a cathedral, or they visit a place to which they ascribe meanings. It is often considered that there are two aspects of a pilgrimage journey: one is an outer journey to a sacred place, and the other is an inner journey into the self.<sup>38</sup> As pilgrims make a pilgrimage, they often embark on a spiritual journey of self-discovery and explore the meaning and purpose of life. In *The Art of Pilgrimage*, Phil Cousineau discusses how an ordinary trip can be transformed into a pilgrimage, arguing that every journey can become a pilgrimage if a traveler goes on the journey "with the purpose of finding something that matters deeply to the traveler."<sup>39</sup> In their works, both Ian Reader and Phil

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<sup>37</sup> Ian Reader, *Pilgrimage: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>38</sup> Brierley, *Pilgrim's Guide: Camino Francés*, 8. In this popular travel guide of the Camino, Brierley pays attention to both the inner and outer aspects of the Camino pilgrimage and finds a balance between these two. He strongly encourages readers to find a spiritual purpose for taking the Camino pilgrimage; Granberg-Michaelson, *Without Oars*, 40. He also emphasizes the two aspects of the pilgrimage, as he writes, "The authentic pilgrim journey moves in two directions—outward and inward."

<sup>39</sup> Phil Cousineau, introduction to *The Art of Pilgrimage: The Seeker's Guide to Making Travel Sacred* (New York: MJF Books, 1998), xxiii.

Cousineau talk about secular pilgrimage, maintaining that the practice of pilgrimage is not limited to a journey to a religious site but includes a journey to secular sites and non-religious places. For instance, Graceland in Tennessee is a pilgrimage site for those who admire Elvis Presley and his legacy; the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. is a pilgrimage site for Vietnam veterans and their families; places associated with one's ancestral roots can also become pilgrimage sites for the person. Any trip can become a pilgrimage, depending on the intention one brings into one's journey. This research assumes that pilgrimage is not limited to an outer journey to a sacred site, but it is also an inner spiritual journey that could be experienced in our daily lives.

### **The Camino de Santiago**

The Camino de Santiago is an ancient Christian pilgrimage path. Pilgrims walk to the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain, which is considered to be the burial place of the Apostle James the Great. James was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. According to the synoptic gospels, he was the son of Zebedee and a fisherman in Galilee with his brother, John. One day when James and John were in their boat, mending fishing nets on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus called them, and immediately they followed him, leaving their father and the fishing nets behind.<sup>40</sup> James was one of the members of the inner circle of Jesus, along with his brother John, Peter and his brother Andrew. They were always with Jesus as he engaged in ministry in Galilee and appeared at crucial moments of his ministry. For instance, they were

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<sup>40</sup> Mark 1:16-20. The New Revised Standard Version translation will be used throughout this project.



present when Jesus underwent transfiguration on a high mountain.<sup>41</sup> They were also with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was praying fervently before his crucifixion.<sup>42</sup>

According to legends, James went to Spain to proclaim the gospel after the death and resurrection of Jesus, but his ministry in Spain was not successful, and he returned to Jerusalem with disappointment. The Book of Acts records his death, according to which, James was executed by King Herod Agrippa I of Judea in AD 44.<sup>43</sup> After his death, his disciples took his body and carried it in a stone boat with no oars or rudder, trusting God to lead them as God wished. The boat miraculously sailed across the Mediterranean Sea and reached Galicia in northwest Spain, and then his body was buried. His tomb was forgotten for a long time, but in the ninth century, it was discovered by a shepherd who saw a bright star, guiding him to the burial place of James. Thereafter, a chapel was built on his burial site, which later expanded into the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. According to an etymological explanation, “Compostela” comes from the Latin term, *campus stella*, which means “the field of stars,” or from *compositum*, which means “burial ground.”<sup>44</sup>

Santiago de Compostela has been considered one of the three traditional pilgrimage sites for western Christians along with Rome and Jerusalem; many pilgrims from all over Europe made a pilgrimage to Santiago in the Middle Ages. At that time, pilgrims usually started walking the Camino from their home; thus, their pilgrimage journey was long and dangerous, often a once in a lifetime event. The *Codex Calixtinus* is a medieval codex compiled in the twelfth century, possibly by a French monk named Aymeric Picaud. This codex comprises five books,

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<sup>41</sup> Mark 9:2-8.

<sup>42</sup> Mark 14:32-42.

<sup>43</sup> Acts 12:1-2.

<sup>44</sup> *Oxford Reference*, s.v. “Santiago de Compostela,” accessed March 4, 2024, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100441348>.

and the fifth book is called “The Pilgrim’s Guide,” which is considered the first travel guide of the Camino de Santiago.<sup>45</sup> It provides a detailed account of the route and its cultural and historical backgrounds with useful advice for medieval pilgrims; thus, it gives us a glimpse into what the Camino pilgrimage looked like in the Middle Ages. There are several pilgrimage routes leading to Santiago de Compostela, among which the Camino Francés is most popular. Today, many pilgrims start walking the Camino from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port or Roncesvalles, small villages in the Pyrenees on the France-Spain border. It is about eight hundred kilometers from there to Santiago, running across the northern part of Spain; it usually takes between thirty and forty days on foot, depending on how far one walks each day. Recently, more than four hundred thousand pilgrims walk this ancient pilgrimage path every year. According to the statistics from Pilgrim’s Reception Office in Santiago de Compostela, 347,566 people completed the pilgrimage on the Camino in 2019, 438,307 in 2022, and 440,328 in 2023.<sup>46</sup>

## **Liminality**

Liminality is a concept that signifies a phase “in-between.” In ritual studies, it refers to a state of transition from one stage of life to the next as people initiate the ritual process. In this transitional stage, people are often situated in a state of ambiguity, uncertainty, discomfort, and disorientation. In *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Victor Turner and Edith Turner apply the concept of liminality from ritual studies to pilgrimage studies, arguing that pilgrimage

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<sup>45</sup> William Melczer, *The Pilgrim’s Guide to Santiago de Compostela* (New York: Italica Press, 1993). This book is an English translation of Book Five of the *Codex Calixtinus*.

<sup>46</sup> I am indebted to several authors, Nancy Louise Frey, John Brierley, and Parick Heiser for the historical backgrounds of the development of the Camino de Santiago. Frey, *Pilgrim Stories*, 8-14; Brierley, *Pilgrim’s Guide: Camino Francés*, 30-35; Heiser, “Pilgrimage and Religion,” 1 of 12. For the statistics from Pilgrim’s Reception Office, see note 3 above.

is a liminal experience of one's religious life.<sup>47</sup> Pilgrims go through a liminal state as they embark on a pilgrimage. According to the Turners, the "liminality" in the practice of pilgrimage means that pilgrims separate themselves from the routines of their daily life as they leave their home, a familiar environment. In this temporal stage, they leave behind their social roles in the former society and embrace a new role.

### **Threshold/Borderland**

Geographically speaking, a borderland is a place where two or more nations are sitting next to one another; metaphorically, it is a place in-between where two or more cultures and/or histories are sitting next to one another.<sup>48</sup> Since two or more cultures are negotiating with one another, a borderland can easily become a place of conflict, contradiction, and ambivalence, as Gloria Anzaldúa, a widely known Chicana writer and a pioneer of borderland studies, contends in her influential book, *Borderlands La Frontera*.<sup>49</sup> In this book, Anzaldúa further argues that the borderland is not simply a place of division or conflict but also a place of possibilities where something new can emerge.<sup>50</sup> Following Anzaldúa, Jung Eun Sophia Park, SNJM, depicts the borderland as "a space where boundary crossings occur, with different socio-political cultural

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<sup>47</sup> Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 7.

<sup>48</sup> Jung Eun Sophia Park, *Border-Crossing Spirituality: Transformation in the Borderland* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 72.

<sup>49</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, preface to the first edition of *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 5th ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), ix. Anzaldúa writes, "In fact, the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy." Anzaldúa further says of the borderland as follows: "It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are prominent features of this landscape."

<sup>50</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, ix. In addition to the place of conflict, Anzaldúa characterizes the borderland as a space of possibilities as well, as she says, "However, there have been compensations for this *mestiza*, and certain joys. Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien' element. There is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind, in being 'worked' on."

elements encountering one another and resulting in creative new situations.”<sup>51</sup> For these two scholars, the borderland is a socio-cultural space where transformation can happen through an encounter with others. Many writers on Christian spiritualities characterize pilgrimage as a threshold/borderland experience through which the transformation of the self could occur. For many pilgrims, the Camino pilgrimage functions as such a borderland/threshold experience. In this research, the terms, “borderland” and “threshold,” are interchangeably used to refer to the unique environment of the pilgrimage journey for possible transformation and spiritual growth. As pilgrims leave their home, a familiar environment, and move across a threshold, they move out of their comfort zones and step into the unknown. Moving across a threshold is a frightening moment for many because the liminal space at the borderland/threshold is a place where the past has gone and the future has not yet come. Therefore, people often feel uncertainty and discomfort in this place, but as Park and other scholars emphasize, it is a space of new possibilities as well.<sup>52</sup> The spirituality of crossing the borders encourages us to be present in ambiguity and discomfort at the threshold.<sup>53</sup> It invites us to stay still in the presence of God and listen to God speaking to us in the depths of our souls, since the threshold/borderland is a space for discernment and reflection.

### **Walking Meditation**

Walking meditation is a spiritual practice of Zen Buddhism. In his book, *The Long Road Turns to Joy*, Thich Nhat Hanh talks about the practice of walking meditation and encourages readers to walk mindfully. As a type of mindfulness practice, walking meditation invites us to

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<sup>51</sup> Park, *Border-Crossing Spirituality*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Park, 73.

<sup>53</sup> Park, 66. Park writes, “Actually, now-ness is a fundamental discipline of border-crossing spirituality.”

stay in the present moment, “here and now.” In her article, “Walking Meditation: Being Present and Being Pilgrim on the Camino de Santiago,” Alison T. Smith discusses the practice of walking meditation advanced by Thich Nhat Hanh, encouraging pilgrims on the Camino to incorporate this spiritual practice of Zen Buddhism into their own pilgrimage walks in order to enhance their pilgrimage experiences.<sup>54</sup>

## **Spirituality**

Spirituality is deeply related to the core of one’s being. According to Philip Sheldrake, “Spirituality concerns what is holistic—that is, a fully integrated approach to life.”<sup>55</sup> “Then spirituality is also understood,” he says, “to be engaged with a quest for the ‘sacred.’”<sup>56</sup> “Further, spirituality is frequently understood to involve a quest for meaning (including the purpose of life) as a response to the decline of traditional religious or social authorities,” writes Sheldrake.<sup>57</sup> As a fundamental human quest for meaning, it is not necessarily limited within or connected to religious institutions. Today, people explore their spiritualities through various spiritual practices and activities. Many pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago are spiritual seekers; they are looking for the meaning of life and often believe in something larger than themselves. As Sheldrake points out, in contemporary societies, the term, “spirituality,” is often used in contrast with the term, “religion.”<sup>58</sup> This research assumes that spirituality and religion are not necessarily in contradiction but signify different aspects of one’s inner life. I agree with Lauren Artress who defines religion and spirituality as follows: “Religion is the outward form, the ‘container,’

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<sup>54</sup> Smith, “Walking Meditation.”

<sup>55</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5.

<sup>56</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Sheldrake, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Sheldrake, 7.

specifically the liturgy and all the acts of worship that teach, praise, and give thanks to God. Spirituality is the inward activity of growth and maturation that happens in each of us.”<sup>59</sup> Since religion refers to an external container, like ritual or worship service, and spirituality signifies an internal activity rooted in the depth of one’s inner self, these two concepts are not necessarily in opposition to each other. People often express their spiritualities through various religious activities.

## **Methodology**

### **Literary Analysis**

This research involves exploring contemporary literature on pilgrimage studies, both scholarly articles and personal accounts of the experience of walking the Camino. The scholarly articles with which I engage in conversation are written from a wide variety of perspectives, such as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, tourism studies, psychology, spirituality, ministry, religious studies, and theology. Many of the personal accounts of the Camino are subjective accounts by authors that provide a detailed description of their Camino experiences. Through literary analysis, I explore the recent phenomenon of the resurgence of the Camino de Santiago and its cultural, religious, and historical backgrounds. It provides a theoretical framework for this research and contextualizes it into contemporary cultural and religious situations.

### **Survey to Pastors**

In order to understand the impact of the Camino experience on the practice of ministry for Protestant pastors, a survey was administered to Protestant pastors who have walked the

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<sup>59</sup> Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path*, 15.

Camino. Through the survey, I gathered information about their denominational affiliation, ministry position, age, and gender identity, along with their experiences of walking the Camino and the impact of their Camino experiences on their practices of ministry. At the end of the survey, I asked about their willingness to participate in the interview to share their experiences of walking the Camino with the researcher. The survey functioned as screening for possible participants in the interview to be identified.

#### Survey Questions:

1. Name, Email, Denomination, Ministry Position, Age, Gender.
2. When did you walk the Camino?
3. What portion did you complete?
4. How was your experience of the Camino?
5. How have you incorporated your Camino experience into your daily life after returning home?
6. How has your experience of walking the Camino affected your practice of ministry?
7. How do you share your Camino experience with your congregation?
8. Would you be willing to talk to me for the interview about your experience of the Camino and its impact on your ministry?
9. Please feel free to leave additional comments here.

#### **Interview with Pastors**

After completing the survey, I conducted in-depth, one-on-one interviews with pastors. The interviews were guided by the following questions below. They were open-ended questions that allowed the interviewees to freely share their experiences of the Camino pilgrimage and their practices of ministry with the researcher.

#### Interview Questions:

1. How did you learn about the Camino?
2. What makes you want to try it?
3. How was your experience of the Camino?
4. How has your Camino experience affected your ministry?
5. How do you share your Camino experience with others?
6. Would you recommend your colleagues to walk the Camino? Why?
7. Can you get some congregants for a survey and/or a Zoom conversation with me to talk about the impact of your Camino experience on the community life of your congregation?

#### **Data Analysis**

Data was collected through the surveys and one-on-one interviews. With the permission of the interviewees, all interviews were recorded for verbatim transcription. After collecting data, I fragmented their survey responses and interview transcripts into excerpts and contrasted them with one another, exploring significant statements and phrases, common motifs, related topics, and similar/dissimilar experiences in these excerpts, and then I grouped them into open codes. Through constant comparison of the open codes, several themes were identified and then categorized into several axial codes. After having reached theoretical saturation, the central phenomenon was identified, and all codes and categories were linked with it. Thereupon, I developed a theory of how the Camino experience impacts the practice of ministry for Protestant pastors. The research results are presented in an in-depth description of their experiences of walking the Camino and its impact on their practices of ministry in chapter 3.



## **Sampling**

Since this research examines how the Camino experience impacts the practice of ministry for Protestant pastors and how the Camino pilgrimage can revitalize the practice of ministry in Protestant churches, inclusion criteria for this research are Protestant clergy persons who have walked the Camino and are currently practicing ministry in the North American religious context or used to engage in it. Many of the research participants were recruited through the membership network of American Pilgrims on the Camino, a non-profit organization for pilgrims in the United States.<sup>60</sup> I made a research request to American Pilgrims on the Camino and was given permission from it for conducting surveys and interviews with its members. The invitation letter to this research was sent out digitally to the entire community of American Pilgrims on the Camino on September 8, 2023.<sup>61</sup> Other research participants were recruited through the network of Lancaster Theological Seminary.

## **Procedure**

Surveys were distributed to pastors through electronic communication with Google Forms, which contained an informed consent form letter to sign digitally before participating in the survey. Participation in the survey should take approximately twenty minutes to complete. Interviews with pastors lasted approximately forty-five minutes for each participant. All interviews were conducted online via Zoom. Prior to the interview, each participant was asked to read the informed consent form letter and sign it digitally if they agreed to participate. All interviews were recorded with proper consent, and information gathered through surveys and interviews was stored on a password-protected computer of the researcher, and only the

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<sup>60</sup> “Home,” American Pilgrims on the Camino, accessed February 24, 2024, <https://americanpilgrims.org/>.

<sup>61</sup> See Appendix.

researcher had access to it. The interview protocol, including questions for the survey and interview, was approved by the Franklin & Marshall College Institutional Review Board on August 23, 2023.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

As the popularity of the Camino de Santiago has been growing in the last thirty years, many scholarly articles and books on the Camino have been written from a wide variety of perspectives, and personal stories about the Camino are also burgeoning. Since my research interests lie at the intersection of the Camino pilgrimage and the practice of congregational ministry in Protestant churches, this literature review limits its scope to the following six topics: (1) pilgrimage as a liminal experience; (2) a spiritual landscape of post-secular culture; (3) the resurgence of the Camino de Santiago; (4) Protestant pastors' memoirs of the Camino; (5) the practice of going back home; and (6) connection between pastors' spiritualities and ministries.

### Pilgrimage as a Liminal Experience

It seems relevant to begin my literature review with a scholarly conversation on the nature of pilgrimage itself as it provides a theoretical framework for my research. It is generally recognized that there are two aspects of a pilgrimage journey: one is an outer journey to a sacred site, and the other is an interior journey into the self. In *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Victor Turner and Edith Turner, prominent anthropologists on pilgrimage studies, articulate the connection of these two aspects of pilgrimage in the following sentence: "If mysticism is an interior pilgrimage, pilgrimage is exteriorized mysticism."<sup>1</sup> This understanding of pilgrimage would suggest that pilgrimage is an interior spiritual journey into the heart. That is, pilgrims seek the depths of their souls as they embark on an outer journey to a sacred site.

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<sup>1</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 7.

In the same work, Victor and Edith Turner, employing the concept of “liminality” from ritual studies, also characterize pilgrimage as “the great liminal experience of the religious life.”<sup>2</sup> According to the Turners, liminality signifies a time “in-between” which is an ambiguous state pilgrims go through as they leave their home and separate themselves from the routines of their daily lives. The Turners’ argument of pilgrimage as a liminal experience is built upon the theory of the rites of passage advanced by Arnold van Gennep, a French ethnographer and folklorist.<sup>3</sup> In his seminal work, *Les rites de passage* (1909), van Gennep explores the meaning of ceremonies that mark transitions in one’s life within a society, arguing that the rites of passages include the following three successive stages: “separation,” “transition” and “incorporation.”<sup>4</sup> In *The Ritual Process*, Victor Turner explicates these three stages in the following ways.<sup>5</sup> In the first stage, people are detached from the society to which they belong, separating themselves from its social norms and cultural expectations. In the second stage, they go through a liminal state in which they experience ambiguity, uncertainty, and disorientation as the social norms and cultural assumptions they used to follow have no significance for them in this transitional stage. In the third stage, they return to the former society and are reincorporated into it. Victor and Edith Turner recognize these three successive stages in the pilgrimage journey and apply this scheme to their pilgrimage studies as they illuminate what pilgrims experience during the pilgrimage journey.

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<sup>2</sup> Turner and Turner, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Turner and Turner, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (2008; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2008), 94-95.

For Victor and Edith Turner, liminality is the central idea to understand the practice of pilgrimage. As pilgrims leave their home, they are liberated from various constraints of their daily lives. In this liminal stage, according to the Turners, pilgrims have experience of “communitas,” another important concept to understand the practice of pilgrimage for them.<sup>6</sup> It is an egalitarian community formed among pilgrims through shared experiences during the journey; it is a sense of solidarity felt among pilgrims as they spend time together with the common goal and shared commitment along the way.<sup>7</sup> Pilgrims often share meals, engage in various communal rituals, and have similar experiences of physical pain and suffering during the pilgrimage.<sup>8</sup> Through these shared experiences, differences in their normal lives, such as nationality, language, age, gender, and social status, are often suspended.<sup>9</sup> Experiencing “communitas,” pilgrims gain fresh insights on life, and a new identity is constructed.<sup>10</sup> They return home with a new vision for life and the self.

Victor and Edith Turner’s understanding of pilgrimage as a liminal experience is a widespread idea among scholars on pilgrimage studies. In *Pilgrimage*, Ian Reader endorses this idea through an examination of the etymological origin of the English word, “pilgrimage,” explaining that it is derived from the Latin terms, *peregrinus*, “foreign,” and *per ager*, “going

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<sup>6</sup> Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 13, 250-255.

<sup>7</sup> Bernadette Flanagan, “Pilgrimage: Spirituality on the Move,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 19, no. 2 (2019): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1353/scs.2019.0026>. In this article, Flanagan writes, “These two elements – liminality and communitas – combine to facilitate journeys of personal exploration and transformation.”

<sup>8</sup> Flanagan, “Pilgrimage,” 184.

<sup>9</sup> Flanagan, 184; Michael A. Di Giovine, “Pilgrimage: Communitas and Contestation, Unity and Difference - An Introduction,” *Tourism Review* 59, no. 3 (2011): 250-51, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/109870>.

<sup>10</sup> François Cazaux, “To Be a Pilgrim: A Contested Identity on Saint James’ Way,” *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal* 59, no. 3 (2011): 361, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/109876>. In this article, Cazaux writes, “The space-time of Saint James’ Way is often perceived as a holiday space enabling individuals to leave the society to which they belong in order to find the moral and physical strength lost in the commitment of everyday life once again.”

through field.”<sup>11</sup> By explaining the original meaning of this term, he argues that pilgrimage “indicates the idea of journeys, travelling, leaving the comforts of home, and being a stranger in the lands through which one journeys.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, pilgrimage is an experience of leaving one’s normal life and stepping into the unknown.

In her work, *The Soul of a Pilgrim*, Christine Valters Paintner, an author of books on Celtic monastic spirituality, also maintains that pilgrimage is a liminal experience, describing it as a practice of moving across a threshold. The threshold, she writes, is a “liminal place where the old is released but the new hasn’t come into being.”<sup>13</sup> Hence, it is a place of uncertainty, ambiguity, and discomfort for pilgrims. According to Paintner, the liminal space of the threshold functions as a monastic cell in which desert monks in the early church spent time with God in silence and solitude.<sup>14</sup> In this space, pilgrims are invited to rest in mystery, reflecting on their lives and going deep inside themselves.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the liminal place, Paintner also describes the threshold with the term, “thin places,”<sup>16</sup> which is an expression in the Celtic monastic tradition that refers to the places where “heaven and earth are closer together and the veil between worlds is thin.”<sup>17</sup> They are potent places, where God is made known to us through revelation, and pilgrims are invited “into a renewed awareness of the nearness of the holy presence.”<sup>18</sup> In terms of the inner spiritual aspect of pilgrimage, Paintner maintains that the outer

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<sup>11</sup> Reader, *Pilgrimage*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Reader, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Valters Paintner, *The Soul of a Pilgrim: Eight Practices for the Journey Within* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2015), 51.

<sup>14</sup> Paintner, *Soul of a Pilgrim*, 3-4, 52.

<sup>15</sup> Paintner, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Paintner, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Christine Valters Paintner, *The Soul’s Slow Ripening: 12 Celtic Practices for Seeking the Sacred* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2018). 1.

<sup>18</sup> Paintner, *Soul’s Slow Ripening*, 1.

journey of pilgrimage has a deep meaning for one's interior spiritual journey and "serves our inner transformation."<sup>19</sup> She further argues that "a pilgrimage is an intentional journey into this experience of unknowing and discomfort for the sake of stripping away preconceived expectations."<sup>20</sup> For Paintner, in other words, pilgrimage is a spiritual journey that transforms one's inner self, and "the goal of this wandering is always to find the place of our resurrection, the place where our gifts can be brought fully to life for the rest of our days."<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, in her work, *To Pause at the Threshold*, Esther de Waal, an author of books on Benedictine spirituality, reflects on what it means to live at the threshold, depicting the threshold as borderlands "where two worlds meet."<sup>22</sup> De Waal sees "borderlands as places where different cultures and histories meet and mix, perhaps challenge one another, and from which the new can then open up."<sup>23</sup> In other words, the borderlands are places of contradiction and conflict where people feel uncertainty and ambiguity, and yet they are also places for transformation and change because something new can emerge through an encounter of different cultures and histories in these places.<sup>24</sup> Throughout this book, de Waal provides readers with spiritual wisdom for how they should endure ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty at the threshold, encouraging them to pause at the threshold for discernment and be open to transformation through an encounter with others.

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<sup>19</sup> Paintner, *Soul of a Pilgrim*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Paintner, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Paintner, *Soul's Slow Ripening*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Esther de Waal, *To Pause at the Threshold: Reflections on Living on the Border* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2004), 10.

<sup>23</sup> De Waal, *Pause at the Threshold*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> De Waal, 18.

As analyzed above, various scholars on pilgrimage studies and Christian spiritualities depict the practice of pilgrimage as a liminal experience. As pilgrims leave their home, a familiar environment, and go to an unknown place, they step across a threshold. The threshold is a place of ambiguity and contradiction where they often feel discomfort and disoriented; at the same time, it is a place of possibilities as well.<sup>25</sup> It is a potential place for novelty to emerge and a new identity to be constructed.<sup>26</sup> The liminal experience in the practice of pilgrimage signifies room for freedom, as Edith Turner points out that pilgrimage is an anti-structural and liberating experience.<sup>27</sup> For many people, the practice of pilgrimage functions as a tool for liberation and empowerment. As pilgrims embark on a pilgrimage, they leave various constraints of their daily lives behind. As they go through the liminality of the pilgrimage journey, new identities are constructed. By experiencing “communitas,” they gain a new vision for life and find a renewed self. In such a way, pilgrims could experience the transformation of the self.

### **A Spiritual Landscape of Post-Secular Culture**

This section of the literature review engages in scholarly conversations with sociologists and philosophers who elucidate the spiritual landscape of contemporary western societies. What is the role of religion in contemporary western societies? What kinds of cultural values do people

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<sup>25</sup> Paintner, *Soul of a Pilgrim*, 53.

<sup>26</sup> Buetta Warkentin, “Spiritual but Not Religious: The Fine Line Between the Sacred and Secular on the Camino de Santiago,” *Social Work & Christianity*, 45, no. 1 (2018): 114, [https://www.nacsw.org/Publications/SWC/SWC45\\_1.pdf#page=112](https://www.nacsw.org/Publications/SWC/SWC45_1.pdf#page=112). In this autoethnography, Warkentin describes her own experience of walking the Camino. Regarding the liminal space of the Camino pilgrimage, Warkentin writes, “Pilgrims are in a suspended space where they are opened to new meanings for themselves. Religious or not, through the ritual of the walk, the physical demands of the body, and the imperative of being present on the journey, pilgrims are opened to this sense of possibility. The sacred enters to provide new insights, healing, and meaning-making, and through the emergence and evolution of identity.”

<sup>27</sup> Edith Turner, preface to the paperback edition of *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, by Victor Turner and Edith Turner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), xiii.



in contemporary societies espouse? What kinds of spiritual experiences are they looking for? In recent decades, a steady decline of the number of people affiliated with the church is attested in the United States.<sup>28</sup> Many people have left the organized religious communities for various reasons; however, spirituality is not diminishing but rather flourishing. We can find a section for spirituality in bookstores in the United States; other forms of spiritual practices, such as prayer, yoga, and meditation, gain an increasing popularity among people. This phenomenon indicates that people are not necessarily losing their interests in spiritual matters; rather they are interested in them, looking for something sacred, something beautiful, and something authentic in their everyday lives, asking a question, “How can I live a meaningful life?” Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun argue that people are searching for flourishing life and that “theologians ought to enter the centuries-long and global conversation in which religious and nonreligious thinkers wrestle with the most important human question: What is the true, flourishing life, and how can we live it?”<sup>29</sup> They further argue that the task of theology is to help “people articulate, embrace, and pursue a compelling vision of flourishing life for themselves and all creation.”<sup>30</sup>

The religious landscape of contemporary western society is often characterized as “post-secular” by scholars. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor, a well-known philosopher for social science, argues that contemporary western societies are undergoing a transition “from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others.”<sup>31</sup> Taylor further contends that people in a post-secular society

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<sup>28</sup> Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

<sup>29</sup> Volf and Croasmun, *Life of the World*, 16-17.

<sup>30</sup> Volf and Croasmun, 33-34.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

share “some continuing sense of the importance of following one’s own spiritual itinerary.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, people in contemporary western societies have renewed interests in religion, but their interests have been shifted “from organized, normative religion to subjective, experiential spirituality,” as summarized by Lisbeth Mikaelsson in her analysis of the spiritual landscape of post-secular societies.<sup>33</sup> As Mats Nilsson’s discussion of “post-secular tourism” indicates, people in post-secular societies are searching for something meaningful and sacred through subjective and personalized spiritual experiences.<sup>34</sup>

These kinds of spiritual trends of post-secular culture can be observed in the spiritual lives of the “religious Nones.” In *Choosing Our Religion: Spiritual Lives of America’s Nones*, Elizabeth Drescher analyzes who they are and describes what their spiritual lives look like.<sup>35</sup> According to Drescher, the “religious Nones” are people who are unaffiliated with traditional religious communities, practicing their spiritual lives “outside or on the margins of institutional religions.”<sup>36</sup> The number of the “religious Nones” keeps increasing in the United States. A recent study of Pew Research Center conducted by Gregory A. Smith shows that about three in ten adults in the United States identify themselves as religiously unaffiliated.<sup>37</sup> A recent research study of the PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute) conducted by Daniel Cox and Robert P.

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<sup>32</sup> Taylor, *Secular Age*, 535.

<sup>33</sup> Lisbeth Mikaelsson, “Pilgrimage as Post-Secular Therapy,” *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 24 (January 1, 2012): 259, <https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67418>.

<sup>34</sup> Mats Nilsson, “Post-Secular Tourism—A Study of Pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela” (PhD diss., Karlstad University, 2016), 68, <http://kau.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:886256/FULLTEXT01.pdf>. Nilsson argues that “post-secular tourism strives to attain a subjectively lived, spiritual and meaningful experience such that neither religious faith nor loyalty is ordained.”

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: Spiritual Lives of America’s Nones* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Gregory A. Smith, “About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), December 14, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>.

Jones also indicates that a significant number of people disaffiliate themselves from the traditional organized religious institutions, seeking something spiritual outside the walls of these religious communities.<sup>38</sup> The “religious Nones” include a wide variety of people, ranging from atheists, agnostics, New Age followers, to those identifying themselves as SBNR (spiritual but not religious). Their spiritual practices are diverse, fluid, and often hybrid, and yet they have some common characteristics. Drescher summarizes some of the features of their spiritual lives as follows:

- They are primarily relational, rather than either individualistic or institutional, highlighting interpersonal intimacy and connectedness.
- They are most often embedded in the experiences, locales, and temporaries of everyday life rather than separated in space and time.
- They are embodied, sensate, and social, more than cognitive, private, and interiorized.
- They are provisional and practical, changing on the basis of new experiences, resources, and life stages and drawing on diverse resources across religious, philosophical, and other wisdom traditions.
- They are dynamic over time while remaining coherent within identity narratives.
- They are often understood as transformational, highlighting personal growth and communal or social change.
- They tend to highlight experiences of authenticity and connectedness in the present moment, rather than future-oriented expectations traditionally associated with “salvation” or various other afterlife schemas.<sup>39</sup>

This summary indicates that the spiritual lives of the “Nones” are practice-oriented rather than based on a belief system, embedded in experiences of everyday life. They also prefer to form a community of like-minded people through loose and yet intimate relationships of family and friends without making a firm commitment to them. Their spiritual lives reflect the humanistic traits of postmodern culture, like respect for diversity, harmony with nature, and others. The

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<sup>38</sup> Daniel Cox and Robert P. Jones, “America’s Changing Religious Identity,” PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute), September 6, 2017, <https://www.prri.org/research/american-religious-landscape-christian-religiously-unaffiliated/>.

<sup>39</sup> Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 119.

recent resurgence of the Camino de Santiago demonstrates these kinds of spiritual trends of post-secular culture, as Buetta Warkentin contends that the Camino pilgrimage echoes the shift of spiritual sensitivities of people in post-secular culture.<sup>40</sup> In her article, she also points out that “there is a greater number of pilgrims who identify as not religious, but spiritual at heart, seeking insight, healing and strength in their journeys both on and off the Camino,” arguing that “the pilgrimage is an opportunity for meaning-making that moves through and beyond religious ritual to spiritual expression.”<sup>41</sup>

### **The Resurgence of the Camino de Santiago**

In this section, I engage in conversations with scholars who analyze factors contributing to the resurgence of pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago in recent decades. Why are people interested in walking this ancient pilgrimage path? Since the mid-1980s, the number of people who walk the Camino has been growing. There are many reasons for walking the Camino, and the recent resurgence of the Camino de Santiago is a complex phenomenon.<sup>42</sup> A recent research study conducted by Rossella Moscarelli, Lucrezia Lopez, and Rubén Camilo Lois González identifies several stakeholders that have been contributing to it, including the Catholic Church (mainly the Diocese of Santiago), the central government of Spain, several local governments (Galicia and others), and private sectors, arguing that, along with these actors, contemporary pilgrims’ multiple motivations are promoting the Camino de Santiago as a post-secular pilgrimage practice, and concluding that “the combination of these motivational and spatial

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<sup>40</sup> Warkentin, “Spiritual but Not Religious,” 110-11.

<sup>41</sup> Warkentin, 111.

<sup>42</sup> Cazaux, “To Be a Pilgrim,” 354. Cazaux writes, “Pilgrimage is indeed a complex, ambiguous and shifting phenomenon, a practice that has always managed to perfectly correspond to the expectations of its epoch, responding at the same time to the economic, political, religious and social needs.”

transformations enhances the factors of post-secular pilgrimage, such as slow mobility, the liminality and the sense of community.”<sup>43</sup>

As analyzed in the previous section, people in contemporary western societies have renewed interests in religion, seeking something sacred through subjective and personalized spiritual experiences. The Camino pilgrimage seems to have potential appeal to the spiritual sensitivities of such people in post-secular societies. What kinds of spiritual experiences does the Camino provide to such spiritual seekers? Pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago has been a devotional practice of the Catholic faith, and this pilgrimage route is still endorsed and managed by the Catholic Church, as the Compostela (an official certificate for completion of pilgrimage) is issued by the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.<sup>44</sup> Hence, the Camino pilgrimage is deeply connected with Catholic religiosity; however, people other than Catholics are also walking this ancient pilgrimage path. As Sara Terreault argues, the Camino de Santiago is an ecumenical and inter-religious path, open to all people regardless of one’s religious faith or affiliation, today.<sup>45</sup>

A couple of recent research studies point out that the uniqueness of the Camino de Santiago is that the Catholic Church provides a religiously endorsed framework for pilgrims and that pilgrims interpret it creatively and tailor it to fit with their own spiritual needs and interests.<sup>46</sup> In his article, “Pilgrimage and Religion: Pilgrim Religiosity on the Ways of St.

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<sup>43</sup> Rossella Moscarelli, Lucrezia Lopez, and Rubén Camilo Lois González, “Who Is Interested in Developing the Way of Saint James? The Pilgrimage from Faith to Tourism,” *Religions* 11, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 24, 1 of 21, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010024>.

<sup>44</sup> Heiser, “Pilgrimage and Religion,” 2 of 12; Mats Nilsson, “Post-Secular Tourism,” 65-66.

<sup>45</sup> Sara Terreault, “The Road Increasingly Taken: Pilgrimage as Contemporary Ecumenical Practice?” *Ecumenism* 192-193 (Winter-Spring 2015): 56-59, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=9c13fb76-6cf9-3859-b7c0-ec36d7b74d49>. In this article, Terreault argues that “popular pilgrimage practice today is commonly ecumenical, inter-faith, inter-convictional in nature.”

<sup>46</sup> Nilsson, “Post-Secular Tourism,” 65-66, 69; Mikaelsson, “Pilgrimage as Post-Secular Therapy,” 263, 266; Heiser. “Pilgrimage and Religion,” 11 of 12.

James,” Patrick Heiser examines how religion plays a role in the context of contemporary pilgrimage on the Camino, arguing that the recent popularity of the Camino can be explained by the interrelation of the personalized spiritual pursuit of pilgrims and the religious assurance provided by the religious institution.<sup>47</sup> In other words, pilgrims can have a personalized spiritual experience within the authentic religious framework provided by the Catholic Church without making a commitment to it. There is plenty of room for pilgrims to articulate their spiritual interests in it. Among pilgrims, it is often said, “Walk your own Camino.” This short phrase exemplifies the spirit of the Camino. Everyone has their own motivation and goal; some people walk for religious reasons, and others walk for sightseeing or trekking. Everyone walks their own journey, following their own spiritual quest, and yet it happens within the authentic religious framework of the church. This kind of flexible yet structured framework of the Camino seems to be appealing to the spiritual sensitivities of people today who are looking for something authentic through subjective and personalized spiritual experiences.

As analyzed above, people on the Camino de Santiago are diverse in terms of nationality, language, gender, age, religion, social status, and others. In this sense, the Camino de Santiago is like a borderland space in which several cultural values exist side by side, often in harmony, but sometimes contesting with one another. In his article, “To Be a Pilgrim: A Contested Identity on Saint James’ Way,” François Cazaux argues that the contesting aspect of the Camino pilgrimage can be seen among pilgrims in terms of their understanding of what the authentic pilgrimage is.<sup>48</sup> Are the pilgrims who walk more authentic than those using other means of transportation? Are the pilgrims who walk a longer distance more authentic than those walking only the last one-

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<sup>47</sup> Heiser, 11 of 12.

<sup>48</sup> Cazaux, “To Be a Pilgrim,” 364.

hundred-kilometer section? Are the pilgrims who do not use backpack transportation service more authentic than those using it? These kinds of questions are often asked in their minds along the way; however, according to Cazaux, pilgrims on the Camino are generally more inclined to enjoy mutual relationships and show respect to one another.<sup>49</sup> He contends that, regardless of one's motivation and/or religious belief, pilgrims gain a new identity, *peregrino* (Spanish term for pilgrim), through shared experiences on the Camino, pointing out that, as they are called *peregrino* by local residents along the way, they gradually recognize each other as a fellow *peregrino* and develop a sense of community through this common identity despite their contesting identities.<sup>50</sup> The Camino de Santiago is a spiritual path that embraces the uniqueness of each person. On the Camino, pilgrims can pursue their own spiritual journey; at the same time, they can enjoy mutual relationships through this new identity as well. This kind of engagement with others provides pilgrims with an authentic communal experience as well as a personalized spiritual experience of pilgrimage, which also would resonate with the sensitivities of people in post-secular societies.

### **Protestant Pastors' Memoirs of the Camino**

There are Protestant pastors who have walked the Camino de Santiago and found it to be meaningful for their Christian faith and spiritual life. This section reviews two of these Protestant pastors' memoirs of the Camino pilgrimage. In *Without Oars*, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson recounts his own experience of walking the Camino, inviting readers to discover this ancient religious practice as a way of life. In this memoir, he reflects on his ministry career through the

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<sup>49</sup> Cazaux, 364.

<sup>50</sup> Cazaux, 363.

lens of the Camino experience and describes how his experience of walking the Camino has changed his understanding of the Christian faith and its practices. Like other spiritual writers on pilgrimage, he illustrates the practice of pilgrimage “as a journey from the known to the unknown” and considers it an inward spiritual journey into the self.<sup>51</sup>

One of the theological assertions Granberg-Michaelson makes in this memoir is that religious faith is an embodied practice, as he briefly writes, “Religious faith is an embodied journey, not a protected cocoon of beliefs.”<sup>52</sup> He also says, “Over the centuries, millions of people have given expression to their faith, and their search for God, not through what they believed, but by where they walked.”<sup>53</sup> Correlated with the embodied dimension of religious faith, he further maintains that interior attentiveness to the presence of God can be cultivated through the embodied practice of walking the Camino. In this memoir, he often alludes that walking the Camino helped him slow down and become more attentive to the present moment, confessing that thousands of steps were needed to clarify his mind. Experiencing “the immediate wonder of the present” on the Camino, he repeatedly invites readers to become more attentive to the presence of God through this practice of slow walking.<sup>54</sup>

In this memoir, Granberg-Michaelson also argues that the embodied practice of walking the Camino helped him gain “a sacramental view of reality.”<sup>55</sup> Recognizing that “people today yearn to taste and touch religious faith not just hear about it,”<sup>56</sup> he illuminates the core of the Christian faith as follows: “At the center of our faith, material reality is imbued with spiritual

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<sup>51</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, *Without Oars*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 12-13.

<sup>54</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 128.

<sup>56</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 125.



significance and power. Bread from the fields, and fruit of the vine, which human hands have made. Water in a baptismal font. Oil anointed on one's head. All this is rooted in the incarnation, where eternal word is united with human flesh."<sup>57</sup>

Throughout his memoir, Granberg-Michaelson shares with readers the spiritual lessons he learned on the Camino. One of the lessons he shares is the practice of shedding, which is the central theme of this book. For him, pilgrimage is a journey about what pilgrims leave behind, and the practice of shedding includes all aspects of one's life. He writes that "pilgrimage requires relinquishment at physical, emotional, theological, cultural, and spiritual levels."<sup>58</sup> It asks us to "leave behind all our preconceived ideas, arguments, agendas, and biases, holding them in suspense."<sup>59</sup> Although the practice of shedding seems to imply losing something, it was liberating for the author. Leaving behind what is no longer important to us, he argues, we can be liberated from what has burdened us and "move forward with a lighter pack, a free spirit."<sup>60</sup>

The practice of shedding extends to his practice of ministry as well. Reflecting back on his own ministry career, he admits that the dogmatic creeds and historical confessions that have been bolstering his ministry are no longer as central to his faith as before. He says:

It's hard to follow Jesus. I used to think following depended on believing right doctrine and truths. But at this point in my journey, doctrine is overrated. It resides in the head, not in the body, not in the soul. Creeds are a curious legacy of a search for a safe harbor of rational religious certitudes. ... Yes, some foundational truths about Christian faith are important. But a lot fewer than I thought.<sup>61</sup>

He continues:

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<sup>57</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 128.

<sup>58</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 14.

<sup>59</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 13.

<sup>60</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 12.

I carry so much accumulated stuff. I don't mean just material things. ... But all my life I've carried weighty theological assertions—creeds and historic confessions I declared were faithful interpretations of the Bible. These I took into my pack when I was ordained.<sup>62</sup>

It is stunning and a little bit shocking that a Protestant pastor who served as General Secretary of the Reformed Church acknowledges a transformation in his understanding of the Christian faith after retiring from his ministry career. His honest account of his spiritual journey, however, is not criticizing Protestant spiritualities; rather, it sounds more inviting and encouraging to other Protestant pastors to open themselves to this embodied practice of the Christian faith and broaden their perspectives on its religious life by experiencing it by themselves.

In this memoir, Granberg-Michaelson explores at several places the implications of the Camino pilgrimage for the practice of ministry, especially for the area of pastoral leadership, encouraging other leaders to use pilgrimage as a metaphor for organizational life and actually embark on it.<sup>63</sup> As analyzed earlier, for him, at the heart of pilgrimage is the practice of shedding, and this practice includes not only material things but also the myth of control and predictability. Through the experience of walking the Camino, he realizes that he cannot control everything as he wishes, learning to become more receptive to the unpredictable, and inviting others to let go of control over their lives and be guided by the unpredictable grace of the Holy Spirit, as the title of this memoir, *Without Oars*, implies. Reflecting back on his ministry career, he writes,

It's naïve and even audacious, I now think, to adopt a ten-year or a five-year goal and think that this is possible. Change comes far too fast and is inherently unpredictable. I have little faith that churches know how to measure outcomes, and less confidence that they have the wisdom to know which outcomes to measure. Now, I would put more energy into helping communities develop the spiritual depth and the practices of

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<sup>62</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 14-15.

<sup>63</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 109.

discernment necessary in order to adapt to the challenges of the future, and far less energy into strategic planning.<sup>64</sup>

In terms of leadership development, Granberg-Michaelson encourages organizational leaders to break the routines of their daily lives for their own growth in leadership. Involved in daily business, leaders often lose sight of what is going on in the organizations they lead, and they stay unchanged in their practices of leadership. As a result, the vitality of the organizations is weakened. As pilgrims leave their home and break the normal patterns of their daily lives, he suggests, organizational leaders should intentionally create disruptions in their daily routines, since breaking the normal routines would create “space for novelty to emerge, even in the face of uncertainties about eventual outcomes.”<sup>65</sup> Breaking the normal patterns of life requires strength to let go, move out of our comfort zones, and step into the unknown. Thus, we often hesitate to break the routines, but only then, something new can arise in this ambiguous space. Granberg-Michaelson argues that the effectiveness of pastoral leaders comes “from their ability to be adaptive to the unexpected, learn from loss, let go of past assumptions, and persistently press ahead.”<sup>66</sup> Like walking the Camino, he writes, leadership “requires ‘going off the map,’ where adaptation is everything.”<sup>67</sup> In sum, Granberg-Michaelson encourages other pastoral leaders to become more adaptive to a new environment, inviting them to leave the normal patterns of their daily lives, which includes the past assumptions and success and the myth of predictability and control. For him, this is what pilgrimage is all about.

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<sup>64</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 111.

<sup>65</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 28.

<sup>66</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 109.

<sup>67</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, 110.

Another memoir of the Camino de Santiago written from a Protestant perspective with which I engage in a conversation is *The Way Is Made by Walking*, written by Arthur Paul Boers. In this memoir, Boers describes his experience of walking the Camino and how it has changed his views on life and ministry. For him, the Camino pilgrimage was first and foremost an experience that taught him what it meant to follow Jesus.<sup>68</sup> It was a challenging endeavor for him, but it was one of his “most satisfying life achievements ever.”<sup>69</sup> On the Camino, he learned various lessons on life and gained fresh insights into the Christian faith and its practices. He summarizes what he learned on the Camino as follows: “Like many Christian pilgrims before me, I experienced major themes of our faith on the way: providence, penitence, evangelism and faithfulness. I learned to trust God’s provision, even in adversity. I grew in self-awareness, reviewed my life, recognized major blocks in my Christian walk and recommitted myself to spiritual growth.”<sup>70</sup> This statement implies that walking the Camino was a life-changing experience that reoriented him toward God. He became more aware of God’s providence through the hospitality he was offered as well as through collaboration with others along the way. In this memoir, he frequently mentions that he was more prayerful on the Camino and learned to trust God who provided him with what he needed. For him, the Camino pilgrimage was also a journey of self-discovery, which made him confront his true self, as he writes, “This pilgrimage gave me ample time to ponder mistakes and shortcomings in my past. Even more powerfully, the journey faced me with difficult truths about myself, realities that emerged from the intense crucible of an arduous long-distance walk.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Boers, *Way Is Made by Walking*, 30-33.

<sup>69</sup> Boers, 21.

<sup>70</sup> Boers, 24.

<sup>71</sup> Boers, 75.

Throughout this memoir, Boers often talks about the embodied aspects of the Christian faith. Quoting Rebecca Solnit, he writes, “Pilgrimage ‘unites belief with action, thinking and doing’ and requires that ‘the body and its actions express the desires and beliefs of the soul.’”<sup>72</sup> For him, pilgrimage is an embodied practice of the Christian faith that integrates his “body and soul, feet and faith.”<sup>73</sup>

In this memoir, Boers also argues that pilgrimage on the Camino is a liminal experience, describing his own experiences of “liminality” and “communitas” as follows:

Pilgrimages have always been spheres for folks to mix across dividing lines of culture, age, nation, class, politics, language and ethnicity. Pilgrims—like other groups on the edge of society, even those who are voluntarily marginal—cross boundaries that normally separate. Pilgrimages resist hierarchy and structure; folks temporarily suspend regular roles. Simplified dress codes, strenuous challenges and pared-down life-styles, in the context of a supportive community, all contribute to what anthropologists call “liminality.” This describes a betwixt-and-between state that can help convert people from one way of life to another.<sup>74</sup>

According to his observation, the Camino de Santiago is a contesting space where many differences exist among pilgrims, and yet they are not competitive but rather collaborative because they tackle a tough endeavor and have a common goal. He describes the collaborative spirit of the Camino as follows:

Yet among the Camino pilgrims, I seldom saw a serious disagreement. There were occasional annoyances and irritations, to be sure, but my overall experience was positive. ... As we learned to cope with the bigger challenges of this long-distance walking, small aggravations we might feel with one another seemed puny and petty.<sup>75</sup>

In this memoir, Boers explores the implications of the Camino pilgrimage for the practice of ministry. One of the areas of ministry that he suggests could be improved is evangelism. On

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<sup>72</sup> Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A Story of Walking* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 50, quoted in Arthur Boers, *Way Is Made by Walking*, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Boers, 23.

<sup>74</sup> Boers, 111.

<sup>75</sup> Boers, 139.

the Camino, he was astonished that people with no explicit religious faith were walking this ancient Christian pilgrimage path, discovering that they were seriously searching for something beyond themselves. He calls them “secular seekers” and describes how these spiritual seekers are feeling toward the institutional religions as follows:

Folks felt strongly about considering themselves pilgrims, *authentic* ones at that. They were comfortable on this route of Christian significance. ... Many visited each church building that was open, attended Mass whenever it was available and appreciated the pilgrims’ blessings that were occasionally offered by local priests as we passed through their towns. Yet they also complained of the institutional church: its wealth and power, dogma and hypocrisy.<sup>76</sup>

He continues:

People often told me they were “spiritual but not religious.” They believed in God, matters of the spirit or at least “something more,” but wanted to do so in a way that was divorced from the burdens and constraints of religious dogma and institutions and all their tawdry history.<sup>77</sup>

According to Boers, these secular seekers were pondering the most fundamental question of humanity, “What is the purpose of life?”<sup>78</sup> They were seeking answers to this question through walking the Camino. He invites other pastors to think about how the church could reach out to these spiritual seekers. He asks, “Are there clues here to how the church might respond to this pilgrim hunger?”<sup>79</sup> He also questions, “Do we offer worship services and other opportunities for prayer that might be hospitable for folks who do not regularly attend church?”<sup>80</sup> “If the church took pilgrimage lessons more seriously,” he writes, “we might yet connect with people of good faith who still want and long to meet God.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Boers, 125.

<sup>77</sup> Boers, 127-28.

<sup>78</sup> Boers, 126.

<sup>79</sup> Boers, 128.

<sup>80</sup> Boers, 130.

<sup>81</sup> Boers, 131.

Although Boers does not explicitly describe how his Camino experience has revitalized his practice of ministry in a congregational setting due to his position as a seminary professor, his suggestion for the practice of ministry is informative and illuminating for pastors who engage in ministry in a post-secular cultural environment. For instance, he writes, “If the church focused less on institutional power, protection and self-interest, and more on prayer, mysticism and the spiritual life, we might still have an opportunity to be heard.”<sup>82</sup> In order to reach out to secular seekers, he invites other pastors to rediscover the practice of meditative walking as a spiritual practice for the Christian church. One exercise he proposes is walking to church on Sunday on foot, reminding us that people used to go to church on foot, not by car. He argues that walking is a “countercultural” activity and that this simple act can teach many things to us.<sup>83</sup> He further contends that walking slows down our minds and helps us find clarity. He also mentions the healing effects of walking for depression, anxiety, and burnout.<sup>84</sup> He says of the practice of walking as follows: “Walking is an essential human faculty. It is deeply connected to who and how we are, and to who and how God made us.”<sup>85</sup> For him, meditative walking is a spiritual practice that helps us walk with God. It is “a metaphor for faithful living.”<sup>86</sup>

The common theme of these two memoirs of the Camino written by Protestant pastors is that faith is practiced by walking. Both of these authors invite their readers to walk more slowly and meditatively. Boers quotes a well-known verse of Antonio Machado, an early twentieth century Spanish poet, who said, “*se hace camino al andar* (The way is made by walking),”

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<sup>82</sup> Boers, 127.

<sup>83</sup> Boers, 164.

<sup>84</sup> Boers, 148.

<sup>85</sup> Boers, 147.

<sup>86</sup> Boers, 148.

which is adopted for the title of his memoir.<sup>87</sup> Granberg-Michaelson also writes the same verse, “The Way is made by walking,” as he contends that the Christian faith is not simply to espouse a set of right doctrines.<sup>88</sup> For both of these Protestant authors, walking the Camino is an embodied spiritual practice that has deepened their relationship with God.

### **The Practice of Going Back Home**

It is commonly perceived that the goal of walking the Camino is not to reach the final destination, the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. In fact, Santiago was the halfway point for medieval pilgrims who returned home by walking. The return journey was part of their pilgrimage experiences. In contemporary pilgrimage on the Camino, its focus has been shifted from the arrival at Santiago to the journey itself. Pilgrims on the Camino find more significance in the process of walking itself.<sup>89</sup> As pilgrims walk the Camino, they come across a myriad of occurrences, such as meeting with new people, enjoying “communitas” at the *albergue*, receiving hospitality from others, having physical suffering, and others. These actual experiences on the Camino and their memories are much more important than arrival at Santiago de Compostela. For many pilgrims, the Camino pilgrimage does not end at Santiago but continues on even after arriving there.

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<sup>87</sup> Boers, 25; Antonio Machado, “Proverbios y cantares XXIX,” *Campos de Castilla* in *El Despertar de La Poesía* (Ciudad de México, Mexico: FCE - Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2020), 77, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/moravianlibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=6774683>.

<sup>88</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, *Without Oars*, 78.

<sup>89</sup> Mikaelsson, “Pilgrimage as Post-Secular Therapy,” 260; Cazaux, “To Be a Pilgrim,” 358. Cazaux writes, “Until the 1990s, most anthropologists focused their attention on holy shrines, forgetting the journey that leads to it. Yet, when one pays attention to Saint James pilgrims’ motivations, it is clear that it is not so much Santiago but the Way itself that represents the goal of this journey: ‘What’s important is not Compostelle, it’s the Way and what happen on it.’”



Returning home is an important topic for the practice of pilgrimage. Many scholars on pilgrimage studies talk about what would happen to pilgrims when they return home. In her book on pilgrimage, Christine Valters Paintner discusses “the practice of coming home” as an important aspect of the practice of pilgrimage, arguing that the purpose of pilgrimage “is always to return home carrying the new insight back to everyday life.”<sup>90</sup> She also writes, “The pilgrim returns home not with all the answers. Instead, they receive better questions; questions that bring the pilgrimage experience into daily life and reveal depth in all they see around them.”<sup>91</sup> Coming back home is the third stage of a pilgrimage journey according to the three successive stages of the practice of pilgrimage presented by Victor Turner.<sup>92</sup> It is the stage of reintegration in which pilgrims return to their former society and are reincorporated into it. When they return home, questions naturally arise in them. “How am I reincorporated into the former community?” “How can I incorporate my pilgrimage experience into my daily life?”

In *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago*, Nancy Louise Frey, a scholar of pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago, adopting the ethnographic approach for her qualitative research, extensively discusses what it means for pilgrims to return home. In her fieldwork, she observed a mixed feeling of pilgrims as they arrived at Santiago as well as when they returned home. “When pilgrims arrive in Santiago,” she writes, “they frequently describe both a sense of elation at having reached the goal and completed a physically and mentally challenging journey and despondency at seeing the experience come to an end.”<sup>93</sup> She also notes, “While Santiago is

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<sup>90</sup> Paintner, *Soul of a Pilgrim*, 3.

<sup>91</sup> Paintner, 126.

<sup>92</sup> Turner, *Ritual Process*, 94-95.

<sup>93</sup> Frey, *Pilgrim Stories*, 155.

an obvious geographic goal, it is not necessarily the end of the interior journey.”<sup>94</sup> According to her analysis, “Several of the salient issues at play in the end of the pilgrimage are reassessment of the journey’s meaning, search for closure, dialogue with the past, contemplation of the future, symbolic death of the self, and preparation for the return home.”<sup>95</sup> Arriving at Santiago, many pilgrims go through a transition, often struggling to reorient themselves to an ordinary life, and have a sense of disorientation, fear, and sadness. “One of the factors contributing to the sense of change,” Frey writes, “is that during the transition in Santiago pilgrims generally drop their role as pilgrims and become tourists. By taking off the backpack and putting down the staff, walking into the streets of Santiago one is no longer a pilgrim as on the road.”<sup>96</sup> After arriving at Santiago, some pilgrims choose to continue their journeys to Finisterre, a coastal town on the Atlantic Ocean, geographically the western end point of the Iberian Peninsula, known as the end of the world for people in Europe since the Middle Ages.<sup>97</sup> Finisterre is full of myths and pagan rituals.<sup>98</sup> As for the symbolic meaning of Finisterre, Frey writes, “The combination of wind, endless water, a limitless horizon, sea spray, pounding waves, and another vital element, the setting sun, all lead many pilgrims to see Finisterre as a point of symbolic death and rebirth or destruction and resurrection.”<sup>99</sup> She further writes, “Pilgrims claim that one must experience and

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<sup>94</sup> Frey, 138.

<sup>95</sup> Frey, 154-55.

<sup>96</sup> Frey, 165.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Blom, Mats Nilsson, and Xosé Santos, “The Way to Santiago beyond Santiago. Fisterra and the Pilgrimage’s Post-Secular Meaning,” *European Journal of Tourism Research* 12 (March 2016): 144. In this research, Blom, Nilsson, and Santos, adopting the phenomenological approach, study the recent popularity of Finisterre as the final destination of the Camino pilgrimage by examining the motives of pilgrims to continue to walk to Finisterre, concluding that “contemporary Fisterra as the end of the journey should be understood both as an effect of the post-secular trend of individual religiosity and as a response to the negative trend (in this context) of increasingly commercialised mass tourism invading the historical goal of Santiago de Compostela.”

<sup>98</sup> John Brierley, *A Pilgrim’s Guide to the Camino Inglés & Camino Finisterre, Including Muxía Circuit: A Practical & Mystical Manual for the Modern-Day Pilgrim* (Forres, Scotland: Camino Guides, 2019), 60-61.

<sup>99</sup> Frey, *Pilgrim Stories*, 174.

feel the end through geography by coming to this extreme point before one can be reborn in one's everyday life (spiritually or personally).”<sup>100</sup> Feeling both sadness of ending their journey and excitement of accomplishing it, some pilgrims stay longer on the pilgrimage road to make themselves ready for returning home.

After going back home, Frey argues, this struggle still continues among pilgrims. They often become nervous at home, not knowing how they incorporate their pilgrimage experiences into their daily lives.<sup>101</sup> After returning home, pilgrims often feel isolated because it is difficult for them to transmit their pilgrimage experiences to others on a deeper level due to the lack of vocabulary to express what they have experienced on the Camino.<sup>102</sup> “How can I keep the Camino experience alive?” Many pilgrims ask this kind of question to themselves after going back home, feeling the difficulty of keeping the Camino experience alive in their daily lives. As for the difficulty of translating the Camino experience into daily life, Frey further writes:

Many return home inspired with a new sense of having (re)discovered God through the road but do not find in their own religious or personal communities an adequate way to assimilate what has transpired during the journey. Often the messages of the journey remain, but it is difficult to apply them to daily life.<sup>103</sup>

She maintains that the Camino experience leaves “an indelible mark, yet it is hard to discern the nature of this mark.”<sup>104</sup> She points out that personal transformation is a long-term process, which could take months and years after the Camino is completed, although it could appear drastically

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<sup>100</sup> Frey, 174.

<sup>101</sup> Frey, 182.

<sup>102</sup> Frey, 186-87.

<sup>103</sup> Frey, 188.

<sup>104</sup> Frey, 178.

in some cases, for instance, pilgrims change their occupation or end their personal relationships after returning home.<sup>105</sup>

As analyzed above, Frey argues that pilgrims often feel disoriented after returning home. Since they have gained new insights on life and self, they often find themselves not neatly fitting into the prevalent ways of thinking, being, and behaving in the former society. After returning home, Frey points out, pilgrims often experience a “reverse culture shock.”<sup>106</sup> People living overseas for a long time often experience a reverse culture shock when they return to their home country, finding themselves unwelcomed within the former cultural environment, and feeling isolated both in home and host countries.<sup>107</sup> Since the practice of pilgrimage is a counter-cultural activity, it is subversive and anti-structural in nature, and thus, returning pilgrims could provoke fear among people at home.<sup>108</sup> They often have difficulty sharing their Camino experiences with others. “But it is clear,” Frey writes, “that the return home is an essential part of pilgrimage: one needs the Camino to put daily life in perspective, and one needs to be back in the daily routine to appreciate the Camino.”<sup>109</sup>

How do Protestant pastors keep their Camino experiences alive after they return home? If it is difficult for returning pilgrims to share their Camino experiences with others on a deeper level as Frey argues, it would be very likely that Protestant pastors also have difficulty sharing their Camino experiences with others on a profound level. What does their return home look

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<sup>105</sup> Frey, 188-98.

<sup>106</sup> Frey, 182.

<sup>107</sup> Park, *Border-Crossing Spirituality*, 65. Park describes her own experience of double culture shock as follows: “Very often, immigrants feel they fit neither in their own culture any more, nor in the new culture of the hosting country.”

<sup>108</sup> Frey, *Pilgrim Stories*, 183.

<sup>109</sup> Frey, 185.

like? How do they keep their memories of the Camino alive? How do they share their Camino experiences with others in their congregations? How do their Camino experiences impact their families and congregations? Many of the memoirs of the Camino talk about their personal transformation attained through the Camino pilgrimage, but they are reticent about the transformation of their communities after they rejoin them. I assume that Protestant pastors' experiences of the Camino pilgrimage have induced their personal spiritual transformation as well as changes in their practices of ministry, but how do they share their Camino experiences with others in their home environments? How does their spiritual transformation affect the spiritual life of the congregation they lead? An inquiry into these questions is needed because, thus far, I have found no clear answers to these questions in the existing literature.

### **Connection between Pastors' Spiritualities and Ministries**

This section of my literature review explores the topic of connection between pastors' spiritualities and ministries. In *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, Ruth Haley Barton explores "the relationship between a person's private encounters with God in solitude and the call to leadership in the public arena."<sup>110</sup> Throughout this book, Barton argues that pastors' practices of leadership are closely related with their personal relationship with God and that pastoral leaders need to deepen their personal relationship with God before they lead a congregation. According to Barton, cultivating an intimate relationship with God in solitude is the most important thing for ministry, as she writes, "The discipline of solitude is a key discipline for all those who seek after God. It is the primary place where the leader's soul is

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<sup>110</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 14.

strengthened.”<sup>111</sup> She argues that pastoral leaders should lead their congregation from their souls because the soul is the center of who they are, the place where they meet with God.<sup>112</sup>

In her discussion about the practice of pastoral leadership, Barton chooses Moses as a model figure for pastoral leadership. After reactively killing an Egyptian who hit an Israelite, Moses fled into the desert of Median and spent forty years there, during which he deepened his relationship with God. In silence and solitude, Moses had an opportunity of self-examination. He reflected back on his life and looked deeply into himself, and he gradually came to know who he truly was in the eyes of God. As he kept listening to God speaking to him in silence, he was able to accept himself as he was. Through this encounter with God in silence, Moses experienced the transformation of the self and was gradually formed into a leader. As mentioned earlier, Barton maintains that staying still in the presence of God in solitude is a key spiritual discipline for the practice of pastoral leadership. In the wilderness, Moses remained in solitude for a long time, during which his awareness of the presence of God was sharpened, and he finally recognized God in the burning bush. According to Barton, this is the most important capacity for pastoral leadership, as she says, “If spiritual leadership is anything, it is the capacity to see the bush burning in the middle of our life and having enough sense to turn aside, take off our shoes and pay attention!”<sup>113</sup> Barton maintains that learning to be attentive to the presence of God is a key spiritual practice for pastoral leaders. It is a discipline of seeing divine grace in ordinary objects and experiences.

After spending forty years in solitude, Moses became ready to lead the people of Israel out of slavery into freedom, since he himself experienced liberation from bondage to the self.

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<sup>111</sup> Barton, *Strengthening the Soul*, 31.

<sup>112</sup> Barton, 13, 25.

<sup>113</sup> Barton. 64.

Barton writes, “By the time God calls Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he had already taken his own journey in the wilderness. He had traversed the wilderness territory of his own soul for forty years, and he knew how to find God there. He had learned how to listen and then follow God’s word to him.”<sup>114</sup> Barton invites pastoral leaders to listen to God speaking to them in silence and spend time to be with God in solitude. She also argues that God calls pastoral leaders to do their ministry from who they are, emphasizing that to know who they are by sitting still in the presence of God is the most important discipline for the practice of ministry. In order to lead a congregation, she contends, pastoral leaders must know themselves. They must sit quietly in the presence of God and cultivate their relationship with God. Her discussion of pastoral leadership indicates that pastors’ spirituality shapes their practices of ministry and that their deep relationship with God enhances their practices of leadership.

Another research study that examines the connection between pastors’ spiritualities and ministries is “Connectional Spirituality: Small Church Pastors and the Future of the Church,” a Major Project for the Doctor of Ministry program at Lancaster Theological Seminary, written by Kathy Harvey Nelson. Through this research, Nelson discovered that “the more engaged a pastor was with spiritual practices, the more likely they were to lead in ways that lifted up those in the community surrounding the church as the ones God calls them to serve.”<sup>115</sup> She maintains that a deep relationship with God is the most powerful resource for the practice of ministry for pastors. In this research, she further argues that one of the most important ministry practices for pastors is to spend time in the presence of God, engage in spiritual practices intentionally and regularly,

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<sup>114</sup> Barton, 87.

<sup>115</sup> Kathy Harvey Nelson, abstract for “Connectional Spirituality: Small Church Pastors and the Future of the Church” (DMin Major Project, Lancaster Theological Seminary, 2019), iii, <https://archive.lancasterseminary.edu/items/show/385>.

and cultivate their relationship with God.<sup>116</sup> The spiritual practices in which the pastors she interviewed regularly engage include various forms of meditative prayer, for instance, *Lectio Divina*, meditative walking, and others.<sup>117</sup> They intentionally spend time to be with God, and their commitment to engage in spiritual practice regularly shapes their ministries.<sup>118</sup> Through this research, Nelson finds that pastors who are deeply engaged in meditative spiritual practices and commit themselves to intentional spiritual growth are more effective leaders.<sup>119</sup> Like Barton's argument, the core of Nelson's argument is that pastors' spirituality affects their practices of ministry. She consistently asserts that the more their relationship with God is deepened through engagement in meditative spiritual practices, the more their practices of ministry become passionate and caring in serving others.<sup>120</sup> Both these two studies are useful resources for pastors to improve their practices of ministry. They clearly indicate that pastors' spirituality shapes their practices of ministry and affects the spiritual life of the congregation they are called to lead.

### **What is the Gap in the Existing Literature?**

As discussed earlier, pilgrimage is a spiritual practice that helps us become more attentive to the present moment and sharpens our awareness of the presence of God in our midst. Walking the Camino is an experience of staying still in the presence of God, and thus, it would be a useful spiritual practice for Protestant pastors to deepen their spiritual connection to God. Then, how does the Camino experience impact their practices of ministry? A theory is not yet well-

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<sup>116</sup> Nelson, "Connectional Spirituality," 5-6.

<sup>117</sup> Nelson, 79.

<sup>118</sup> Nelson, 80.

<sup>119</sup> Nelson, 22.

<sup>120</sup> Nelson, 47.



established regarding how the experience of walking the Camino impacts the practice of ministry for Protestant pastors and how the Camino pilgrimage revitalizes the practice of ministry in Protestant churches. By clarifying this process, more effective strategies of ministry could be suggested for Protestant pastors. How do Protestant pastors integrate their Camino experiences into their practices of ministry? How do their experiences of walking the Camino bring about the spiritual transformation of the congregation they lead? Thus far, I have found no qualitative research on the connection between the practice of pilgrimage on the Camino and the practice of congregational ministry in Protestant churches. I am hoping that this research will make a contribution to filling this gap.

### **Chapter 3: Research**

This research employed both surveys and interviews for its examination. The surveys were distributed in September 2023, followed by the interviews conducted between September and November 2023. Seventeen Protestant clergy persons participated in the survey; all of them agreed to participate in the interview (including one clergy person who gave the researcher permission to interview his spouse). Out of the seventeen survey respondents, fourteen clergy persons and one clergy person's spouse participated in the in-depth, one-on-one interview. One clergy person joined the interview with her spouse, who was also a clergy person. Hence, the sample of the interview consists of fifteen clergy persons and one clergy person's spouse. The interviewees include four Presbyterian (PCUSA) ministers, four Methodist (UMC) pastors, two Congregational (UCC) ministers, one Lutheran (ELCA) pastor, one Episcopal priest, one pastor in the United Church of Canada, one non-denominational pastor, one Unitarian Universalist minister, and one Episcopal priest's spouse. Among these sixteen interviewees, eight are female, and eight are male; fourteen are over sixty years old, and two are between fifty-one and sixty. The most popular pilgrimage route among the interviewees is the Camino Francés. Many of them walked the Camino Francés from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Santiago de Compostela, and some of them walked a portion of it. Several participants walked the Camino Portugués. One clergy person walked from Le Puy-en-Velay, France, and one from Paris. There are several pastors who have walked the Camino multiple times. Among these sixteen interviewees, some walked alone, and others walked with their family members or friends. Some pastors organized and led a group of people from their congregations, a group of local community members, or a tourist group.

From the survey responses and the interview transcripts, ninety-five open codes were identified. During the initial stage of data analysis, several common phenomena these pastors had experienced while walking the Camino emerged, and several spiritual lessons they had learned on the Camino were found. In addition to that, the collected data demonstrated that these pastors employed similar congregational strategies to share their Camino experiences with others in their ministry contexts after returning from the Camino. In the axial coding process, the ninety-five open codes were grouped into six sub-categories: the central phenomenon, causal conditions, contexts, intervening conditions, personal consequences, and resulting congregational strategies. Through the selective coding process, the following theory has evolved regarding how the Camino experience impacts the practice of ministry for Protestant pastors. The Camino pilgrimage provided the Protestant pastors interviewed with an opportunity to deepen their spiritual lives in embodied and contemplative ways. While in most cases there are not substantial changes in what they do in their practices of ministry afterward, they are revitalized to minister with new intentionality. In other words, the Camino experience primarily affects the personal spiritual lives of the Protestant pastors interviewed, and their inner spiritual transformation is naturally integrated into their practices of ministry. In the following sections, I will outline how this theory has developed by describing the findings of this research according to the six sub-categories proposed above.

### **The Central Phenomenon**

For most of the pastors, walking the Camino was one of the most memorable experiences of their lives. For instance, a Methodist pastor said of her Camino experience as follows: “It was a beautiful, marvelous, life-changing experience.” An Episcopal priest also said, “It is ... really

one of the high points of my life.” Likewise, a UCC pastor reported, “It was ... definitely one of the best experiences of my life. Even seven years later, I continue to draw from the experience. It’s a touch point that grounds me.” As these comments suggest, the experience of walking the Camino has left a huge positive impact on their lives. What kind of impact did the Camino experience have on these Protestant pastors? As I proceeded with the survey and the interview, most of the pastors reported that it had made a huge impact on their spiritual lives. Many of them talked about how it had made an impact on their inner spiritual lives more than on their practices of ministry. For instance, a Methodist pastor reported, “The Camino made a difference in me. It had a deep impact on my self-awareness.” Likewise, a Unitarian Universalist minister said, “The Camino experience had a huge impact on my personal spiritual life.” A non-denominational pastor also remarked, “I’d say the impact of the Camino is more on my heart and my mind, then, in my actions.” As these comments suggest, the Camino experience has impacted their spiritual lives; it has made a difference in their inner selves.

### **Connection to God is Deepened**

The collected data indicates that the biggest impact of walking the Camino is that their spiritual connection to God was deepened. In the interviews, many pastors reported that they had been feeling a strong need for spiritual renewal before going on the Camino and seeking a break from ministry to rejuvenate themselves. A pastor in the United Church of Canada said, “I find ministry to be demanding. It is demanding of your time, your energy, and your emotional well-being, and your spiritual well-being can often suffer because the demands don’t allow you the time or the space to actually work on your own spiritual well-being.” Likewise, a Unitarian Universalist minister reported, “Ministry is a wonderful work, but it can sometimes be very overwhelming, frustrating, and tiring and drain your spirit.” This minister added that he wanted

to make his sabbatical leave something that could truly “recharge his spiritual batteries.” He said, “When I was doing this sabbatical from my ministry there, I didn’t want it to be a study sabbatical. I wanted it to be something that would give me a break from the work of the church.” Other pastors also reported that they had been feeling a strong need for a break from ministry before going on the Camino. A Lutheran pastor said, “I really needed a kind of a recharge time.” A Methodist pastor expressed a sense of urgency she was feeling as follows: “I was exhausted, spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally.” She made an additional comment on the condition of her spiritual well-being before the Camino as follows: “My relationship with God was slipping away, and I needed to reconnect to God.” As these comments imply, they were feeling spiritually drained as they spent most of their time and energy taking care of others and nurturing their spirits. As a result, they felt a strong need for a break to take care of their own spiritual well-being and nurture their own souls. The Camino experience was indeed a refreshing experience for the pastors interviewed. A Presbyterian minister articulated how he felt refreshed as he walked the Camino as follows: “It was renewing like you come back renewed and refreshed.” Other pastors also made similar comments: “God entered into each step on the Camino,” and “The Camino releases my spirit.” As these comments suggest, their inner spiritual lives were rejuvenated, and they felt more deeply connected to God as a result of walking the Camino.

### **Connection to the Self is Deepened**

Along with the spiritual connection to God, most of the pastors interviewed reported that they were reconnected to themselves as a result of walking the Camino. A Methodist pastor said, “I could get in touch with myself all over again.” She also reported, “I was on my own. I could make my own decisions. I forgot how I could make my own friends by myself. ... I needed to

pray, and I needed to have fun. And there was so much joy. I felt like ... I was myself again.”

Likewise, a pastor in the United Church of Canada reported, “The Camino has made me feel comfortable with myself. ... I am happier with myself.” As these comments suggest, the Camino experience has made a huge impact on their self-awareness of who they are. After returning from the Camino, they regain self-confidence and feel that they are in touch with themselves again. They also find joy in their personal lives as well as in their practices of ministry.

### **Discovered the Value of Pilgrimage for Deepening Spirituality**

Another common phenomenon the Protestant pastors interviewed experienced while they were walking the Camino was that they discovered the value of pilgrimage for spiritual deepening. “What does it mean to make a pilgrimage?” “What is the spiritual significance of the practice of pilgrimage?” Many pastors have special interests in pilgrimage and have been engaged in these kinds of theological questions for many years. On the Camino, these questions were explored, and they gained fresh insights into what it meant to make a pilgrimage. In other words, their theological understandings of pilgrimage were incarnated through an embodied experience of walking the Camino. During the interviews, some pastors extensively talked about the spiritual significance of pilgrimage. The following comments are examples of what they said about it: “Pilgrimage is a journey into the heart and from the heart out to what is larger than us,” “It was an inner journey of reflection and introspection. It was an embodied experience of mind and heart, eyes, ears, legs, and feet,” “It is about an attitude about how you approach life,” “I have always seen pilgrimage as a way for some people to deepen their walk with Jesus and deepen their connection to God,” “Spirituality is about deepening themselves and strengthening their connection to God,” “The religious life is really about ordinary, day-to-day, incremental, prayer by prayer, reading by reading, daily struggle of growth,” “Spiritual life is about seeking

meaning and purpose,” and “The real Camino is not the Camino that you walk in Spain for five weeks. The Camino that you walk each and every day throughout your life. That’s the true Camino.” As these comments suggest, many of the pastors interviewed understand that pilgrimage is a spiritual journey into the heart and consider the Christian faith to be an embodied spiritual experience that involves one’s mind, body, and soul.

## **Summary**

In summary, the biggest impact of making a pilgrimage on the Camino for the Protestant pastors interviewed can be seen in the personal transformation of their inner spiritual lives. The Camino provided space for these pastors to open themselves to God and to themselves, which helped them explore the meaning of life and reflect on their faith journey. As they walked the Camino, their spiritual connection to God and to themselves was deepened, and their spiritual lives were rejuvenated.

## **Causal Conditions**

This section explores the open codes that pertain to the causal conditions of the central phenomenon. What are the causes that brought about the inner spiritual transformation in the lives of the Protestant pastors interviewed? Why do they feel that their spiritual connection to God and to themselves has deepened? These pastors came across a myriad of happenings and met various people along the way. The collected data suggests that these occurrences and encounters have left a huge impact on these pastors. Experiencing various happenings and encounters, their trust in God was deepened, and their connection to themselves was strengthened. Furthermore, their faith in humanity was reaffirmed as they were touched by the

beauty of human hearts. They also learned a myriad of life lessons and gained spiritual insights into what it meant to live with the Christian faith.

### **Encounter with Others**

Through the interview process, I discovered that there were several similar experiences the pastors interviewed had as they walked the Camino. One of the most common experiences is an encounter with others. According to the statistics from Pilgrim's Reception Office in Santiago de Compostela, more than four hundred thousand people completed the Camino pilgrimage in 2023, and they came from many parts of the world. Many of the pastors interviewed reported that they had met people from all over the world and enjoyed conversation with them along the way. For instance, a Presbyterian minister reported, "Meeting people from all over the world, some faith-based, some not, was just a good, wonderful life-giving experience." As they met new people from various parts of the world, they were exposed to new cultures and learned new things from them, which broadened their perspectives. Likewise, a pastor in the United Church of Canada remarked, "Every day you meet somebody different who has a different point of view. ... It was like ... being part of a community that was ever changing and yet all the same because we were all on this same path." Another Presbyterian minister reported, "Everyone is on their own journey." As he met new people coming from many parts of the world and had conversations with them, he realized that there were many reasons to walk the Camino. A Methodist pastor also left a similar comment about the variety of reasons to walk the Camino: "Some wanted to hike, and others were doing it for a spiritual reason. Some were doing it because their friends were doing it. Just so many different reasons."

In the interview, another Methodist pastor shared a story of her experience of overcoming language differences along the way. It happened when she was sitting at a dinner table with other



pilgrims from various parts of the world: three pilgrims from Italy, one from France, some from the Netherlands, and one from the United States. They spoke their own languages, and so at least four languages were going back and forth around the table, and yet they somehow communicated with one another. At this dinner table, this pastor witnessed a beautiful moment of overcoming language differences and recognized that they were fellow human beings. They had a sense of peace with one another.

Other pastors also reported similar experiences on the Camino. As they met new people coming from all over the world, they learned that everyone did the Camino differently and saw things differently. The open and welcoming atmosphere of the Camino would have encouraged them to open their minds and hearts to new ideas and helped them open themselves to new people and embrace them as they are.

### **Limits of Physical Endurance**

Another common experience among the pastors interviewed is physical pain. Some pastors reported that they had reached the limits of their physical endurance while walking the Camino. A pastor in the United Church of Canada said, “The Camino is physically challenging. ... Some days putting one foot in front of the other took everything I had within me.” Several other pastors reported that they had suffered injuries along the way. A Lutheran pastor got blisters on his feet and suffered leg cramps and sore feet throughout the journey. A non-denominational pastor got injured while he was walking from Santiago to Finisterre and was not able to walk anymore. He had to get medical attention and was ordered to take three days of rest. He reported that he was deeply disappointed that he could not walk the whole way and had to change his travel plan. He said, “My body was not able to ... do everything I wanted it to do.”

Instead of walking, he took a bus to the next town. Things were not unfolding as he planned, but he saw God at work through his injury. He remarked:

There is a verse in the Bible people talk about. When I am weak, I am made strong. I think the Camino makes this more real than any other experience I have had in my life. Because I reached the end of my physical endurance, I could not walk anymore. I was in pain. I was in need of help. I had to change my plans and seek alternate transportation. And in that experience, God's presence and his provision and his kindness to me was made known.

A Presbyterian minister who had walked the Camino several times before reported that when he ran into the moments of getting dehydrated and having knee pain for the first time, he realized that he was not invincible. This was a valuable lesson for him. These experiences of reaching the limits of their physical endurance made these pastors feel not only vulnerable but also humbled as they recognized the finitude of human existence. Similarly, the experience of physical pain helped them resonate with other people who had a similar experience of pain and suffering. The Lutheran pastor who suffered blisters and leg cramps said, "Putting one foot in front of the other in the midst of suffering with pain was a spiritual discipline for me. I understood the meaning of 'No pain, no glory' through this experience, and it helped me resonate with others."

### **Extraordinary Spiritual Experience**

Several pastors reported that they had extraordinary spiritual experiences along the way. An Episcopal priest met a group of about twenty-five pilgrims carrying a large crucifix with a picture of a woman. As he walked into the city of León, they passed by him from behind. After continuing to walk for about ten minutes, he came upon them at a rest stop and asked them where they came from. One of the pilgrims in this group told him that they were from Lithuania, walking across Poland, Germany, and France, accompanied by a bus that carried all their stuff. They were walking the Camino to honor a woman who had been beatified by the Roman Catholic Church, hoping that she would be canonized. He was impressed by what they were

doing, and then, he was asked who he was. He told them that he was an Episcopal priest. And before he knew it, half of the group was lined up in front of him, asking for his blessing. In the middle of the Camino, he was laying hands on people's heads and praying for them. In this brief encounter, he felt that he had made spiritual friends from across the world. For him, that was one of the high points of his Camino experience.

A Methodist pastor shared with me a story of her revelatory experience which happened when she was walking down a hill from a mountain. At the bottom of the hill, she met a woman with a basket of refreshments and seashells. Each seashell had a note written inside. This pastor picked up a seashell that contained the following message: "You will get through this and many other things." This pastor was struck by the message, since she had been going through a series of cancer treatments before embarking on this pilgrimage. The message on the seashell also reminded her of Psalm 23 in which it is written, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me."<sup>1</sup> This encounter with the woman at the bottom of the valley was a powerful experience of God's revelation for this pastor. It was a confirmation that God was with her and would help her go through the cancer treatments. With this chance encounter, she made a breakthrough in her understanding of her illness. At the end of the story, this pastor said, "I kept that shell on my backpack, and I have it hung up, so I can see it every day. It was just so powerful. It gave me what I needed."

Another Methodist pastor also shared a story of his experience of epiphany on the Camino. It happened during his second Camino. At this time of the Camino, he was carrying a pilgrim cross made of brass plumbing parts with an oath that he would carry it in his hands through the whole eight hundred kilometers to Santiago. Just before reaching Pamplona, he

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 23:4.

climbed up a hill and came to a little, old church off the main route. He got into the chapel and saw Jesus hanging on a large wooden crucifix, surrounded by many notes of prayer. He asked a woman in the church for permission to touch the crucifix. As he stretched out his hands and touched Jesus' heart with his pilgrim cross, he was suddenly overwhelmed with a feeling of love. He had a strong sense of being connected to Jesus, realizing that he was in the right place with a sense of assurance that everything would be good and all right. It was an experience of epiphany for him. It was an extraordinary spiritual experience to be spiritually connected with Jesus through physical contact with Jesus' heart with his pilgrim cross, which he was carrying in his pocket throughout his pilgrimage journey.

One more Methodist pastor also shared a story of her extraordinary spiritual experience that happened to her when she was walking down a treacherously slippery hill on a rainy day from a mountain village called Acebo. When she woke up in the morning, it was raining hard, and the wind was blowing all around. She was wondering if she should take a taxi down the hill. Other pilgrims were taking a taxi, but she was not sure of what she should do. So, she waited through the breakfast, thinking about what she should do, and finally decided to walk down the hill. It was still raining, but not as hard as earlier. She described this experience as follows:

It was the most glorious day. There was hardly anybody else on the path because everybody else was taking cabs down. And, I think part of it was that sense of achievement, that sense of being so focused on where we were stepping, because it was all that granite rocky stuff was wet ... and literally this sense of care that we were being watched over as we were. It was just glorious.

These are some of the examples of extraordinary spiritual experiences the pastors interviewed had while they were walking the Camino. These kinds of extraordinary spiritual experiences are abundant in their Camino stories. Through these extraordinary spiritual experiences, God was

speaking to these pastors, and they were deeply touched by God's love and had a strong sense of assurance that God was with them.

## **Hospitality**

Receiving hospitality is also a common phenomenon the pastors interviewed experienced while they were walking the Camino. Several pastors reported that they had truly enjoyed hospitality along the way. A UCC pastor talked about hospitality on the Camino as follows: "Something that surprised me along the way was hospitality, and to me that became the theme of the walk." In her survey response, this pastor also noted, "I began to see God in the hospitality we were offered and began to see offering hospitality as a central call for the church." Stories about hospitality are abundant in the interviews. For instance, a Presbyterian minister reported his experience of receiving snacks along the way. Likewise, a Methodist pastor reported her experience of being welcomed on the Camino as follows: "I was very surprised at how open the people living in those communities were. They would offer you something like water, cookies, or something." These pastors felt warmly welcomed by local residents along the way. In addition to the hospitality offered by local residents, they also enjoyed the hospitality extended by fellow pilgrims. Even though pilgrims on the Camino are different in terms of their motives, nationality, language, social status, and others, they all share the same commitment and have the same goal in their minds; thus, they are easily connected with one another. A Presbyterian minister said, "We have shared such a meaningful experience in different ways, but we still have a common, shared meaningful experience of having been a pilgrim. And so, the community of pilgrims is a powerful community of people." This mutual friendship is what is called by Victor and Edith Turner "communitas," a sense of solidarity cultivated among pilgrims. Many of the pastors enjoyed food and conversation with other pilgrims at the end of the day. These pastors'

reflections on their experiences of hospitality would suggest that people on the Camino are more inclined to help one another and that the Camino makes people more willing to reach out to people in need. The experiences of receiving and offering hospitality have left a huge impact on the inner spiritual lives of the pastors interviewed. Many of them still remember them clearly and consider hospitality an essential spiritual practice for the church.

### **The Rhythm of Walking**

In the interviews, many pastors alluded to the rhythm of walking. The simple rhythm of walking was a delightful experience for them. For instance, a UCC pastor said of her experience of walking the Camino as follows: “It was just putting one foot in front of the other that allowed me to contemplate all kinds of things.” Similarly, a Methodist pastor reported, “The rhythm of walking really helps me feel a connection with God. That was really good, and it was just very restful for me. ... I was also surprised at how I could get into a deeply meditative state just by walking.” As these comments suggest, the simple rhythm of walking helped these pastors become meditative and brought them into the presence of God.

### **Solitude**

Along with the simple rhythm of walking, many of the pastors reported that they had enjoyed solitude while walking the Camino. A Methodist pastor reported, “I walked alone by myself and enjoyed the time for myself. I was completely disengaged from the church and things around me.” A Presbyterian minister also said, “I intentionally detached myself from things. No Facebook on the Camino. I tried to be present for my experience.” Another Presbyterian minister also reported that he had enjoyed solitude on the Camino as follows: “All you are doing each day is out there on your own. You are not solving other people’s problems. You are not solving the problems of the world.” These comments would suggest that these pastors enjoyed time for

themselves as they walked the Camino. This research discovered that the Camino pilgrimage was an inner spiritual journey that had led these pastors deep into their souls.

### **“The Camino Provides”**

Many of the pastors interviewed reported that they had experience with what is called “The Camino Provides.” This phrase is often used among pilgrims to express the phenomenon that what is needed is always provided on the Camino. A Methodist pastor shared with me a story about how, when she was not aware that she had been lost in a narrow old town street, she met a local resident talking to her in Spanish from her apartment, teaching her the right direction to get to the plaza of the village. She said of this experience, “God put people in our way. ... People helped us sometimes when we weren’t even aware of being helped.” A Presbyterian minister shared a story about how what was needed was always provided at the right time and in the right place on the Camino. For example, when he got thirsty, he met a person setting up a table with bananas and water. Another Methodist pastor also shared his experience of “The Camino Provides.” He made an application for a grant for his sabbatical leave, but the application was not approved. After receiving the notification, he posted a blog on his personal websites, and soon after that, he received a donation from anonymous donors that could cover his travel expenses and other related expenses for the church while he was away. He said of this unexpected gift, “This is a God thing!” The Methodist pastor cited earlier, who had gone through a series of cancer treatments, also recognized her encounter with a woman who gave her a seashell at the bottom of the valley as an experience of “The Camino Provides.” These pastors had a sense of assurance that they were looked after by God through the experience of “The Camino Provides.” The episodes of “The Camino Provides” are abundant in their Camino stories, and each pastor had a unique experience of it. Although what they were provided was

varied, ranging from snacks, meetings with people, financial support, and spiritual messages, they all found God at work in ways unexpectedly beyond their imagination. An experience of “The Camino provides” was an opportunity to deepen their trust in God.

### **Simplicity**

Several pastors reported that simplicity on the Camino was a comforting and refreshing experience for them. A UCC pastor said, “I love the simplicity of our routine, just getting up and walking, and then you get groceries, get dinner, and do your laundry.” Another UCC pastor left a similar comment, “I love just getting up every day and walking, not worrying about my clothing, taking a shower, anything like that.” A Presbyterian minister also remarked, “All you do today is walk.” Experiencing the simplicity of life on the Camino, these pastors learned that they did not have to do many things in a day but had only one thing to do. If they get tired, they can stop and rest, just like a typical day on the Camino. A Methodist pastor said, “I can only do as much as I can in a day, depending on physical, mental, and spiritual resources. Then I give myself permission to stop.” The lesson of “doing one thing for a day” is a valuable lesson for these pastors. It is a practice of self-care, forgiving themselves, and being relaxed.

### **Listened to the Stories of Others**

Some of the pastors interviewed reported that they had listened to the stories of others while walking the Camino. On the Camino, pilgrims are inclined to share deep things with others, such as motives for walking the Camino and other personal things. A Methodist pastor reported:

The Camino is where you learn stories quickly. When you meet people, you don’t spend a whole lot of time on peripheral issues. You get pretty deep. ... Sometimes when you’re traveling, people go pretty quickly into the more personal deep stuff because partly they won’t see you again. And so, they can kind of reveal themselves.



Likewise, a Unitarian Universalist minister told me that people on the Camino were willing to “open up and share things in their life.” He recounted his experience of listening to others as follows: “People shared deep things with me. ... We had a conversation that was not just a conversation, but I would say it was a pastoral conversation, and the same things happened countless times to me without people knowing I’m a minister.” By listening to the stories of other pilgrims, he reaffirmed his conviction that ministry was “to create places where people could have a safe place to go deep into their hearts.” Recently, he did volunteer as an *hospitalero* (host) at an *albergue* (hostel) and offered a time for sharing, reflections, and prayer for fellow pilgrims.

By listening to the stories of fellow pilgrims, these pastors became aware of the importance of the practice of listening to others and appreciating their stories. The Methodist pastor cited above remarked, “The Camino helped me know people more deeply. Everyone is looking for a new beginning.” Having deep conversations with fellow pilgrims, this pastor learned that many people were in life transitions, such as retirement, unemployment, illness, divorce, and the death of someone, and were looking for a new beginning. By listening to the stories of others, these pastors learned about people. The practice of listening to others is a form of pastoral care, which is translatable to the practice of ministry in a congregational setting.

### **A Path of Prayer**

The Camino de Santiago is a path of prayer for many of the pastors interviewed. They prayed for the members of their congregations, for their friends and family members, or for someone who was in need of their prayer. Some of them reflected on scriptural passages, and others used various experiences that they came across on the Camino for reflection. Some pastors lit a candle at local churches along the way. A couple of pastors reported that they had

prayed at the Cruz de Ferro, a famous iron cross standing at the top of the Monte de Irago on the Camino Francés. At the bottom of this cross, stones are piled up. It is one of the traditions of the Camino pilgrimage that pilgrims carry a stone from their home and leave it at the bottom of this iron cross. Their stones are witnesses to their prayers, love, and/or the pain they are carrying throughout their lives. Leaving a stone at the bottom of this cross is a symbolic act of leaving all burdens behind and starting a new life. A UCC pastor prayed for her congregation at the Cruz de Ferro. Another UCC pastor invited her congregation to join her in prayer when she prayed at the Cruz de Ferro: “We asked the congregation to pray for us while we were walking. ... I asked people to pick up a rock and carry it with them. On the day we went to the Cruz de Ferro, we invited everybody in the church to lay down the rock somewhere as well to join us.” A Methodist pastor prayed for her sister-in-law, who had been suffering from a terminal illness. She shared the following story of her prayer at the Cruz de Ferro and candle lighting:

I had a sister-in-law who was dying of cancer at the time, and she really wanted to go with me, but I did not know that. We didn’t even know each other very well, but I decided that I would find a way to take her with me. And so, I tied a little charm, a boot, on my backpack string, and as I walked, it walked with me. I had that with me for three weeks, and then I got to the Cruz de Ferro, and I put it there at the Cruz de Ferro, and I filmed it for my sister-in-law. And it was just a very important time for her because she was dying, and she said, “People treat me like I’m dying. I’m no longer living. But the fact that you carried this symbol and put it there makes me feel like at least somebody in the world is praying for me today.” And it just brought me closer to her. And then afterwards, I stopped in every small chapel and prayed for her the rest of the way, since it wasn’t swinging and walking with me. So, I prayed all the way into Santiago, and then, when I got home, ... my brother said that she was dying, and I said, “I’m gonna come and be with you.” I didn’t know her very well until I walked the Camino, and something just brought us closer together through that experience.

### **The Community of Pilgrims**

Some of the pastors interviewed talked about the community of pilgrims on the Camino. This open code signifies various aspects of the Camino community. As described earlier, many pastors enjoyed meeting with fellow pilgrims along the way. The Methodist pastor cited earlier

felt a strong sense of community as she witnessed the overcoming of language differences at the dinner table. Having been suffering from illness, she also expressed her deep appreciation for the support and encouragement she was offered from other pilgrims as follows: “I could make some beautiful friends. ... They were very supportive of me during the cancer time. And they said, ‘If you can walk five hundred miles, you can beat this cancer.’ And they are very supportive afterwards.” An Episcopal priest talked about the community of pilgrims he had enjoyed along the way as follows:

Walking into the square in Santiago was just a real, exhilarating experience. There’s something very special about that plaza there, because people are arriving there from different places. And there’s a lot of celebrating, and people are reconnecting. I saw people that I had met on the way. And we congratulated each other for having made it there. So, there was a real spiritual high.

As these comments suggest, the Camino de Santiago is filled with a sense of community. As these pastors walked the Camino, they naturally walked with other people and found them as fellow pilgrims who were engaged in the same endeavor. This sense of connection with other pilgrims extends beyond time and space. As they stepped on the road that thousands of pilgrims had walked over the centuries, they felt a historical connection with other pilgrims in the past as well as with those who would be walking the same path in the future. A Presbyterian minister explained this sense of historical connection with other pilgrims as follows:

I do realize that you are walking in the footsteps of where other Christians and non-Christians have walked for hundreds of years. And there are some places along the Camino ... where the road is sunk. You’re walking like in a ditch that the road itself is down. So, there’s the sense in which you are walking underneath where people have walked above you, and to be tied and connected to ancestors, if I could use that word, or the saints who have come on before us. To be part of that way was very important to me. Some of these things drew me to the Camino.

In addition to this kind of historical connection with other pilgrims, many pastors felt a sense of connection with contemporary people, especially with those in their congregations.

Before embarking on the Camino, some pastors put a Camino map on the walls of the hallways in their church to share their pilgrimage journey with their congregations. The congregants were invited to engage in the activity of locating where their pastors were walking each day. Some of the pastors shared with their congregants what they were experiencing on the Camino through the Internet. They posted reflections and pictures on their personal websites to get connected with their congregants and/or family members left behind. The Episcopal priest cited earlier reported:

I took pictures as I went and posted them on Facebook every day. I had probably one hundred twenty to one hundred fifty people who followed along with me, and they were very encouraging. I mean they made comments. They liked the photos that I put. When I came back, many of them wanted to hear about how my experience was. So, I did a lot of sharing. My family, my wife followed me every day. ... It really felt like I was carrying a community along with me by posting on Facebook. .... That was a significant part of my experience as well.

### **Learned about the Self**

While walking the Camino, the pastors interviewed learned a lot about themselves. They had plenty of time for self-reflection and introspection along the way. A Presbyterian minister said, “Really ... I learned a lot about myself. I couldn’t believe it then. In the end, I actually did it. And since then, ... it has also had an impact on many other aspects of my life as well.” After returning from the Camino, this minister embarked on a new journey in his professional life. Another pastor reported that she had come to know herself better through an interaction with other pilgrims on the Camino. She said, “I found myself being good at taking care of others.” She has been told by her family members that she was naïve about people and trusted others easily. She believed that it was her flaw throughout her life, but, as she enjoyed companionship with other pilgrims and found herself being good at taking care of others, she came to realize that it was her strength rather than her weakness. She was finally released from the idea that had been

binding her for a long time. After having come to know herself, she regained self-confidence in herself and is now feeling comfortable with herself.

### **Enjoyed the Beautiful Nature along the Way**

Some of the pastors interviewed reported that they had enjoyed the beautiful nature in Spain along the way. A pastor in the United Church of Canada said, “I really liked the scenery and seeing parts of Spain. It is incredible.” An Episcopal priest reported that, after walking the Camino, he saw the creation, such as “sunsets and rain, winds and snow, creatures of the field and birds in the air, ... all reflecting the glory and majesty of God!” A Presbyterian minister reported that he felt overwhelmed as he saw the Atlantic Ocean on the last stretch of the Camino Finisterre, as follows:

I remember coming over the hill and seeing the ocean for the first time. And it was like this wave of the closeness of God just washed over me, and I just lost it, and I was in the middle of nowhere, with nobody around me, and that was completely fine. And so, for me, my coming home in the Camino was seeing the ocean. I have lived by the ocean for most of my life. And so, for whatever reason the Atlantic Ocean is sort of where I feel closest to God. And so, it was seeing that ocean, and then finally putting my feet in that ocean that made me feel like this was what I was supposed to do the whole time. It wasn't about the cathedral. It was about walking to that ocean and putting my feet there and understanding that God was with me the whole time.

For these pastors, the Camino pilgrimage was an opportunity to connect with nature. As they walked the Camino, they were touched by the beauty of God's creation and felt connected to God through it. Their experiences of being in harmony with nature have broadened and/or reaffirmed their views of God and God's relation to the world.

### **Healing Experience**

Some of the pastors interviewed reported that they were carrying various psychological distress in their personal lives as well as in their professional lives and had a healing experience of their psychological wounds as they walked the Camino. A research participant noted:

What I encountered on the Camino was an unpacking and jettison of many emotional and unresolved issues in my life and ministry. Like the proverbial backpack, I unloaded things across the meseta that I did not even realize I was still carrying with me, from failed pastoral relationships, to parishioner abuse towards clergy, to family challenges. As well as regaining an understanding of what brings joy to life. I return now to the Camino for a cleansing, a recalibration of life, and a deepened time of discovering God anew.

Another participant said, “I had come to thirty years of ministry and had a lot of difficult times due to sexism, to be honest, and a lot of disappointment, a lot of plans that did not go the way that I thought. I wasn’t where I thought I was gonna be in my life.” An interviewee also talked about sexism and close-mindedness in the church she had been struggling with throughout her ministry experience:

I think part of what I was reflecting and praying about on the Camino was that, almost forty years of ministry, it was very challenging for me because I was the only woman in a lot of settings. And that was part of what I worked out. As I walked, I could feel my body. This is the healing that releases things that I have been holding.

As these comments suggest, these pastors found the Camino to be a path of cure that released their distress and healed their psychological wounds. After walking the Camino, they get in touch with themselves and regain joy in their lives, both personally and professionally.

## **Contexts**

This section explores the open codes that pertain to the contexts in which the Protestant pastors experienced their spiritual deepening.

### **Sabbatical Leave**

The first open code is “sabbatical leave.” Many of the pastors interviewed walked the Camino during their sabbatical leaves. As analyzed earlier, they were feeling a strong need for a break from ministry, seeking time for themselves to take care of their own spiritual well-being. Some of these pastors’ congregations were supportive of their request for a sabbatical leave, and

others were not necessarily sympathetic to them, and yet most of the pastors took advantage of their sabbatical leaves to make a pilgrimage on the Camino. Since it usually takes between thirty and forty days to walk through the Camino Francés from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Santiago de Compostela, the pastors needed an extended period of time to walk the Camino. A sabbatical leave was a good occasion to walk the Camino for them.

### **Life Transitions**

The second open code is “life transitions.” Some of the pastors interviewed were going through transitions in their lives. An Episcopal priest reported that the Camino pilgrimage was a post-retirement activity for him. He was wondering what he would do after retirement and found himself enjoying the Camino. After returning from his first Camino, he became a co-chair of a local chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino. Now, he considers it a new ministry for him, sharing the joy of walking the Camino with others. A Methodist pastor also reported that she was going through major changes in her personal life as well as a crisis in her faith journey. Before embarking on the Camino, she was appointed to a new parish, struggling to adapt to the new environment; at the same time, she was going through a series of cancer treatments. She reported that she was feeling stagnant in her life and really needed time away from the routines of her daily life.

### **Inspired by *The Way***

The third open code is “*The Way*.” One of the interview questions was, “How did you learn about the Camino?” Most of the pastors interviewed reported that they had watched the movie, *The Way*, and were inspired by it. As already mentioned in chapter 1, *The Way* is a 2010 film on the Camino de Santiago. It is the story of a father who walks the Camino for his adult son who died while he was walking the Camino. Twelve out of the sixteen interviewees

mentioned this film. After watching it, some of them felt called to walk the Camino. For instance, an Episcopal priest said, “When I saw that, I said, ‘I think this is speaking to me.’” A Methodist pastor also reported that, after watching this movie, she immediately knew that she had to do that. She articulated her sense of calling as follows: “My heart said to me, ‘You must do that!’” A Presbyterian minister also remembered his feelings after watching this movie. He said, “As I was sitting there watching that [*The Way*], I immediately knew that that was on my bucket list.” Although there were many reasons to walk the Camino, it was a calling for many of the pastors interviewed. Besides this film, three pastors reported that they were inspired by books written on the Camino de Santiago and/or the practice of pilgrimage. One pastor mentioned Joyce Rupp’s memoir, *Walk in a Relaxed Manner: Life Lessons from the Camino*, as a source of inspiration. Another pastor was inspired by Lacy Clark Ellman’s *Pilgrim Principles: Journeying with Intention in Everyday Life*. In addition to these published materials, some pastors were inspired by their friends, colleagues, parishioners, or family members who have walked the Camino.

### **The Relaxing Atmosphere on the Camino**

Another important context in which the central phenomenon unfolded is the relaxing atmosphere of the Camino. As analyzed earlier, some pastors enjoyed hospitality along the way. Other pastors enjoyed conversation with other pilgrims. Through these interactions with fellow pilgrims and local residents, these pastors were exposed to different cultures. More than that, they were touched by the kindness of others. On the Camino, people naturally help one another. They become less judgmental toward others and more affirming one another. As the spiritual lesson, “Everyone walks their own journey,” implies, each person is respected on the Camino, and every culture is celebrated as it is.



## **Intervening Conditions**

There are several intervening conditions that have contributed to the personal spiritual transformation of the pastors interviewed. What kinds of personal attributes and/or preceding life experiences have affected their experiences of walking the Camino? This section explores the intervening conditions that have exerted influence on their Camino experiences.

### **Personality and Family Relationship**

One of the intervening conditions is the personality of each pastor. A research participant said, “I am an introvert. I like to spend time alone. ... I like being on the edge, where things happen beyond my comfort zone.” Some pastors reported that they loved outdoor activities, such as walking, hiking, and traveling. For instance, an Episcopal priest said, “I’m an active, outdoor person. ... I love adventure.” Likewise, a Presbyterian minister said, “I’m a hiker, and I already love to walk outdoors. And so, it just was a natural fit to combine my spirituality and my love of being outdoors in this way.” A history of family also exerts influence on their experiences of the Camino. A pastor reported that he had an ancestral root in France. For him, walking the Camino from Paris was something like a root pilgrimage, through which he searched for his own ancestral connection.

### **A Long History of the Camino de Santiago**

Another important intervening condition is the rich history of the Camino de Santiago. A Presbyterian minister spent several years in Scotland for his research and ministry and became interested in pilgrimage by being exposed to the long and rich history of pilgrimage in Europe. As explained in chapter 1, the Camino de Santiago is a vast network of pilgrimage routes spread throughout Europe. It starts in Geneva or even in eastern European countries. According to this

Presbyterian minister, people in Europe are very familiar with the idea of pilgrimage and its practice, since cathedrals are located in major cities throughout Europe, and many of them have been functioning as pilgrimage destinations for a long time.

The long history of the Camino de Santiago in the Christian tradition also attracted other clergy persons. For instance, an Episcopal priest reported that he was attracted to the Camino because of its ancient roots. Likewise, a UCC pastor stated that she had an interest in walking a historical path. She said, “I really have an interest in walking where our ancestors have walked. There is something very spiritual for me to know that my steps are the steps that people of faith have been walking for hundreds and hundreds of years. It helps me to feel connected to the past and the present and hope for the future.”

### **Academic and Spiritual Interests in Pilgrimage**

Some of the pastors interviewed reported that they had academic interests in pilgrimage even before walking the Camino. A Methodist pastor studied Christian education in seminary a long time ago and has been interested in spiritual growth and its transformation process since then. She came to understand the spiritual potential of the practice of pilgrimage for one’s spiritual growth as she actually walked the Camino herself. Several pastors expressed their interests in contemplative spiritual life. For instance, a Methodist pastor said, “I call myself a contemplative. I have a hard time being still, ... but I am always drawn to the idea of it.” A Presbyterian minister, who was a member of a study group for pastors that focused on the renewal of spirit, was pre-exposed to the idea of pilgrimage through this study group. He said, “I got introduced to the Roman Catholic idea of pilgrimages and the spiritual inner journey in ways that I had never been introduced to as a Presbyterian. ... Participating in that group for twelve to fifteen years before my pilgrimage really set me up to embrace the idea of a pilgrimage.” This

research discovered that many pastors were pre-exposed to the idea of pilgrimage and had special interests in this spiritual practice.

### **The COVID-19 Pandemic**

During the interviews, some pastors reported that they had difficulty getting through the COVID-19 pandemic. They felt exhausted by the demands of the pandemic since it radically changed the ways they engaged in ministry. For instance, a Methodist pastor reported, “I had lost somewhere along that way during all COVID. I have lost any sense of being able to set boundaries for my time.” Likewise, a Presbyterian minister said, “I needed to walk the Camino because I just needed a break from church and all the stuff that came along with leading a congregation through a pandemic. I just needed it. I was pretty spun out after doing that.”

### **Personal Consequences**

As the central phenomenon indicates, one of the biggest impacts of walking the Camino for the pastors interviewed is on their personal inner spiritual lives. Most of the pastors reported that they had experienced spiritual deepening. There were changes in their relationship with God as well as with themselves as a result of walking the Camino. For instance, an Episcopal priest reported, “The Camino has changed me spiritually and emotionally.” Likewise, another pastor also said, “The Camino has made a difference in me.” What are the personal consequences of walking the Camino for these pastors? This section explores the open codes that pertain to the personal consequences of the Camino experience for them.

### **Get in Touch with Oneself**

This research discovered that their personal transformation included deepening their spiritual commitment and changes in their self-understanding. Most of the pastors reported that

their faith was reawakened and that their trust in God was deepened. In addition to the deepening of their spiritual connection to God, they feel more connected to themselves. As quoted earlier, a Methodist pastor said, “I could get in touch with myself all over again.” Likewise, a pastor in the United Church of Canada reported, “I have become easier with myself. The Camino experience makes me comfortable with myself, which has improved my relationship with others. It has changed the way I interact with others in my ministry setting and beyond.” A UCC pastor summarized the impact of her Camino experience as follows: “I came back more centered. I think that’s the best word.” As these comments suggest, one of the outcomes of walking the Camino for the pastors interviewed is that they are now feeling more connected to themselves.

### **Worried Less**

As a result of their deepened trust in God, some of the pastors interviewed reported that they had become less worried about the future. A Methodist pastor noted:

Walking the Camino, when every step was an act of faith for perseverance over the miles and unfamiliar path ahead, was a tangible experience of trusting God for a future that I cannot see. As I have returned to work, ...my memories of the Camino help me to relax. They help me to trust God for the future I cannot see. My Camino experience helps me to worry less, trust more and simply try to be present and open for God to use me as God needs each day.

As described earlier, this pastor shared the story of her experience of walking down a steep hill on a rainy day. She was wondering if she should take a taxi down the hill, but she decided to walk down and safely reached the next town. Through this experience, she found herself being looked after and felt that God was with her. Before going on the Camino, she overcontrolled her life. She described how she became less worried after the Camino as follows:

All I can do is to trust God for each step. So, it’s those lessons of perseverance, and not knowing what’s ahead, not knowing what’s around the corner, and being able to be okay with that. And the Camino has given me a very practical memory and experience that everything will be okay whatever’s around the next corner. And so, every step is not

gonna be perfect. ... But that's okay because we end up at the foot of Christ. Anyway, we end up at the cathedral.

### **Become Adaptive**

The Camino experience has made the pastors interviewed more adaptive. For instance, a Lutheran pastor succinctly said, "I become adaptive to the situations." Some pastors reported that unexpected things had happened to them while walking the Camino. As they ran into unexpected moments, they realized that they could not control everything and learned to adapt to the situations given. The Lutheran pastor above reported that the areas of ministry most affected by the Camino experience were his interpersonal skills as follows: "I think the Camino made me more patient with people and with situations." The Camino experience helped him become more willing to embrace people where they were and who they were and appreciate the unique gifts given to each person. As his comments suggest, the Camino experience has made the pastors interviewed more receptive to what is happening to and around them.

### **A New Understanding of God**

Another significant consequence of walking the Camino is a change in their theological understanding of God and God's relation to the world. An Episcopal priest noted, "My understanding of God and creation has changed radically," summarizing his current theological understanding of God as follows:

With [Jürgen] Moltmann and other theologians, I now find myself a proponent of panentheism, meaning that all creation is in God. ... Much like everything in an aquarium is there or exists individually, but it all exists in the water, ... so we, all of us, exist within God. Creation was the first sacrificial act by God. In the beginning was God, ... all there was God. So where did God put creation? Moltmann says (in his work on the trinity) that God placed creation within Godself. What this means for me is a radically new

understanding of creation, of God, of worship, of sunsets and rain, winds and snow, creatures of the field, and birds of the air, ... all reflecting the glory and majesty of God!<sup>2</sup>

During the interview, his wife reported, “It [the Camino] made a big impact on his ministry in the way he sees God.” She described how his understanding of God was changed as follows:

“We are in God, ... and we are all connected with God. That is ... probably more than anything that sums up his spirituality now. And that is very different from when he first got into ministry.”

After returning from his first Camino, this priest became interested in Celtic spirituality and incorporated the natural world into his worldview.

Along with obtaining a new theological understanding of God, some pastors reaffirmed their ongoing theological understanding of God and God’s relation to the world. For instance, the Presbyterian minister, who felt overwhelmed as he saw the Atlantic Ocean near Finisterre, said:

My understanding of God and God’s relation to us in our world is just much bigger than what we are traditionally taught, and so I would say that is reflected in my preaching even more so now than it was before the experience of walking the Camino. ... So, in a way it has affected me quite a bit because I’ve really adopted more of a global understanding of God’s relationship with us and with our neighbor. I think the Camino reinforced that and helped me own it in a different way.

As these pastors’ comments suggest, the experience of walking the Camino has left an impact on their understanding of God and God’s creation. Both of these pastors take a broader view of God’s relation to the world, and it affects the ways they practice ministry.

## **Walking Meditation**

Another aspect of personal transformation brought about by walking the Camino can be observed in changes in the routines of their daily lives. After returning from the Camino, several

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<sup>2</sup> Hans Gustafson, “Pansacramentalism, Interreligious Theology, and Lived Religion,” *Religions* 10, no. 7 (June 28, 2019): 3 of 15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10070408>. In this article, Gustafson explains panentheism as follows: “Panentheism literally refers to the claim that all is in *theos* or the divine, yet the divine is not exhausted by all things. In simpler terms, although God is in the world and the world is in God, God remains more than, and thus transcends, the world as such.”

pastors have incorporated the practice of walking into their daily lives. A UCC pastor noted, “I have continued to walk with mindfulness and recognize what I needed to not carry on my journey.” The Episcopal priest cited in the previous section wrote:

Since returning from the 2016 Camino, I walk an average of five to seven miles per day. A walk invites me to reflect upon creation, resolve challenges, pray, build sermons and rest in God. I truly believe the walking that I have started as a result of the Camino has lengthened my life, improved my health, expanded my ministry, and given me a completely new appreciation and understanding of God, creation, and people.

This priest also noted, “Walking is an opportunity to connect with nature, with my spirit, and to open my heart.” Likewise, a Unitarian Universalist minister has incorporated the practice of walking into his daily life after returning from the Camino. He said, “I continued to walk almost daily and fairly long distances around here and really developed walking as a spiritual practice.” He explained the benefits of walking as follows: “One reason I walk is to stay in good physical shape, ... but equally or more importantly is the opportunity to connect with nature, to connect with my own spirit, to open my heart for introspection, and more.” During the interview, he mentioned the practice of walking meditation advanced by Thich Nhat Hanh, considering the practice of walking the Camino a form of walking meditation.

### **Become Intentional**

As a result of walking the Camino, several pastors have become more intentional about what they do in their daily lives. A Methodist pastor said, “My walks are much more thoughtful and intentional,” summarizing her understanding of the spiritual meaning of pilgrimage as follows: “Pilgrimage is a journey with intention, and it is about an attitude about how you approach life. The heart of pilgrimage is to deepen one’s walk with Jesus and deepen one’s connection with God. Spiritual life is about creating a space in life to experience the divine. It is about deepening connection with God.” After returning from the Camino, she had sermon series

and retreats on the theme of pilgrimage, encouraging people in her congregation to find ways to incorporate the idea of pilgrimage and its practices into their spiritual journeys.

### **A Slower Approach to Life**

In addition to becoming intentional, some pastors reported that they had other changes in their approach to life. A Presbyterian minister reported that something had changed in him, such as the way he spoke. Another pastor simply noted, “I do not rush.” A non-denominational pastor stated that, after returning from the Camino, he took “a slower and more thoughtful approach to life.” In the interview, he added:

I would say that it [the Camino experience] has added a level of contemplation, that I’m more comfortable, stopping to think and to feel. And because of my willingness to do that with myself, I am willing to do that for others. And so, instead of having an answer and thinking that I need to actually do something, I am more inclined to stop and contemplate what my people are saying or feeling, and just be there in that place with them and try to be present in the emotional moment that they’re experiencing. My wife says that I brought home more patience. I don’t think I’m more patient. I’m really just more contemplative.

As these comments indicate, these pastors have adopted a more thoughtful approach to life after returning from the Camino; they slow down their lives and find joy and grace in each moment.

As they take a more thoughtful approach to life, they naturally take a more contemplative approach to their spiritual lives and ministries. A UCC pastor summarized her spiritual life after returning from the Camino as follows: “Contemplative spiritual practices support my practice of ministry. I recognize that contemplative practice is essential to ministry.”

### **Changes in Professional Life**

How did their inner spiritual transformation impact their professional lives? Some of the pastors interviewed reported that they had embarked on a new journey in their professional lives. An interviewee reported that she resigned her full-time position after returning from the Camino.



While she was away from the church during her pilgrimage, the congregation made a change in the future direction of their ministry and offered her a part-time position when she returned home. After going through a discernment process, she decided to leave the congregation and move on to the next place where God would lead her to serve. It was unusual for her because she always planned well and organized things in advance, but somehow at this time she made a decision to leave the position without knowing what she would do next. She said:

I guess part of the Camino experience was ... I wasn't afraid to do what I felt God was calling me to do. ... And now, I'm trying to figure out, "What's God calling, and how's God calling me to put all this together? And what's my ministry gonna look like in the future?" That still ties back to that trust, and you don't know what's around the bend, and you know that it fits together.

She made an important decision in her professional life out of her deepened trust in God, which had been cultivated through her experience of walking the Camino.

Another interviewee also felt called to resign the full-time position after his five-year service to a large congregation. As he went through the discernment process, he felt that he had done enough and provided all he had for the congregation, realizing that it would be the time when someone other than him should lead this congregation to the next stage. For him, the Camino was a spiritual walk for self-reflection and introspection, which helped him clarify his mind and make an important decision in his professional life. Another clergy person also embarked on a new journey into psychoanalytic training after returning from the Camino. As these examples show, the Camino pilgrimage changes the course of one's life. After returning from the Camino, some pastors made a big decision about their professional lives and moved on to the next place, following God's call and their inner voices.

## **Return to the Camino**

After returning from the Camino, some pastors went on the Camino repeatedly. As mentioned earlier, a Unitarian Universalist minister did volunteer as an *hospitalero* (host) for an *albergue* (hostel) in a large town on the Camino Francés. As an *hospitalero*, he provided pastoral care to fellow pilgrims by offering time for sharing and reflections to them. A Presbyterian minister reported that she and her husband were planning to go on the Camino next month and do volunteer work at Pilgrim House Welcome Center in Santiago for a couple of weeks. Many other interviewees also stay connected with the Camino. Some of them have become coordinators of a local chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino, leading activities, such as walking and coffee gatherings, and sharing the joy of walking the Camino with others. In addition to coordinating activities for a local chapter, a Methodist pastor has started a new ministry of taking other people on the Camino. She organized a pilgrimage trip for a group of women clergy persons who had psychological distress and led them on the Camino pilgrimage. Many other pastors also go on the Camino repeatedly. Ten out of the sixteen interviewees have walked the Camino multiple times. Some went on the Camino every three years; one walked almost every year. As these examples imply, these pastors are passionate about the Camino and return to the Camino for their spiritual renewal and nourishment.

## **Resilience**

Another outcome of walking the Camino is that it has built up resilience for the pastors interviewed. For some of them, walking the Camino was a helpful experience to get through a difficult time in their lives. For instance, two pastors reported that the Camino experience helped them get through the COVID-19 pandemic. A Methodist pastor noted, “When the pandemic

occurred, and the day-to-day sameness started to feel like fatigue, I had an insight! This is a pilgrimage! Moving from day to day, and with persistence, I will get through to the other side.”

A Presbyterian minister also reported that the lesson, “Stay one step at a time,” which he learned on the Camino, helped him get through the pandemic:

There was no class in seminary on how to pastor during a pandemic. There was no book you could turn to. There were no resources. There was no one you could even pick up the phone or email to ask how they did it. And then, there was this overwhelming sense of “How are we going to get through this?” “What’s going to happen?” “How many people are we going to lose?” At the very beginning, overwhelmed with what’s gonna happen, what I remembered was the first two or three days of walking the Camino, leaving St-Jean-Pied-de-Port, crossing the Pyrenees, and then crossing the border into Spain. I had this image in my mind that I had all of these miles to go. I was projecting into the future, walking five hundred miles, and projecting what that future is going to look like. And then I realized that projecting too far into the future was not helping me in the moment. They were actually becoming a disservice to me because all I had was this day and this section of the Camino, and this is all I can take responsibility for. And when I made that mental shift in my head, I had more energy available to me to walk in the moment, instead of projecting into the future, being overwhelmed with how much land I had to cover, and being overwhelmed in the moment. ... And that was a really valuable lesson for me. When I arrived in Santiago thirty-three days later, I looked back. It seemed to go very fast. And, it didn’t go very fast, but I realized that if you break things up into smaller segments along the way, you can get very far. And I shared that with my congregation, and that helped me during the COVID, because all we had is this week, and then the next week, and then the next. Projecting into the future was just not helpful to anyone.

## **Summary**

In summary, this research discovered that the Protestant pastors interviewed took a more thoughtful approach to life after returning from the Camino. They become more adaptive to new environments and more intentional about what they do. They also become more relaxed with themselves and less worried about the future. Their resilience is built up stronger, and they become more courageous and optimistic. They regain self-confidence and find joy in their everyday lives. They are also inclined to let go of control in their lives. As they get in touch with themselves, moreover, their interpersonal skills improve. These internal changes naturally flow out into their practices of ministry, and now they engage in ministry in a more reflective way.

They also practice ministry out of internal joy, self-confidence, and deep trust in God cultivated through the Camino pilgrimage. In the next section, I will explore the resulting congregational strategies these pastors adopt for their practices of ministry after returning from the Camino. I will also briefly explore how they shared their Camino experiences with their congregations during their pilgrimage journeys.

### **Resulting Congregational Strategies**

One of the central phenomena the pastors interviewed experienced as a result of walking the Camino was that their theological understandings of what it meant to make a pilgrimage deepened. A Unitarian Universalist minister summarized his understanding of pilgrimage as “a journey deep into the self.” Likewise, a Methodist pastor explained his theological understanding of spiritual life as follows: “Spiritual life is about meaning and purpose, and the Christian life is a day-to-day, ordinary experience.” Many of the pastors explored the spiritual meaning of pilgrimage as they walked the Camino. They gained fresh insights into it and have integrated the idea of pilgrimage into the practice of ministry in their congregational settings after returning from the Camino. What do they do after returning from the Camino for their practices of ministry? As analyzed in the literature review, returning home is an important topic for the practice of pilgrimage. How to incorporate the Camino experience into one’s daily life is a crucial question, as a Methodist pastor remarked during the interview, “Pilgrimage begins when you go home and unpack all the learnings.” This section explores the resulting congregational strategies the Protestant pastors interviewed employ for their practices of ministry and describes how they utilize these strategies to share their Camino experiences with others in their ministry contexts.

## **Preaching**

Many of the pastors interviewed have incorporated the idea of pilgrimage and its practices into their ministries. Preaching is a natural place for this. Many pastors reported that the Camino experience had provided a lot of sermon illustrations for them. Some pastors did a sermon series on the theme of pilgrimage, and others brought just one story to integrate the Camino experience into preaching in order to illustrate particular points. For instance, a Presbyterian minister talked about the yellow arrow of the Camino in his sermon, interpreting it as a symbol of God's guidance. As the Camino yellow arrow always directs us along the way, God always guides our spiritual journeys. An Episcopal priest used the image of the Camino scallop shell for a memorial service, interpreting its shape as illustrating the multiple routes of the Camino de Santiago on which each pilgrim walks one's own way, but all lead to the same destination, the cathedral at Santiago. Although these preachers do not always talk about the Camino in their preaching, they reported that their repertoire of material had been enriched by their experiences.

## **Slideshow Presentation, Bible Studies, Adult Education Class, Newsletter, and Retreat**

In addition to the practice of preaching, the pastors share their Camino experiences through various communication strategies, such as slideshow presentations, adult education classes, catechism classes, retreats, newsletter articles, coffee hour conversations, and others. After returning from the Camino, many of them gave a slideshow presentation to their congregations, since they made their pilgrimages during their sabbatical leaves. They recounted their Camino stories with pictures to help their congregants visualize their pilgrimage journeys. Some pastors prefer to write articles for the newsletter to share their Camino stories with their congregations. Others share their experiences through teaching in adult education classes or

catechism classes. A Methodist pastor offered several retreats for various groups of people in her congregation with a pilgrimage theme. Another Methodist pastor talked about the inner life of a pilgrim during a staff meeting. Although these pastors' communication tools are various, the main goal of their practices is not just to tell their Camino stories to their congregants but to invite them to discover the spiritual meaning of pilgrimage and find ways to incorporate the practice of pilgrimage into their own spiritual journeys. During the interviews, several pastors stated that pilgrimage can be experienced anywhere without making a trip to Spain. They encourage others to walk their own pilgrimage journeys where they live.

### **Metaphors of Pilgrimage, Journey, and Walking**

Many pastors reported that the Camino was a very rich and informative metaphor for the Christian life, recognizing the usefulness of the metaphors of pilgrimage, journey, and walking and their applicability to the practice of ministry. For instance, a Presbyterian minister said, "Pilgrimage is a metaphor for a spiritual journey to walk with Jesus Christ, and to be a disciple of Jesus means to walk with him." He understands the Christian life to be a dynamic movement, always moving forward, which resonates with the practice of walking the Camino. He said:

I think living up to this idea of being on a journey ... is overused, but I really do think it is valuable that we are called to start somewhere and to end somewhere else, and to be able to move and to walk. The Christian life is not a static thing. It is a dynamic, moving, fluid experience.

He also mentioned that, on the Camino, pilgrims often encouraged one another to keep moving forward, saying, "¡*Ultreya* (a Spanish term for onward)!" According to him, this movement forward is just like a personal spiritual journey as well as the spiritual journey of the church. Each person walks one's own spiritual journey, and yet we walk together as a community of faith.

A Methodist pastor reflected on the spiritual meaning of “the way,” as he walked the Camino. In addition to the metaphor of the way, he explored the metaphor of a new beginning and its theological meaning. He said, “What does it mean to begin anew every morning, every moment, to be opening up to a new beginning? And so, since then, when I’ve come back, a lot of my sermons are about what it means because at the heart of the gospel is a new beginning. The old self died, and the new was born in baptism.” As he had deep conversations with other pilgrims on the Camino, he realized that many people were experiencing life transitions and looking for a new beginning. He said:

What I realized was that almost everyone was looking for a new beginning. They were at some transition point in life. They’ve been in a rut, and they want a new life, or they’ve been experiencing grief, and they want to find a way to handle that grief, so they can move on. Everyone was looking for something new, primarily a new beginning. And so, my spiritual path now is called the way of a new beginning.

This Methodist pastor is now writing a book on the spirituality of pilgrimage.

### **Share the Spiritual Lessons Learned on the Camino**

In addition to the metaphors of pilgrimage, journey, and walking, the pastors interviewed applied the spiritual lessons learned on the Camino to their practices of ministry and shared what they learned on the Camino with their congregants. For instance, a Methodist pastor noted, “I share a lot of stories of hospitality, prayer, and trust. Also, historical connections with the Christian practice of pilgrimage.” The spiritual lessons learned on the Camino are various, for instance, valuing simplicity, everyone on their own journey, the appreciation of walking, resilience, letting go, trust in God, and others. Several pastors share the spiritual lesson of hospitality with their congregants. For instance, a UCC pastor reported:

I found on the Camino that I had everything I needed. We didn’t know where we would sleep each night, but always found a shelter. When it was hot, we noticed the shade of the trees planted along the way. When we were tired, we found benches waiting. When we were thirsty, we found a little boy with a lemonade stand. We were greeted by *albergue*

owners, some of whom were pilgrims themselves, who welcomed us to “our home for the night.” I began to see God in the hospitality we were offered and began to see offering hospitality as a central call for the Church.

This pastor is now engaging in a ministry that focuses on creating a welcoming community of faith. Likewise, a Unitarian Universalist minister also shares the spiritual lesson of hospitality with people in his religious communities through his preaching:

I preached ... on my experience on the Camino as an *hospitalero* in terms of hospitality, being not just an industry but really a cultural, religious, and spiritual practice, weaving in, of course, the story of Abraham and the angels, the Hebrews passage about entertaining angels unawares, and how in our religious communities, particularly in our Unitarian religious communities, practicing hospitality and welcome is so important.

Several other pastors also reported that they shared the spiritual lesson of hospitality in their own ministry contexts as well as in the denominations with which they are affiliated. Another spiritual lesson is intentionality. As mentioned earlier, after returning from the Camino, a Methodist pastor becomes more intentional about what she does and invites others to become more attentive to what they do. A Presbyterian minister shares the spiritual lesson of being made a new creation with his congregation, which consists of mostly elderly people. He said:

One of the big things learning from the Camino is for us being a little bit older that life is not over. There is still vibrancy in life, and I think that’s a wonderful spiritual message for anybody to be reminded of. At any stage of our life, ... we are made new creations every day. And we continue to be even as we are aging, so that the whole life is not over. ... It’s a time of discovery and a time of encouragement and new life, an opportunity to be living vibrant lives for Christ. A lot of that came out of, I think, walking the Camino.

Some pastors share the spiritual lesson of resilience, and other pastors share the spiritual lesson of trust in God. These spiritual lessons are what they learned as they walked the Camino. They discovered that their resilience grew stronger and that their trust in God deepened. They share these lessons with others not as a set of knowledge but as a way of life that shapes their own ways of living and being.



## **Introduce Walking as a Spiritual Practice**

As described earlier, many pastors have incorporated the practice of walking into their daily lives. Likewise, they have incorporated it into their practices of ministry. After returning from the Camino, a Unitarian Universalist minister started teaching the practice of walking as a spiritual practice to his congregation, encouraging them to walk more meditatively in order to enhance their spiritual lives. Below are some examples of the practice of walking incorporated into their practices of ministry.

### ***Walking a Labyrinth***

Several pastors have introduced the practice of walking a labyrinth to their congregations and incorporated it into their ministry practices. As a coordinator of a local chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino, a Methodist pastor made a workshop on the labyrinth and took a group of her local chapter members to places where labyrinths were located in the local area. She also invited the youth group of her congregation to walk a labyrinth. In the interview, she shared a beautiful story of this activity as follows:

I've taught it [the labyrinth] to my youth to help them slow down their lives. And we had communion in the middle, and we talked about the experience of labyrinths. We had one right on the church's yard. So, I said, "This is a tool. You need to learn this." And the children all said, "It helps me breathe better. It helps me slow down and think and pray."

She continued:

My biggest surprise was my teenagers. We took the junior high school students first, because they're so fast. But they treated it just as respectfully as the older kids. ... It was just beautiful. They gave everybody space. And they walked, and then they had to stop and turn, and we sat down, and I said, "What was your experience?" "How did you feel about this?" And they said, "It was nice to put down a cell phone and focus on our feet and breathe." I didn't expect that, and I was so excited.

As a pastoral leader, she shared a ritual and brought its history into this activity.

### ***Outdoor Worship Service***

A pastor in the United Church of Canada had a Sunday worship service at a nearby park for a mini-Camino exercise. People in the congregation walked outside around the stations they set up and had a mini-pilgrimage experience as part of their Sunday worship service. This pastor recounted this activity as follows:

We did the little mini-Camino exercise one Sunday, instead of doing a regular church. And the kids really loved that. The kids thought that was the greatest thing ever, because they had their little kind of passport, and they got their little Compostela at the end. And the kids really enjoyed that.

### ***Walking around the Neighborhood***

A Presbyterian minister found that the practice of walking around the neighborhood was beneficial for the practice of congregational ministry, explaining it as follows: “Slow walking grounds us in the community and connects us to people in the neighborhood. We cannot notice what is happening in our neighborhoods when we drive a car. But as we walk around the local community, we can get to know our neighbors.” This minister also remarked, “Faith is embodied through actual walking. Walking with Jesus and walking together as a church is incarnational.” Walking around the neighborhood is a useful tool for the ministry of the church. It could make our faith concrete and help us get connected to people in our local communities.

### ***Psychological and Physical Benefits of Walking***

A Presbyterian minister recognized the psychological benefits of the practice of walking and its positive effects on mental health. He said, “Walking stirs things that are unconscious in us. It is a healing process. As we walk, our psyche is released, and our stress is released. It is good for our mental health and helps us clear our minds.” Other interviewees also mentioned the various healing effects of walking. For instance, an Episcopal priest reported that a regular walk

released stress for him. Likewise, a UCC pastor talked about the therapeutic effects of walking as follows: “When I retired in June, it felt like I was detoxing my nerves from all the activity, and the walking ... can release some of that.” As these examples indicate, the pastors interviewed have come to realize not only the spiritual benefits of walking but also its physical and psychological effects through the embodied experience of walking the Camino. It has improved their health conditions and strengthened their spirits. They encourage others in the congregation to engage in the practice of walking.

### **Teaching the Camino for a Local Community**

After returning from the Camino, a Unitarian Universalist minister started teaching a class on the Camino for a local community education program. In this class, he teaches not only the logistics of the Camino, such as travel arrangements or equipment to be purchased, but also the spiritual meaning of walking the Camino to people in non-religious settings. He tries to reach out to people outside his own religious communities out of his conviction that pilgrimage is for everyone, regardless of one’s religious conviction or affiliation. Other pastors also share their Camino experiences with people in their local communities. For instance, a non-denominational pastor created artwork of the Camino scallop shell for his farm in order to make people aware of the Camino.

### **A New Prayer Service**

As described earlier, an Episcopal priest became interested in Celtic spirituality after returning from the Camino and started a Celtic prayer service in his parish. In the interview, his wife described this prayer service as follows:

Last November, we started a Celtic service on Sunday nights. It’s much more fluid; it’s much more relaxed. There is no sermon in our Celtic service. Instead, it’s people in the congregation that offer a three-to-five-minute reflection. And so, it’s hearing their

experiences. And it involves light and dark, water and candles, and doing things as part of the liturgy, just ways to incorporate the natural world in our worship.

She further described what had happened in this prayer service as follows:

The people in the Celtic service probably have seen more of a transformation, and we run about thirty people in the Celtic service, and they are so thankful for that service. They talk over and over about how much they love that. The service draws people from our community that are otherwise not connected to our service.

Her comments indicate that the ministry of this parish has expanded through this prayer service and that many people are interested in this kind of worship experience. This prayer service is a good example of the benefits of walking the Camino for the practice of congregational ministry. It invited new people in the local community where the congregation was located and welcomed them to the presence of God.

### **Remembering the Camino**

Some of the pastors remember their experience of walking the Camino by hanging the Compostela (an official certificate for completion of pilgrimage) or a map of the Camino on the wall of their office as a reminder of their Camino pilgrimage. They try to keep their memories of the Camino alive and remember the Camino experience as they engage in the day-to-day practice of ministry. A Methodist pastor stated that she remembered the Camino when she felt distressed. A Presbyterian minister remembers the anniversary of his pilgrimage, the date when he started walking the Camino from St-Jean-Pied-de-Port. It is a reminder for him to renew his pilgrimage spirit with thanksgiving.

### **Journaling**

A Methodist pastor reported that she was engaged in the practice of journaling while she was walking the Camino. Before the Camino, journaling was not part of her spiritual discipline. But she was given a journal book from her spiritual director, and as she left her home, she soon

started journaling every day, found herself enjoying it, and came to see it as a spiritual practice of silence. This spiritual practice helped her find God during her pilgrimage, and she learned that “God always showed up in some way.” As she reflected on what happened to her each day, she asked herself, “Where did I see God today?”

### **Sharing the Camino Experience with the Congregation Left Behind**

Many of the pastors interviewed were eager to share their Camino experiences with their congregants while they were walking the Camino. How did they share their Camino experiences with the congregations left behind? What kinds of communication tools were used to share their experiences? This section explores how they shared their Camino experience with others during their pilgrimage journeys.

#### ***The Internet***

While walking the Camino, many pastors utilized the Internet to share their Camino experiences with their congregations. They could share their experiences instantly with people left behind through a blog. Many of them posted reflections and pictures on their personal websites. Through this exercise, the pastors carried their congregations with them, and the congregants walked the Camino vicariously through their pastors’ blogs.

#### ***Other Tools***

Some of the pastors put a map of the Camino de Santiago on the walls of the hallways in the church before they embarked on the Camino. People in the church could keep track of where their pastors were walking each day. This activity connected the pastors with their congregations. A Methodist pastor created a study guide on pilgrimage for the congregation before she left for the Camino. With this study guide, she invited her parishioners to have a pilgrimage experience

where they were. Likewise, a UCC pastor wrote an article for the newsletter and bulletin before leaving for the pilgrimage, informing her congregants where and how far she would be walking each day, and inviting them to walk around their hometown. Some congregations had a prayer service for their pastors, and other congregations did their own walk in their local area. A congregation in Maryland walked to the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., while their pastor was walking the Camino. This pastor purchased a vinyl labyrinth for the congregation before leaving for the Camino, inviting them to have their own walk. These activities were useful tools to make congregants experience a pilgrimage for themselves and helped them grasp the spiritual meaning of making a pilgrimage.

## **Summary**

The main goal of the congregational strategies the pastors interviewed adopt is to expose their congregants to the idea of pilgrimage. They try to help their congregants understand the spiritual meaning of pilgrimage and find ways to incorporate it into their spiritual journeys, but they do not force them to participate in this spiritual practice; rather, they invite them to think of it as an option to enhance their spiritual lives. For instance, a Methodist pastor reported, “This is not for everyone. ... There are so many different ways to do pilgrimage. Some of you may not like it. I’m not forcing you into this. This is for those who want to try a different kind of spiritual discipline.” A Presbyterian minister also reported, “I’m very willing to talk with others about my experience, but I don’t push it. I mean, it was a very personal thing for me. And so, it is just something I treasure in my own heart. But if somebody wants to talk about it, I’m one hundred percent happy to talk about it.” This minister also talked about how the practice of pilgrimage is understood in his ecclesiastical tradition as follows: “In the Presbyterian tradition, pilgrimage is really not the language we would use that often. It is not really encouraged. It is not discouraged.

It is just not the way we normally talk about it.” As this comment implies, pilgrimage is not a common word to describe Protestant spiritualities. Nor is it a common spiritual practice among Protestants. Nevertheless, the Protestant pastors interviewed recognize the spiritual benefits of the practice of pilgrimage for one’s spiritual deepening and use it as a tool for their practices of ministry. In the next chapter, I will explore the implications of the practice of pilgrimage for the practice of ministry in Protestant churches today.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusions**

This chapter concludes my research. Based on the findings, I will first outline the theory of how the Camino experience impacts the practice of ministry for Protestant pastors, and then I will discuss the spiritual potential of the Camino pilgrimage for the practice of ministry in Protestant churches today.

### **How the Camino Experience Impacts the Practice of Ministry**

The theory emerging from the analysis of the data collected through the survey and interview is that the Camino experience primarily affects the personal inner spiritual lives of Protestant pastors, which includes spiritual renewal, changes in self-understanding, and deepened spiritual connection to God, and that their personal spiritual transformation naturally flows out into their practices of ministry. In other words, the Camino experience modestly impacts the practice of ministry for Protestant pastors, and the biggest impact is on their inner spiritual lives. While in most cases there are not substantial changes in what they do in their practices of ministry after returning from the Camino, they are revitalized to minister with new intentionality. In addition to the theory outlined above, the research results indicate that pastors with a strong spiritual relationship with God will be more effective and resilient pastors than those lacking such a relationship and that the Camino pilgrimage is a powerful tool for cultivating such a relationship for Protestant pastors.

How have these pastors' practices of ministry changed as a result of their personal inner spiritual transformation attained through walking the Camino? The pastors interviewed reported that they came to do ministry in more reflective ways. Although several pastors started a new ministry, such as a Celtic prayer service, teaching a course on the Camino de Santiago for a local



community education program, volunteering as a coordinator for a local chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino, and taking a group of people on the Camino pilgrimage, they did not fundamentally change the tasks of ministry. They use conventional congregational strategies as they incorporate the idea of pilgrimage and its practices into their practices of ministry, for instance, preaching, Bible studies, catechism, and adult education classes. The Camino pilgrimage is a rich metaphor for the Christian life and provides a lot of sermon illustrations for them. Accordingly, their Camino experiences naturally creep into their preaching and teaching as they practice ministry in their congregational settings.

Changes in their approach to life are personal; therefore, their personal transformation is often unrecognizable to others. Furthermore, it seems difficult for pastors to describe the impact of their Camino experiences in words, as a Methodist pastor said, “I shared the journey as best I could, though putting words to the internal impact is difficult to express.” And yet, their internal changes have definitely left a huge impact on their practices of ministry. The Camino experience bolsters their ministries from the inside, as another Methodist pastor said, “The everyday experience of the Camino is in my muscles now.” The Camino experience has been internalized and has become part of who they are. Hence, as they take a more thoughtful approach to life, they naturally adopt a more reflective approach to ministry.

One of the unique aspects of the Camino pilgrimage is that people walk very slowly along the way. The pastors interviewed walked about twenty to thirty kilometers a day, and the slow movement on the Camino helped them slow down and made them more attentive to things in and around them. This inner change is made manifest in their actions and attitudes. In other words, changes in their “being” naturally flow out into what they are “doing.” Some pastors become more patient with others, and others become more intentional about what they do. As a

result of their inner spiritual transformation, they feel more comfortable with themselves. In their practices of ministry, they are more willing to create room for others. I agree with the Unitarian Universalist minister who defines ministry as creating a safe space for others to go deep into their hearts. Creating room for others to be themselves is an act of love. It is an act of listening to others; at the same time, it is a practice of hospitality.

Through this research, I also learned that being more deeply connected to God and to the self was crucial for ministry. The quality of pastors' performance in ministry depends on how deeply they are spiritually connected to God. In other words, pastors with a strong and intimate relationship with God will be more effective and faithful pastors than those without such a relationship. As analyzed in chapter 2 for the literature review, Ruth Haley Barton makes a similar claim about it. In *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, she argues that spiritual deepening is crucial for pastoral leaders and that they need to deepen their spiritual relationship with God before they lead a congregation.<sup>1</sup> She encourages pastoral leaders to spend more time alone in the presence of God and nurture their own souls.<sup>2</sup> Many of the Protestant pastors interviewed reported that they enjoyed solitude as they walked the Camino. As they walked alone, they spent time with God and had conversation with God. As a result, they came to feel more deeply connected to God.

One of the recurring problems in the practice of congregational ministry today is that pastoral leaders do not spend enough time to nurture their own spiritual connection to God. In her DMin Major Project, Kathy Harvey Nelson writes, "Often we allow ourselves to become so busy that we are overwhelmed by tasks and duties to the exclusion of developing our own

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<sup>1</sup> Barton, *Strengthening the Soul*, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Barton, 31.

spiritual life with God.”<sup>3</sup> Because of the multiple tasks to be done, she argues, pastors often forget or ignore the most important thing in the practice of ministry, that is, spending time with God and cultivating their spiritual connection to God.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as her doctoral project would also imply, the legacy of the business leadership model of the 1980s and 1990s seems to be still enduring in Protestant churches today.<sup>5</sup> In the interview, a UCC pastor stated that she encouraged her congregation to focus on being a congregation rather than on what they are doing. She explained it as follows:

I think ... in the United Church of Christ, we tend to do a lot about what you are doing. We are measured by how much we do, like how productive we are. I think that many times we neglect to spend the time spiritually, building up the spiritual foundation that gives us energy.

This pastor also reported, “I think it was a real lesson for them to hear from me as their pastor how powerful and meaningful it was to just be and stop, and not to worry about the next thing, but to just be in that.” It would be a common phenomenon for pastors that the success of their congregational ministries is assessed by what they do, what outreach programs they implement, and how many people they contact. The growth of ministry is evaluated by the number of people they have for worship services and the financial growth of the congregation they lead. Obsessed with the myth of numerical growth and productivity, pastors often put aside the spiritual discipline of sitting still in the presence of God. Their minds and hearts are restless, always occupied with sermon preparation, emails to respond, preparation for business meetings, and other responsibilities during the week. In addition to that, pastors are trained to read the Bible for preaching and teaching but seldom read it for spiritual nourishment, like *Lectio Divina*, a

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<sup>3</sup> Nelson, “Connectional Spirituality,” 5.

<sup>4</sup> Nelson, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Nelson, 47-48.

contemplative way of reading the Scriptures. As Ruth Haley Barton constantly asks throughout her book, how can we lead a congregation if we lose our spiritual connection to God?<sup>6</sup> I agree with Barton that the most important practice of ministry for pastors is to build up a strong and intimate relationship with God. We know the importance of the spiritual discipline of sitting still and spending time alone in the presence of God, but we often experience difficulty setting aside a certain period of time for it in our daily lives and practicing it regularly.

In the interview, another UCC pastor talked about her engagement in a contemplative spiritual practice, although she acknowledged her struggle to incorporate it into her daily spiritual life:

It's not something extra to my ministry. It's integral. It's essential. ... My ongoing challenge is finding ways to be contemplative without going away somewhere. ... I haven't figured out how to do that in the midst of the normal routine. That's the challenge. And yet, my ministry is most powerful when I can have those times.

The findings of this research indicate that walking the Camino is a useful instrument for pastors to cultivate their spiritual connection to God. As the collected data shows, the Camino provided plenty of time for the pastors to spend time alone for themselves. As they spent time alone with God, they went deep into themselves and discovered God speaking to them in the depths of their souls.

In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin argues that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self are connected in our spiritual lives.<sup>7</sup> Without knowing God, we have no knowledge of the self, and vice versa. In his book, *The Gift of Being Yourself*, David G.

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<sup>6</sup> Barton, *Strengthening the Soul*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 35. In the well-known opening sentence of the *Institute*, Calvin writes, "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."

Benner explores the spirituality of self-discovery, arguing that we encounter God in the deepest parts of ourselves. Following Calvin, Benner maintains that the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the self are interdependent and that we come to know God as we come to know our true selves.<sup>8</sup> According to Benner, to know our true selves is a painful process because we have to unmask our false selves, but only as we come to know our true selves, we come to know God.<sup>9</sup> For the Protestant pastors interviewed, the Camino pilgrimage was an opportunity to come to know themselves. They encountered unexpected moments of God's grace along the way. They came across the moments that they had to overcome their own fears. They also ran into the limits of their physical endurance. Through these experiences, they saw who they were. They found themselves to be deeply loved by God. The Camino pilgrimage provided them with such an opportunity for self-discovery. Their Camino experiences support Benner's claim that we come to know God as we come to know our true selves. The discovery of God and the discovery of the self are inseparable, like the two sides of the same coin. In the interview, a Presbyterian minister stated that walking the Camino was both a time of solitude and a time of community for him. This was a common experience among the pastors interviewed. By spending time alone in solitude, they encountered God in the depths of their souls; simultaneously, they encountered God through an encounter with others in the community of pilgrims.

This research discovered that walking the Camino was a life-changing experience for the Protestant pastors interviewed, although some of them claimed that it did not change the spiritual paths that they had already taken but rather reaffirmed them. Nonetheless, it certainly nourished their spiritual lives. As the collected data indicates, it has deepened their trust in God and

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<sup>8</sup> Benner, *Gift of Being Yourself*, 21-22, 101.

<sup>9</sup> Benner, 69-82. In chapter 5, Benner describes the process of unmasking one's false self.

reawakened their Christian faith. A UCC pastor said of her Camino experience as follows: “It was a powerful experience. It exceeded my expectations. I certainly did encounter things that did deepen my trust in God.” She also talked about the goal of her sabbatical leave as follows:

I went on that sabbatical, wanting to deepen my trust in God. That’s the intention that I went with. That’s why I wanted to walk it [the Camino], because I felt like not knowing where I was going to sleep, not knowing what I was going to eat, and not knowing who or what I was going to encounter, would help with that. And it did.

Walking the Camino was a powerful experience that deepened her trust in God. The Camino experience has become part of who she is and strengthens her ministry from within. This experience would be true not only for this pastor but also for any pastor who is searching for the meaning and purpose of their personal lives and ministries.

One of the interview questions was, “Would you recommend your colleagues to walk the Camino?” All interviewees responded affirmatively to this question. They strongly encouraged their colleagues to walk the Camino for spiritual renewal. For instance, a Presbyterian minister answered this question as follows: “Absolutely. I cannot imagine anybody being disappointed if they really go into it with the right mindset and preparation. Regardless of what you want to get out of it, you can absolutely receive something wonderful just by experiencing it. I would one hundred percent encourage my colleagues or peers to do it.” A Methodist pastor recommended the Camino pilgrimage especially to those who engage in parish ministry. She said, “You’re just carrying so much for so many people all the time. And it [the Camino] allows you to let that go for a while, and not be responsible for anybody but for yourself and your own spiritual needs.” Another Methodist pastor recommended the Camino to relatively young and inexperienced pastors to get reconnected with their calling for ministry. Other pastors also recommended the Camino to their colleagues for the renewal of their calling at some point in their ministry careers. A Presbyterian minister said:

If they can be in a position where the church gives them the time and space to truly walk the Camino slowly, that would be an invaluable gift for them to discover and rediscover who they are, why they are called to serve in the first place, and how maybe the nature of the call might be shifting.

In the interviews, some pastors acknowledged the privilege of their physical fitness. They recognized that walking the Camino was a demanding endeavor that involved a physical challenge and that it would not be necessarily appropriate for everyone. Yet, they all recommended this spiritual practice to those who were physically able.

In addition to the renewal of their calling, walking the Camino would be a useful tool for pastors to prepare themselves for retirement. A UCC pastor, who had walked the Camino a year before her retirement, noted, “For me, it was instrumental in my determination that it was time to retire.” She also reported that she was thinking of how she could have a good ending to her ministry before retirement and found it enlightening as well as healing to have days just to think, pray, and reflect. She said, “I think I would have had a very different retirement ending if I hadn’t done the Camino. I think it helped me get centered. The hours of having just quiet time gave me language for how to approach the congregation and myself for these last months.” Walking the Camino was an opportunity for this pastor to reflect back on her forty years of ministry, which helped her prepare to end her professional career with gratitude. Likewise, a Lutheran pastor reported that the Camino pilgrimage helped him reflect on his ministry and prepare for retirement. He said, “After the experience of the Camino, I am much more ready to be thinking about retirement.” Similarly, a Unitarian Universalist minister walked the Camino, pondering the future of his ministry career. He said, “It was also to think about what the last few years had been for me personally and professionally in the congregation, where I was now, and where I might be going with my life, including my professional life as a minister.” An Episcopal priest made his first Camino after his retirement from full-time parish ministry. He said, “It was

about a year after I had retired. So, I'm kind of wondering what to do in my retirement." As he walked the Camino, he pondered what he would do in his retirement. After returning from the Camino, he started volunteering as a co-chair for a local chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino. In the interview, he made the following comment that would illustrate his passion for this ministry: "I see myself very much as an encourager for others to have a really good Camino experience." As these examples suggest, the Camino de Santiago could be a path of discernment for Protestant pastors.

Along with discernment, walking the Camino would be a valuable spiritual experience for any pastor because it is a rich metaphor that informs the day-to-day practice of ministry. A Methodist pastor said, "It is hard to say that a pilgrimage experience like this informs your whole ministry, but it does provide rich metaphors, sermon illustrations. It provides an understanding of people and community. It helps you understand the idea of setting goals, working towards them. So, it is extremely informative." The Camino pilgrimage is a practical tool for pastors to improve their practices of ministry. For instance, the Camino experience cultivates their skills in listening to others. Many pastors reported that they had a myriad of opportunities to listen to the stories of others along the way. The Camino pilgrimage could also enhance their leadership skills. As Wesley Granberg-Michaelson suggests in his memoir, it would cultivate their skills in "adaptive leadership."<sup>10</sup> The Methodist pastor quoted above also maintains that making a pilgrimage is a formative experience for pastors as follows:

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<sup>10</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, *Without Oars*, 109-10; Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009). In this book, the authors portray adaptive leadership as the practice to mobilize and lead people to tackle the challenges imposed by new realities in changing environments. I believe that this leadership skill is needed for pastors to navigate their congregations in the constantly changing world today. As analyzed in chapter 2, pilgrimage is a liminal experience. It is a journey from a familiar place, like one's home, to an unfamiliar place. Adaptive leadership mobilizes people to take risks and challenge the status quo, leading them into the unknown. In order to lead a congregation into unknown territory, pastoral leaders need to cultivate their own



As ministers, we are called into a relationship with God and a relationship with the community as leaders. And understanding what that is and how to fulfill it is a lifetime process. Seminaries don't form us that well for ministry. They give us a lot of ideas, but they really don't do a lot with formation. But doing pilgrimage is a formative experience. And I think the better formed we are as pastors and as spiritual people, the better we can provide ministry.

As this comment implies, the Camino pilgrimage shapes pastors into more compassionate and spiritually mature pastoral leaders.

I would recommend the Camino to any pastor who really wants to renew their calling, prepare themselves for retirement, and make an important decision on their professional careers as well as on their personal lives. As we engage in the simple rhythm of walking, our heads get cleared. As the waves of our thoughts subside, we become more attentive to our inner voices which we often ignore or suppress. I agree with Ruth Haley Barton that pastoral leaders have to lead their congregations from their souls.<sup>11</sup> In other words, pastors need to listen to their own inner voices as they lead a congregation because God speaks to them in the depths of their souls. Although making a pilgrimage on the Camino demands an extended period of time for us, we can walk the Camino as a part-time pilgrim. We do not have to walk the whole section of the Camino at a time. It can be divided several times. If we can take one Sunday off, we can fly out to Spain from major cities in the United States. If it is difficult to make a trip to Spain, we can find other places in the United States to experience a pilgrimage in an alternative form, for instance, El Camino de San Antonio Missions in Texas, where people “can officially begin

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abilities to stay present to uncertainty and tolerate discomfort. If they are not capable of staying present to uncertainty and discomfort, they would not be able to lead others into unknown territory. Walking the Camino is a practical tool for pastors to move out of their comfort zones. It helps them learn to stay still in uncertainty and discomfort and shapes them into adaptive leaders for the church in the world of constant changing.

<sup>11</sup> Barton, *Strengthening the Soul*, 15.

walking El Camino de Santiago.”<sup>12</sup> We can make a pilgrimage to the seminary from which we have graduated for the renewal of our calling. As many interviewees said, pilgrimage can be experienced where we are. We can make a pilgrimage in our neighborhoods.

### **Discover the Sacred in Everyday Life**

What is the spiritual potential of the Camino pilgrimage for the practice of ministry in Protestant churches today? In the interview, a Methodist pastor stated that pilgrimage was an attitude about how we approached life. She further emphasized that pilgrimage was a journey with an intention. This idea is a key perspective to enhance our traveling experiences. At the same time, it could enrich our spiritual journeys as well. What kinds of intentions do we bring to our spiritual journeys? As an interviewee said, spiritual life is an ordinary, day-to-day experience, but it could become a pilgrimage experience if we bring an intention for spiritual renewal or transformation into it. The Methodist pastor quoted above shared a story of her teachings about what it meant to bring an intention into our daily lives to her congregation as follows:

One of the things we talked about is how we go through life, ... and we did a lot of work on the difference between just living your life and being intentional about your life. There's meaning even when you're washing your dishes. ... And that can be an experience of feeling connected to God. And so, we explored how to do those things, and we tried to experiment with it. And then we had people reflect on the experience and talk to each other about the experiences, but we tried to really get people to be more intentional about what they did in their lives. ... I really think the Camino experience can help you focus on it that way.

The intention we bring to what we do cannot be seen by others, but it would make a difference in our lives. It could change our outer actions and attitudes, such as how we talk, how we walk,

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<sup>12</sup> “Main Menu,” El Camino de San Antonio Missions, accessed February 24, 2024, <https://caminosanantonio.org/>.

how we eat, how we drive, and how we wash. The moments we engage in these ordinary, day-to-day activities can become sacred moments if we live each moment with an intention for renewal and transformation.

As for the impact of the Camino experience, a non-denominational pastor stated that it made him “elevate common tasks of life as sacred in their own space.” Along with congregational ministry, this pastor engages in farming, fixing computers, and taking care of his elderly mother. During the interview, he explained what it meant to “elevate common tasks of life as sacred in their own space” as follows:

When you’re walking, that’s what you’re doing. You can have conversations, and you can be prayerful. You can be singing, but you have to walk. ... You have to keep going, such as life that this week is harvesting soybeans. And I’m on the Camino as I’m walking from the truck which is on one side of the farm to the combine on the other side of the farm, or I’m in the truck, and I’m hauling soybeans eleven miles down the country road, carry in twenty-five thousand pounds of soybeans and a wagon behind me, and I’m singing or praying. And so, this space is sacred. This work I’m doing is sacred space. It’s not sacred because it is ministry. It’s sacred because it is the Camino, it’s the path that I’m on, and God is with me. And I want to draw him in and be conscious of his spirit when I’m hauling beans and combining, when I’m talking to people on the phone about software, or when I’m driving to take care of my mom. All the normal work of life is God’s work. If you take the time to welcome him into the moment and acknowledge his presence, then you will find him there.

As this comment suggests, this pastor discovers God in everyday life. He is conscious of God’s presence in mundane realities. In such a way, he elevates “common tasks of life as sacred in their own space.” This is what he learned on the Camino.

As we become more attentive to what we do, we become more aware of the presence of God in our midst. To feel the presence of God in daily life is based on the theology of incarnation and the sacramental understanding of created realities. It is written in the prologue of the Gospel of John, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.”<sup>13</sup> Since the Son of God

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<sup>13</sup> John 1:14.

became incarnate, we can encounter God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We can also encounter God in the face of others as well as through created things. This understanding of physical and mundane realities would be resonating with the Benedictine spiritualities that seek God in the ordinary experiences of daily life. The *Rule of Benedict* is a book of monastic rules, originally written for monks living in a monastery, but its teachings can be applicable to those living outside the walls of monasteries as well. In chapter 31 of the *Rule*, Benedict instructs the cellarer of the monastery to “think of all the monastery’s property as if they were consecrated chalices.”<sup>14</sup> Ordinary daily utensils, such as cups and dishes, should be treated as sacred vessels for the altar. This teaching can be translatable to any situation in our daily lives. In *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict*, Esther de Waal explicates the teachings of Benedict, in which she writes, “St Benedict is saying that material things are *sacramenta*, symbols that reveal the beauty and the goodness of their creator.”<sup>15</sup> Benedict’s instruction to the cellarer assumes that “all created things are God-given.”<sup>16</sup> It reminds the cellarer that “objects which belong to God cannot be treated lightly.”<sup>17</sup> Physical and mundane realities are sacred vessels through which God’s grace is made manifest. Expounding this teaching, de Waal further argues that this sacramental understanding of material things “emphasizes common creation,” “plays down the division between the sacred and the secular,” and “brings the awareness that all comes from God.”<sup>18</sup> “It enables me to seek God here and now,” says de Waal.<sup>19</sup> As for the daily routine of everyday

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<sup>14</sup> Benedict, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Anthony C. Meisel and M. L. Del Mastro, 1st ed, An Image Book Original (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1975), 74.

<sup>15</sup> Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 104.

<sup>16</sup> De Waal, *Seeking God*, 102.

<sup>17</sup> De Waal, 99.

<sup>18</sup> De Waal, 104.

<sup>19</sup> De Waal, 104.

living, she writes, “What we can learn from the Rule is that the sense of God’s presence can be mediated through daily work and not destroyed by it.”<sup>20</sup> Our ordinary, day-to-day work can become a conduit to encounter God, depending on how we approach our daily work. Divine presence is everywhere, and thus, the glory of God can be praised through our daily work.

In terms of ordinary, day-to-day work, during the interview, a Lutheran pastor shared his interpretation of Martin Luther’s understanding of pilgrimage and vocation as follows:

I think it would be accurate to say that Luther did not reject pilgrimage. What he objected to was what he found along the way. ... What he had expected it to be was a much more of a spiritual experience than it ended up being. He made his trip down to Rome, and that made him, I think, reflect theologically on the sense of holy in the everyday. ... “Do I have to go to Rome to have this experience?” “Could the cobbler not have this kind of experience by making the best pair of shoes that he or she can make?” “Could the farmer not have this kind of experience of closeness to God in the daily work that they do?” And so, whole ministry vocation becomes very important for Lutherans, and finding holy and sacred in the everyday, which, curiously, of course, is what walking the Camino will help you do. You will find the sacred in everyday life.

This Lutheran pastor sees a similarity between what Lutherans are taught about vocation and what he learned on the Camino, that is, encountering the sacred in everyday life. The Camino experience helped him discover the sacred in ordinary things in his daily life. Here, I would say that the intention we bring to our daily lives is a key element to feel the presence of God in our midst. How do we approach our daily lives? What kinds of intentions do we bring with us as we prepare meals for families? What kinds of intentions do we have as we sit in the church office? Sharing a meal is a sacred moment because it is a time of thanksgiving for the food we eat and the fellowship we are given. It could become an act of worship if we bring our gratitude into it. The Camino experience could help us elevate “common tasks of life as sacred in their own

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<sup>20</sup> De Waal, 105.

space.” As Wesley Granberg-Michaelson points out, it provides us with “a sacramental view of reality.”<sup>21</sup>

The Camino pilgrimage is recommended not only to pastors but also to lay persons as well. As the Methodist pastor cited above maintains, the Camino experience would help us become more intentional about what we do, and this spiritual practice would provide a myriad of spiritual benefits for anybody. The Lutheran pastor quoted earlier said, “There are many Caminos to walk. You don’t have to go to Santiago. There are some places in which you will walk intentionally with a goal in mind and an openness to the experience along the way.” This comment implies that he also assumes that pilgrimage is a journey with an intention that can be experienced everywhere. A Unitarian Universalist minister is teaching a course on the Camino outside religious communities, since he believes that pilgrimage is an activity not exclusively for religious people but open to anybody who is in search of meaning and purpose in one’s life. As this minister maintains, making a pilgrimage would be a good spiritual exercise for anybody to enhance one’s spiritual life.

The popularity of the Camino de Santiago has been growing in recent decades. More than four hundred thousand people walked the Camino in 2023. Why were they attracted to the Camino? I have already pointed out several reasons for it. The results of this research provide ample support for my analysis of the recent popularity of the Camino. People in contemporary western societies are living in the so-called “post-secular” age. As analyzed earlier in chapter 2, Charles Taylor argues that contemporary western societies are undergoing a time of transition “from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith,

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<sup>21</sup> Granberg-Michaelson, *Without Oars*, 128.

even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others.”<sup>22</sup> Although belief in God has become one option among many, as Taylor contends, their spiritual quest is not diminishing, but rather they have renewed interests in religion. Today, people are looking for something sacred through subjective and personal spiritual experiences. The emergence of the “religious Nones” and those identifying themselves as SBNR are prime examples of this spiritual phenomenon. They are interested in spiritual matters but do not belong to a specific religious institution. They engage in spiritual practices but do not go to church for worship. They are looking for an authentic spiritual experience of the sacred outside the walls of organized religious institutions. As already discussed in chapter 2, in *Choosing Our Religion*, Elizabeth Drescher analyzes the spiritual lives of the “religious Nones,” summarizing their spiritual trends into several common features. According to her analysis, their spiritual lives are “relational,” “embedded in experiences ... of everyday life,” “embodied,” “drawing on diverse resources,” “dynamic over time,” “transformational,” and “tend to highlight experiences of authenticity and connectedness in the present moment.”<sup>23</sup> These common features of their spiritual lives seem to resonate with what the Protestant pastors interviewed encountered on the Camino.

Why are people interested in the Camino de Santiago? Why does the Camino pilgrimage attract many people today? A Unitarian Universalist minister shared his observation about it:

This [the Camino] is something that people may have heard about, but they don’t know a lot about it. They may know some people who’ve done it, but they haven’t. So, I think part of it is just curiosity and interest, and being intrigued at something that is a little bit exotic or out of the way. But again, the core of the message that I’m trying to get across to them is not so much about the Camino itself, but about how we get in touch with our soul or spirit, or with that which is greater than ourselves. Whether you want to call it God, or the universe, or life, or love, or anything else, I think that it touches people.

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<sup>22</sup> Taylor, *Secular Age*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 119.

This minister finds that people are spiritually hungry today, looking for connection with that which is greater than themselves. In the interview, a Presbyterian minister discussed the recent popularity of pilgrimage as follows:

Now there's an interest, and it's both, I would say, Christian or religious, but it's also secular as well. People are interested without necessarily being drawn to Christianity. ... There's something that's calling people, fascinating people about walking and discovering things along the way."

This minister also detected the spiritual hunger of people today, both religious and non-religious. He further shared his analysis of the recent popularity of the pilgrimage as follows:

In Norway, St. Olav's Way has become very popular, but these walking pilgrim routes are now becoming very popular among people who have never stepped foot in a church themselves. ... But there's a spiritual draw to the experience. ... Walking the Camino gives you an experience. ... That's a full experience of all your senses, your thoughts, your heart, your body, everything. You're fully engaged. It's not just sitting and worshiping, and having your head engaged in a sermon. I love preaching, but, in a worship service, it's not so for people who are looking for an experience. They want a full experience. They want something to really throw themselves at. The Camino experience or pilgrimage experience provides that, I think, in some ways sometimes worship doesn't.

He continued:

Theology believes all of that is really important. But if that is all that we're talking about, or trying to debate or defend, or to prove to someone that my belief is better than your belief or that I have belief and you don't have belief, that's not engaging the full person. And I think a lot of people don't have any patience for that. But I think a pilgrimage experience provides a fuller, authentic, spiritual, religious experience. It's very important.

This minister argues that the Camino pilgrimage provides an engaged experience of the sacred for people. It is a fully engaged spiritual experience that involves all aspects of our beings, intellectually, physically, and spiritually, and the church is not necessarily providing such an experience to people today. This minister further remarked:

Belief is important. But belief can also be divisive. ... But walking with the Lord and walking together as a church, ... I think, is a very rich metaphor. It's far more incarnational because there's the physicality of walking itself. And the faith is being embodied through, not the thought of walking, but actually walking, and connecting the



foot to the ground and being grounded in a particular place and time. We also then relate to the community around us when we walk. We don't connect to the world around us when we're in a car. We become familiar with our neighborhood in our communities when we walk through them, when we interact with people along the way.

As this minister points out, belief can be contentious, though it is very important for the Christian faith. In addition to belief, this minister encourages us to think of the Christian faith through the metaphor of walking. He said, "I think it is a richer relational image or metaphor for us to use perhaps these days." Walking is an embodied practice that involves all aspects of our beings. It brings our minds, bodies, and souls together. As this minister argues, it is also an incarnational experience. This kind of fully engaged spiritual experience is what people are looking for today. Many of the pastors interviewed reported that they had a fully engaged spiritual experience of the sacred as they walked the Camino. They met people from all over the world. They got injured and suffered physical pain. They were touched by the hospitality extended to them. They walked the paths thousands of people had walked over the centuries. They encountered God through these tangible experiences by using all of their five senses. During the interviews, many of the pastors talked about the usefulness of the metaphor of walking to understand the Christian faith. The Camino is a rich metaphor for our spiritual journeys, both personally and communally. Everyone walks one's own spiritual journey; at the same time, we walk together as a community of faith. After returning from the Camino, these pastors incorporated the metaphor of walking into their practices of ministry, inviting their congregants to think of their spiritual journeys as a pilgrimage

A challenge is how to teach the spiritual potential of pilgrimage to Protestants because pilgrimage is not a common word to describe the Christian faith for them. Since the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, the practice of pilgrimage has been undervalued among them. How can the idea and practice of pilgrimage be integrated into the practice of Protestant

ministry? It would be a real challenge to Protestant pastors. The Presbyterian minister, who was exposed to the rich history of pilgrimage while he was living in Scotland, said of the challenge as follows:

A challenge is how to create a framework in an American setting when we don't have cathedrals. We have the National Cathedral here, but we don't have locations that have that kind of rich spiritual religious designation. Do you have to go to Europe or somewhere else in the world to have a pilgrimage? What does pilgrimage look like in an American context? I think that's where it's difficult to translate it. Are you familiar with the Sanctuary Chimayo, New Mexico? But that's still within the Catholic tradition of a pilgrimage site. There's no equivalent in the Protestant tradition for that. And you can't just create it out of thin air. ... For some, going on the civil rights tour through the deep South, through Alabama, Mississippi, the places that are associated with the civil rights movement, places associated with Martin Luther King Jr., ... almost becomes a pilgrimage kind of route that becomes a holy track to follow. To go to the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday and go to those places where something significant happened ... is somewhat close to going to holy ground. What's the holy ground for us in an American context? It's very difficult to find those places. So that's a question. Otherwise, it's difficult for Americans to get hooked by pilgrimage. I know people go on in a very secular setting. They'll go on tours of the great baseball stadiums, or, if you're a golfer, go to the great golf courses in the United States. These are special places, holy ground. But it's difficult to find the equivalent from a theological, religious Protestant perspective.

How can we provide such a pilgrimage experience to Protestants in the United States? As discussed earlier, pilgrimage can be experienced where we live since it is a journey with an intention. God is omnipresent and everywhere; accordingly, we can seek God where we are. Pilgrimage is not a matter of geographical destinations but a matter of heart. It is an interior spiritual journey into the self while we make an outer journey to a sacred site. In chapter 3, I referred to the statement made by a Methodist pastor who reaffirmed his theological conviction that at the heart of the gospel was a new beginning. Listening to the stories of others, he discovered that many people were experiencing life transitions and looking for a new beginning. Moving from one stage of life to the next, they were reflecting back on their past as well as thinking of their future. The Camino was a time for discernment for them. All of us go through

multiple transitional moments in life, such as graduation, getting a job, marriage, having a child, relocation, unemployment, divorce, retirement, illness, the death of someone, and others. As we move into the next stage of life, we step across a threshold. As analyzed in chapter 2, Christine Valters Paintner argues that pilgrimage is an inner spiritual journey and that its goal is “to find the place of our resurrection.”<sup>24</sup> Pilgrims make an outer journey to a sacred site in order to discover their resurrected selves, that is, a new beginning. Pilgrimage is a liminal experience. As pilgrims leave their home and go to unknown places, they move out of their comfort zones and go across a threshold. The threshold is a place of uncertainty and discomfort because the past has gone and the future has not yet come. Hence, as we move from one stage of life to the next, we often experience disorientation.

Today, people are living with a sense of uncertainty. Feeling lost and fragmented in the transitional moments of life, they are seriously searching for the meaning of life. The Camino pilgrimage is appealing to the spiritual sensitivities of people in contemporary societies because the liminal experience on the Camino resonates with the life experiences of many. As a liminal experience, the Camino pilgrimage provides us with an opportunity to explore the self. Walking is a fundamental practice of coming back to oneself. The constant rhythm of walking helps us get centered. Many people walk the Camino when they go through transitions in life. The Camino is a path of discernment for many. People walk the Camino, searching for a new beginning, a place for their resurrected selves. In this sense, the Camino pilgrimage embodies the core belief of the Christian faith, that is, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the paschal mystery enacted in the sacrament of baptism. Pilgrims go through death and resurrection as they walk the Camino. As they leave a stone at the Cruz de Ferro, they leave the past behind and start a new life. By

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<sup>24</sup> Paintner, *Soul's Slow Ripening*, 25.

walking to the end of the earth in Finisterre, they go through the symbolic death of the self and find their resurrected selves. “What is the true, flourishing life, and how can we live it?” As pointed out earlier, according to Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, this is the fundamental human quest in any culture.<sup>25</sup> As a religious institution, the Christian church is called to provide a convincing answer to this fundamental human quest; however, the messages the church often conveys are not necessarily life-giving for many. Their emphasis on right belief sounds rigid and often contentious, though it is very important for the Christian faith. Today, many people are disaffiliated with organized religions for a variety of reasons.<sup>26</sup> They are looking for something sacred through personal and subjective spiritual experiences. On the Camino, faith is experienced by walking. It is practiced holistically with our minds, bodies, and souls. How can we provide such a fully engaged spiritual experience of the sacred to people today? In the next section, I will explore the implications of the research results for the practice of Protestant ministry today.

### **Implications for the Practice of Protestant Ministry**

All of the research participants recommended the Camino pilgrimage to their colleagues. They found the benefits of this practice for spiritual renewal and deepening; they also discovered that their practices of ministry were revitalized as a result of walking the Camino. What are the practical implications of the Camino pilgrimage for the practice of Protestant ministry? This section considers the possible spiritual practices Protestant pastors can incorporate into their practices of ministry. Based on the findings of this research, I would suggest the following three spiritual practices for Protestant ministry: the practice of walking, the practice of hospitality, and

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<sup>25</sup> Volf and Croasmun, *Life of the World*, 17, 19.

<sup>26</sup> Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion*, 53-88. In chapter 2 of this book, Drescher describes how people became “religious Nones” and their reasons to leave their original religious affiliation.

the practice of silence. All of these spiritual practices provide fully engaged spiritual experiences of the sacred that bring our minds, bodies, and hearts together.

### **The Practice of Walking**

One of the spiritual practices the Protestant pastors interviewed have incorporated into their practices of ministry after the Camino is the practice of meditative walking. Many pastors walk regularly after returning from the Camino. Some of them encourage their congregants to engage in the practice of meditative walking for their spiritual nourishment. One of the benefits of walking is that it clears our heads. Our minds are always thinking of something. Walking is a physical exercise, and its constant rhythm slows down our minds. *Solvitur ambulando* is a well-known Latin phrase that means, “It is solved by walking.”<sup>27</sup> This Latin phrase is often attributed to Augustine of Hippo,<sup>28</sup> referring to our shared experience that a problem is often solved while we are walking. When we reach a logical impasse, we are often encouraged to take a walk. Walking helps us keep our distance from the problem and gives us fresh ideas.

As described in chapter 3, there are various ways to incorporate the practice of meditative walking into the practice of ministry. On the practical level, walking around the neighborhood is a useful tool for ministry as it connects us to people in our neighborhood. During the interview, a Presbyterian minister stated that walking around the neighborhood was a spiritual practice that could ground us in the local area in which a congregation was engaged in ministry. We first need to know about people if we want to reach out to them. We can know more about them by walking around the neighborhood. In the United States, an automobile is used for our daily

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<sup>27</sup> Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “*solvitur ambulando*,” accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/solvitur%20ambulando>.

<sup>28</sup> Boers, *Way Is Made by Walking*, 148.

transportation, but we could not know our neighbors or what is going on in our neighborhood by driving a car because it travels fast. The Camino de Santiago is a path on which people walk very slowly. We are invited to savor each moment and become more attentive to things around us. In her article, Cara Anthony illuminates the practice of slow walking as an act of resistance to “hypermobility,” which refers to the prevalent mode of living in the United States where people often travel far and fast, arguing that this mode of living “erodes encounters with landscapes and neighbors, and accelerates the mistreatment of both nature and vulnerable members of our communities.”<sup>29</sup> I would recommend the practice of slow walking around the neighborhood for the practice of Protestant ministry because it grounds us in our local community and connects us to our neighbors. According to the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus started his public ministry in Galilee, he made his home in Capernaum.<sup>30</sup> This is what Jesus had done before he began his public ministry. He decided to be rooted in the area in which he was going to proclaim the good news. To be rooted in one’s local area is an essential practice of ministry. It helps us get to know more about people living in our neighborhood.

Next, the practice of walking a labyrinth can be incorporated into the practice of Protestant ministry. The labyrinth was used as an alternative form of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages when making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem was expensive and dangerous due to social instability.<sup>31</sup> In *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice*, Lauren Artress, a pioneer of labyrinth studies, explores the history and the spiritual significance of the labyrinth, arguing that walking the labyrinth is a spiritual practice for the transformation,

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<sup>29</sup> Cara Anthony, “Walking as Resistance to Hypermobility: The Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage,” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 18, no. 1 (2018): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1353/scs.2018.0001>.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 4:13.

<sup>31</sup> Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path*, 32.

healing, and renewal of the self. Like the practice of walking the Camino, people search for the inner self through walking a labyrinth, as she says, “It connects us to the depths of our souls so we can remember who we are.”<sup>32</sup> As for the psychological effects of walking the labyrinth, she further writes, “The labyrinth teaches us that if we keep putting one foot in front of the other, we can quiet the mind and find our center.”<sup>33</sup> For Artress, the labyrinth is “a powerful spiritual tool whose path would lead each of us to our center.”<sup>34</sup> It can be used as an alternative form of pilgrimage, as she notes, “It helps them [people] see their lives in the context of a path, a pilgrimage.”<sup>35</sup> As we walk a labyrinth, we would be able to experience a pilgrimage without going to Spain. It is an experience of walking on one’s spiritual path, like the Camino. We can find a labyrinth lying on the floor of the sanctuary in the church, for instance, Grace Cathedral, San Francisco. Lancaster Theological Seminary also has a cloth labyrinth on the ground floor in the library. A labyrinth can be found easily where we live.

In addition, the practice of walking can be incorporated into the practice of ministry as a metaphor. It can connect us to our biblical roots. As many of the pastors interviewed suggested, walking is a rich metaphor for the Christian faith, and its theme is abundant throughout the Scriptures. We walk our own spiritual journey individually; at the same time, we walk together as a community of faith. To be a disciple of Jesus means to walk with him and follow him. We can explore the theme of walking or pilgrimage in the Scriptures as well as in the Christian tradition with our congregants for Bible studies or adult education classes. It could expand our understanding of the Christian faith.

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<sup>32</sup> Artress, introduction to *Walking a Sacred Path*, xxi.

<sup>33</sup> Artress, preface to the second edition of *Walking a Sacred Path*, xvi.

<sup>34</sup> Artress, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Artress, 21.

Lastly, the practice of meditative walking connects us to nature. In her article, Kristen Johnson Largen compares the Christian pilgrimage to a meditative walk in the rock garden in *Ryoanji*, a Zen temple in Kyoto, Japan, arguing that meditative walking can “inculcate a sense of radical interconnectedness between humanity and nature, and foster more explicit Christian ecological commitments and doctrines.”<sup>36</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us that we can feel the earth on the soles of our feet as we walk gently on it. He writes, “Be aware of the contact between your feet and the Earth. Walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet.”<sup>37</sup> We touch God’s creation as we touch the ground with our soles. We also learn stewardship and taking care of the earth through the practice of mindful walking.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, a gentle walk can make our world a more hospitable place for all, as Thich Nhat Hanh keeps reminding us that it can bring us peace and joy. The practice of mindful walking is a meditative practice in Zen Buddhism. Walking is an ecumenical and inter-religious spiritual practice that connects us to people in other faith traditions. It could be a practice of making peace.

In summary, the practice of meditative walking is a valuable tool for the practice of ministry in Protestant churches. It helps us clear our minds and makes us more attentive to our bodies and hearts. It promotes our physical health as well as our emotional and psychological well-being because it releases stress. It also helps us get centered. It is a path of self-exploration and self-discovery. We also find God as we walk in nature. We can feel harmony with God’s creation. As an act of resistance to “hypermobility,” the practice of slow walking promotes environmental justice. Furthermore, it promotes social justice as well, as Arthur Paul Boers

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<sup>36</sup> Kristin Johnston Largen, “Living the Walk: Meditative Christian Walking and Ryōanji,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2021): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bcs.2021.0007>.

<sup>37</sup> Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 28.

<sup>38</sup> Nhat Hanh, *Long Road Turns to Joy*, 21.



writes, “Walking is an act of dissent; it is countercultural.”<sup>39</sup> Walking is a fully engaged spiritual practice that brings our minds, bodies, and souls together. As our minds slow down, our thoughts subside, and we can more easily hear the voice of God speaking to us in the depths of our hearts. The practice of mindful walking is a practical tool to sharpen our awareness of God in our daily lives.

### **The Practice of Hospitality**

One of the spiritual practices in which the Christian church over the centuries has been engaged is the practice of hospitality. As many of the research participants reported, pilgrims have a myriad of opportunities to provide and receive hospitality on the Camino. In the *albergue*, pilgrims are warmly welcomed and provided a shelter for the night. They receive hospitality from local residents and other pilgrims along the way. They often share meals with fellow pilgrims. Pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago is abundant with the practice of hospitality. Some of the pastors interviewed found the practice of hospitality an essential call for the church and have brought it back to their ministry contexts.

What is the practice of hospitality in the Christian church? In *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Christine D. Pohl explores the practice of hospitality in the Christian tradition, arguing that “hospitality is a way of life fundamental to Christian identity.”<sup>40</sup> In this book, she argues that, in the last three hundred years, “the term ‘hospitality’ has lost its moral dimension and, in the process, most Christians have lost touch with the amazingly rich and complex tradition of hospitality.”<sup>41</sup> According to her analysis, when people hear the word,

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<sup>39</sup> Boers, *Way Is Made by Walking*, 164.

<sup>40</sup> Christine D. Pohl, preface to *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), x.

<sup>41</sup> Pohl, *Making Room*, 4.

“hospitality,” they often think of the hospitality industries of luxurious hotels and restaurants or a gathering of family and friends over a nice meal, but originally it was a practice of welcoming strangers in the Christian tradition, which had a moral component.<sup>42</sup> She writes, “Indeed, Christian believers were to regard hospitality to strangers as a fundamental expression of the gospel.”<sup>43</sup>

Why did early Christians consider the practice of hospitality to be a fundamental expression of their identity? Exploring the ancient practice of hospitality, Pohl identifies the grand narrative behind which hospitality has been practiced in the Judeo-Christian tradition. For the people of ancient Israel, it was their identity as an alien and their experience of being strangers in the land of Egypt. According to Pohl, “this alien identity also provided an experiential basis from which Israelites could know the feelings and needs of sojourners and powerless people living in their midst.”<sup>44</sup> The people of ancient Israel were commanded to be compassionate to strangers in their midst, as it is written in Exodus 23:9, “You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” Pohl points out that this commandment reminds them that they were sojourners in the land of Egypt and lived by God’s grace on earth.<sup>45</sup> The people of ancient Israel were resident aliens in a foreign land, and thus, they should know the feelings of being treated as an alien; therefore, they should not oppress resident aliens living among them but rather be sympathetic to them.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Pohl, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Pohl, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Pohl, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Pohl, 28.

<sup>46</sup> Pohl, 28. Pohl writes, “Israel’s experience of vulnerability and dependence was expected to yield a sympathetic and gracious treatment of the vulnerable aliens in its own land.”

The word, “pilgrimage,” originally means “stranger,” “foreign,” and “going through a field” in Latin.<sup>47</sup> Pilgrims are strangers going through a foreign land. As analyzed earlier in chapter 2, pilgrimage is often considered a liminal experience. Pilgrims leave their home, a familiar place, and go to a distant land, an unfamiliar place. Hence, pilgrimage is an experience of becoming a sojourner. Pilgrims encounter various occurrences in a foreign land, where the languages spoken are different from their own. As they become strangers in a foreign land, they feel vulnerable and realize that they really need help from others.

Hospitality is a spiritual practice of the church. It is rooted in the experience of the people of ancient Israel and the people of the early church. For Christian believers, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the Cross is the root of our practice of hospitality, as the Apostle Paul says in the letter to the Romans, “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.”<sup>48</sup> As God graciously accepted us in Jesus Christ on the Cross, we are expected to accept others and extend our generosity to them.

Throughout the history of the church, the practice of hospitality has been passed on in monasteries. Providing hospitality to strangers and travelers is an important spiritual practice for Benedictine monasteries. Benedictine monks are instructed to welcome a guest as Christ, as it is written in chapter 53 of the *Rule*, “All guests to the monastery should be welcomed as Christ.”<sup>49</sup> The rationale behind this teaching is the story of the great judgment Jesus narrates in the Gospel of Matthew 25:31-46, in which God, who is portrayed as the king, says, “I was a stranger and

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<sup>47</sup> Reader, *Pilgrimage*, 20; Paintner, *Soul of a Pilgrim*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Pohl, *Making Room*, 29. Pohl identifies the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ through which people could be welcomed into the kingdom of God, expressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 15:7, as a rationale behind the practice of hospitality in the Christian church.

<sup>49</sup> Benedict, *Rule*, 89.

you welcomed me.”<sup>50</sup> Expounding this teaching of the *Rule of Benedict*, Esther de Waal argues that “hospitality means more than simply the open door, and the place at table; it means warmth, acceptance, enjoyment in welcoming whoever has arrived.”<sup>51</sup> Benedict teaches us that we see the face of Christ in the face of a stranger and that we welcome Christ as we welcome a stranger. On the Camino, we are invited to see other pilgrims as fellow pilgrims. We are invited to recognize one another as our friends. The Camino pilgrimage encourages us to see Christ in the face of others.

When we hear the word, “hospitality,” in a congregational setting, we often think of coffee hour after worship service. A cup of coffee could become a sign of God’s welcome when we welcome others and strangers from the bottom of our hearts. As this example would suggest, hospitality is a matter of heart. As mentioned earlier, a Unitarian Universalist minister defines ministry as providing a safe space for others. He provided a safe space for others and listened to their stories along the way. Attentive listening is a practice of hospitality. It is the act of creating room for others. As de Waal points out, we often impose our rules, values, and/or assumptions on others as we welcome them, but the real hospitality is to welcome others as they are and create room for them to be who they are.<sup>52</sup>

Many of the research participants reported that they enjoyed hospitality on the Camino. They felt warmly welcomed by local residents as well as by other pilgrims along the way. As they were welcomed by others, they were transformed to be welcoming to others. Christine D. Pohl says, “Hospitality is a way of life fundamental to Christian identity. Its mysteries, riches,

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<sup>50</sup> Matthew 25:35; Pohl, *Making Room*, 21-22. Pohl writes, “This has been the most important passage for the entire tradition on Christian hospitality.”

<sup>51</sup> De Waal, *Seeking God*, 120.

<sup>52</sup> De Waal, 120-22.

and difficulties are revealed most fully as it is practiced.”<sup>53</sup> Hospitality is a tangible expression of the Christian faith. Some of the pastors have brought it back to their own ministry contexts. The practice of Protestant ministry can be revitalized by the spiritual practice of hospitality.

### **The Practice of Silence**

Protestant pastors can utilize the practice of silence for their ministries. This research discovered that Protestant pastors truly enjoyed solitude on the Camino. Many pastors reported that their faith was refreshed and that their trust in God was deepened by spending time alone with God. Silence is a spiritual discipline of staying still in the presence of God. It is a spiritual practice of listening to God speaking to us in the depths of our hearts. We are always thinking of something all the time. We have to quiet our minds and become silent before we listen to the Word of God.

One of the ways to incorporate the practice of silence into our ministry is the practice of Centering Prayer. It is a form of silent prayer that deepens our relationship with God. Thomas Keating, OCSO, is one of the founders of the Centering Prayer movement. In *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, he explains what Centering Prayer is about and how to practice it, inviting readers to rest in the presence of God through this practice.<sup>54</sup> This contemplative form of prayer is also part of *Lectio Divina*, a prayerful reading of the Scriptures. To sit still in the presence of God and let go of our thoughts is a spiritual discipline that cultivates mindfulness in us. As we stay still in silence and stop thinking, we are more aware of the presence of God in our midst.

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<sup>53</sup> Pohl, *Making Room*, x.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York: Continuum, 1986), 33-51.

As I walked the Camino, I discovered intimacy between Centering Prayer in the Christian tradition and the practice of meditation in Zen Buddhism. As Centering Prayer invites us to stay still and rest in the presence of God, the practice of meditation in Zen Buddhism also invites us to stay in the present moment. Both of them encourage us to stop thinking and be attentive to the present moment, “here and now.” Pilgrimage is a liminal/threshold experience. As we step across a threshold, we experience uncertainty and discomfort because it is where the past has gone and the future has not yet come. A threshold is a frightening place, but it could become a place for discernment, introspection, and prayer for us if we bring an intention for transformation and renewal with us. As we step across the threshold, we are invited to sit still and listen to God speaking to us in the depths of our souls. The spiritual discipline of silence encourages us to seek God’s grace in each moment. Although it would be difficult for us to recognize God’s grace in a liminal space because we are experiencing uncertainty, discomfort, and disorientation in this place, it is a place of possibilities as well where something new can emerge. It is a potent place where God makes Godself known to us through revelation. The spiritual practice of silence cultivates in us an awareness of the presence of God at every moment. It also helps us hear the Word of God in the depths of our hearts. In the Gospels, Jesus often went out to the mountain and prayed to God by himself.<sup>55</sup> He regularly withdrew to deserted places and prayed alone in solitude.<sup>56</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount, he taught his disciples how they should pray as follows: “But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.”<sup>57</sup> These scriptural passages indicate that Jesus often prayed to God by himself in a quiet

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<sup>55</sup> Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12.

<sup>56</sup> Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16.

<sup>57</sup> Matthew 6:6.

place and invited his disciples to pray likewise. The practice of silent prayer is biblically rooted. I would recommend the practice of silence for spiritual nourishment in Protestant churches.

## **Summary**

The three spiritual practices suggested in this section are practical tools to experience the Camino pilgrimage where we are without going to Spain. As we walk around the neighborhood, we can experience what the walking of the Camino looks like. As we extend our warm welcome to strangers in our church, we experience what the hospitality of the Camino looks like. As we sit silently in the presence of God at home, in the chapel, or in nature, we experience what the silent walk on the Camino looks like. Pilgrimage is a journey with an intention. It can be experienced where we are.

Furthermore, all of these spiritual practices are fully engaged spiritual practices. Walking is a physical activity. Hospitality is exchanged through human interactions. Silence is a spiritual exercise that connects our bodies and souls. All of them invite us to come into the presence of God. We encounter God with our whole beings through these spiritual practices. Today, people are looking for a fully engaged spiritual experience of the sacred. They are searching for something sacred in their daily lives through subjective and personal spiritual experiences. Thus, these three spiritual practices can be utilized as practical tools to invite new people to the church. More than that, they are useful tools for us to cultivate our awareness of God in our daily lives. These spiritual practices could transform our inner spiritual lives. As the theory developed through this research suggests, our outer actions spring from our inner disposition. The Camino experience transforms us into more hospitable persons from the inside. It also cultivates in us the joy of being in the presence of God.

Listening to the Word of God is one of the essential spiritual disciplines in Protestantism. The Camino provides a sacred space in which we are invited to listen to the Word of God in the depths of our souls. Pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago is an ancient spiritual practice of the Christian church. It started before the Protestant Reformation, and thus, it is not necessarily foreign to Protestantism; rather, it is part of our heritage. Through this research, I discovered that many Protestant pastors enjoyed walking the Camino, recognizing the spiritual benefits of this spiritual practice for their personal spiritual lives, and bringing it back to their ministry contexts. As I heard their Camino stories, I have come to the conclusion that the Camino experience has definitely enhanced their practices of ministry afterward.

### **Study Limitations**

There are possible areas needed for further studies about the relationship between the practice of walking the Camino and the practice of Protestant ministry. The limitations of this research come from several factors. One of the study limitations pertains to the sample size of this research. Although I interviewed fifteen clergy persons and one clergy person's spouse, I could only collect positive views of their Camino experiences. All interviewees reported that their experiences of the Camino pilgrimage were very rich and inspiring for them. They were very willing to share their Camino stories with the researcher, and I did not hear any negative comment on the Camino from them. Hence, this research does not include an analysis of the negative impacts of the Camino experience on the practice of Protestant ministry.

The second is related to the age group of the research participants. Fourteen interviewees are over sixty years old, and two are between fifty-one and sixty. There is no participant under fifty. The participants are relatively experienced pastors, and many of them have a long ministry



career. I assume that they could take a sabbatical leave more easily than younger pastors after spending several years in the same ministry context. Moreover, they seemed to have strong interests in the Camino pilgrimage as their life experiences developed. Perhaps, they wanted to reflect back on their long ministry careers as they moved toward retirement or at some point in their professional lives. Hence, this research does not include the voices of younger pastors who have walked the Camino. It would be an interesting study to compare the impacts of the Camino experience on pastors at different stages of professional development. How does their spiritual and emotional development as a pastor affect their Camino experiences?

The third is related to the religious/cultural context in which this research was conducted. This research was conducted within the North American religious context, and all of the research participants are North Americans. Their ministry contexts are either in the United States or in Canada, and thus, the cultural environment of North America has influenced their responses. As a Presbyterian minister stated, unlike Europe, pilgrimage is not part of religious life in the United States. Although there is a Catholic pilgrimage site, like the Santuario de Chimayo in northern New Mexico, pilgrimage is relatively undervalued by Protestants in the United States. In other parts of the world, people are more familiar with the practice of pilgrimage. There are several pilgrimage routes in Japan, which have a long history and are integrated into Japanese society, for instance, the Shikoku pilgrimage, a twelve-hundred-kilometer pilgrimage route, visits eighty-eight Buddhist temples on the island of Shikoku. It would be possible to do a similar study in other religious and cultural contexts, like European or Asian countries, and compare what Protestant pastors in Europe or Asia would say about their experiences of the Camino with what I have discovered through my research.

The fourth factor also pertains to the sample limitations. I initially planned to conduct surveys and interviews with congregants to understand their perceptions of how their pastors' Camino experiences impacted the practice of ministry in their congregation. Since the pastors' reflections are subjective accounts of their Camino experiences and their practices of ministry, I wanted to gather more objective data from the perspectives of congregants. I reached out to several congregants with permission from their pastors but had difficulty communicating with them.

These study limitations should be taken into consideration for further studies on the Camino pilgrimage and its impact on the practice of ministry. Yet, this research is not to be undermined due to these study limitations, as it provides a theory derived from the data that is firmly grounded in the actual experiences of Protestant pastors. As I proceeded with the iterative data collection and analysis, I reached the point of saturation after completing about thirteen interviews and had enough information to develop a theory. But all interviews were needed to complete this research. I appreciate all the research participants providing data for this study.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This research has filled the gap in the existing literature as it provides a theory that explains how the Camino experience impacts the practice of ministry for Protestant pastors. Through this research, I discovered that the Camino pilgrimage was a useful instrument for Protestant pastors to revitalize their practices of ministry. It could deepen their spiritual connection to God and cultivate their awareness of the presence of God in their daily lives. A strong and intimate relationship with God is the foundation of our ministry. The Camino is a powerful tool to cultivate such a relationship for Protestant pastors. Although I recognize that

pilgrimage is not a spiritual practice for everyone, I would highly recommend the practice of walking the Camino for anyone who really wants to renew their Christian faith.

## Afterword

Finally, I have arrived at the final destination of this pilgrimage journey. As many pilgrims feel disoriented in Santiago de Compostela, I am feeling disoriented. Like many other pilgrims who continue to walk to Finisterre before returning home, I need time for reflection and adjustment before going back to my normal life. My pilgrimage journey for this DMin major project had been prepared for me by God long before I realized it. In September 2019, I happened to visit Lancaster Theological Seminary. At that time, I was a missionary for a Japanese speaking congregation in New York. When this congregation celebrated its thirty years of ministry in that month, I had a guest from Japan, who was my mentor. When he was a pastor for a historic congregation in Sendai, Japan, I spent a summer at his church as an intern. More than one hundred thirty years ago, two missionaries who graduated from Lancaster Theological Seminary went to Sendai and co-founded a theological school there with a Japanese pastor, who was one of the founders of the congregation to which my mentor was ministering. Because of this historical connection, my mentor was interested in visiting Lancaster Theological Seminary and asked me to take him to the seminary. I soon contacted the seminary and asked for a campus visit. When we arrived at the seminary, the president and the dean welcomed us and gave us a campus tour. I was impressed by the documents of the missionary work of these two missionaries archived in the library. I was also surprised to see symbolic images of Japan, Mt. Fuji and a *torii*, an entrance gate for a Shinto shrine, etched in the stained-glass windows in the chapel. A year later, I was sitting in the online classroom for DSEM1, a required course for the first-year DMin student. I never thought of the DMin program for myself. but somehow, I was led to this path. It was a challenging journey for me, but it was one of the most exciting adventures of my life. I met many people on this journey who kept encouraging me. I want to

express my deepest appreciation to my project supervisor, Rev. Dr. Stephens Lytch, for his guidance and encouragement throughout this research. I also appreciate Dr. Anne Thayer for her scholarly insights. I want to express my special thanks to all of the research participants who shared with me their Camino stories. As I heard their stories, I felt that I had to take off my shoes because I was standing on holy ground. My special thanks also go to American Pilgrims on the Camino for allowing me to interview its members. It was truly an experience of “The Camino Provides” for me. Lastly, I want to thank my family, who have always supported me during this journey. The practice of going back home is an important aspect of the practice of pilgrimage. How do I incorporate what I learned during this pilgrimage into my daily life? This is a life-time question. As I embark on a return journey, I keep saying to myself, “¡*Ultreya* (go forward)!” This is the spirit of the Camino. I understand what this word means more deeply through this research. Thank you to all who walked with me on this pilgrimage journey. Without your help, I would not have been able to reach the goal of my project. ¡*Buen Camino*!

## Appendix

### Invitation Letter to the Research to American Pilgrims on the Camino

Dear Pilgrims,

Hello, my name is Yoko Ueda. I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Ministry Program at Lancaster Theological Seminary.

I am seeking participants in my research that studies Protestant pastors who have walked the Camino de Santiago and the impact of the Camino experience on the practice of ministry.

I am inviting Protestant pastors who have walked the Camino to my study. Participation in the survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participants will be asked to describe their experience of walking the Camino and its impact on their practice of ministry. Participating in this study may not benefit participants directly, but it will help us learn more about the spiritual potential of the practice of pilgrimage for ministry. There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort involved in participating in this research.

All your responses will be kept confidential; all data will be kept on a password-protected digital device. At the completion of my project, all data will be destroyed by the researcher. No names or identifying information would be included in any publications or presentations based on these data.

If you could participate in the survey and share your experience of walking the Camino and its impact on your practice of ministry with me, I would appreciate it. Please access the link below to complete the online survey on Google Forms.

Online Survey Link: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeUjIJ3oV4bjgQc4OWOEFb-vme1jEtINRo8Ev\\_\\_iYkQsU3QeA/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeUjIJ3oV4bjgQc4OWOEFb-vme1jEtINRo8Ev__iYkQsU3QeA/viewform?usp=sf_link)

If you have trouble accessing the online survey, please contact me at [yueda@lancasterseminary.edu](mailto:yueda@lancasterseminary.edu). I will send you the survey in another format.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing your Camino story.

Buen Camino,  
Yoko Ueda

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