



PILGRIMS

By Ian Menzies

Several people I know have walked some or all of a Camino pilgrimage trail that can commence from multiple places all over Europe but which all eventually arrive at the shrine of St James in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain.

Some take months to complete their journey. Others return regularly to do another section, completing the whole over years.

Some just walk the last 100km, and all seem filled with a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

Prayerfully walking a labyrinth is another, less physically demanding discipline that echoes these longer journeys.

Unlike a maze, a labyrinth is a single pathway to the central focal point.

Some carry a symbolic stone to place there: a prayer, a weight, a concern.

Then, leaving it behind, they return to their present lives by retracing that inward journey.

New Zealand writer Richard Gillard's popular hymn 'Brother, sister, let me serve you' contains the lines, "We are pilgrims on a journey and companions on the road; we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load".

Life itself is viewed here as a pilgrimage. Our symbolic "stones" are viewed as a shared responsibility.

Sometimes we need to accept help with our "load", other times we need to proffer aid to others.

The challenge in all these things is awareness. Awareness of one's own needs and a willingness to accept assistance, and the developing of a conscious watchfulness for the needs of others and of ways to help.

For although a pilgrimage may seem at times a deeply personal and solitary thing, its richness lies in the sharing of the experience with others on the journey.

As it is with life.