

“Walk the Ancient Sands Pilgrimage”
at Sandbanks Provincial Park in Prince Edward County, Ontario
offered in celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the United Church of Canada
in 2025 presented by
Rev. Aaron M and Cressy Glenora United Church

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COMPLETE DETAILS

What is a pilgrimage?

A pilgrimage is a walk that is at once an outward journey of the body and an inward journey of the soul. A pilgrimage is a walk with intention, a journey in community, for people of faith, people of philosophy, and people with their own personal sense of spirituality.

The inspiration for this pilgrimage comes from Rob Fennell, a United Church minister and a professor at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax. In 2014, he created the Camino Nova Scotia, a multi-day pilgrimage along the shores of his seaside province. He shared about his experiences in his book “Camino Close to Home” writing, “Pilgrimage is a deliberate time away, a time to break up the routine and notice what is going on in us spiritually.” Whatever your reason—or for no particular reason at all—you are welcome on the “Walk the Ancient Sands” pilgrimage.

Our pilgrimage will be guided by the *Nine Pilgrim Virtues* that Fennell describes in his book. These are: community, sharing, serving others, perseverance, prayer, reverence and care for creation, patience, simplicity and gratitude. “While on pilgrimage, we can refocus on what really matters in this life. It is people, kindness, love, and goodness... it is our connection to God and to nature. These count the most,” writes Fennell.

What is the “Walk the Ancient Sands” Pilgrimage about?

We’ll walk the “Dunes Trail” at Sandbanks Provincial Park. The trail is a 2.5 km loop, rated easy to moderate. This trail loops through a unique and fragile sand dune habitat. The dune system is the largest of its kind in the world and the pannes are a rare wetland habitat that supports wildlife and unusual flora. The trail will take 1.5 to 2 hours to complete. We will take breaks and rest as needed. Following the walk we’ll gather for an “agape meal” of food, drink and conversation at the beach.

Preparation for the pilgrimage begins two weeks before, with reflection prompts sent to participants. Choose from reflection prompts that are philosophical (no religious language) or choose reflections prompts with gentle God-language. The walk is rated intermediate level, however arrangements can be made for those with reduced mobility to meet up at the beach-front seating. Registration required, including a modest fee for each participant to cover expenses. About two weeks after the pilgrimage, the guide will follow-up and share photos and memories. This gathering was inspired as part of the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of The United Church of Canada, inviting the wider community into deep spirituality.

Who is invited? Who can attend?

The pilgrimage welcomes anyone who is open to a walk in community. Welcome are people of faith, people of philosophy and people with their own personal sense of spirituality. We'll hold a diversity of people and perspectives with respect, never imposing our beliefs or practices on another. People of all ages, incomes, genders, sexual orientations, places of origin and so on, are affirmed and valued. We invite each other as pilgrims in community, in a peaceful and generous way.

ABOUT THE AGAPE MEAL

What is an agape meal?

An agape meal is a very ancient Christian practice also referred to as a love-feast, and is meant to express sharing and unity. The idea is that after our walk, we'll sit and talk over light food and drink, in a casual way.

What foods will be served at the agape meal?

The menu will be these Mediterranean-inspired foods: pita bread, gluten-free bread (upon request), olive oil and balsamic vinegar, juice or iced tea, fruit (apples, grapes, dried apricots and dried dates); cheddar cheese, mixed nuts, variety of olives, hummus and cut fresh vegetables.

Where will the agape meal take place?

Depending on the number of participants, the agape meal will take place either at the beach (in the covered picnic area) or we'll reserve the large covered day-use area that is in a field near the beach.

ABOUT THE TRAIL

Description of the Trail

We will walk a trail in Sandbanks Provincial Park. Here is a description of the trail from *Ontario Parks*: The trail is "a 2.5 km loop, easy to moderate. This trail loops through a unique and fragile

dune habitat and travels along the edge of several pannes. The dune system is the largest of its kind in the world and the pannes are a rare wetland habitat that supports wildlife and unusual flora. In addition to the main trail, there is also a one kilometre loop at the beginning of the trail that is barrier-free. Please stay on the trail to minimize your impact and to avoid Poison Ivy, which is common throughout the area. Trail Guide is available.” The trail will take 1.5 to 2 hours to complete. We will take breaks to rest at bench areas.

GETTING TO THE TRAIL

Gathering Location

First, we’ll gather to organize ourselves, then we’ll drive to the trail together. We will meet at 12:45 p.m. in the parking lot of Picton United Church (12 Chapel Street in Picton, Ontario). Selected cars will receive a pre-registered “Day Use, Daily Vehicle Permit” to gain access to the park. These permits are \$20 each (the cost of the permit is included in the event fee). We’ll carpool, four people per car, as able. After the pilgrimage, cars will return to Picton United Church around 5:30 p.m.

Driving Directions

Together we will proceed to The Dunes Trail, at Dunes Beach, which is located on West Lake inside Sandbanks Provincial Park. The address is: 3004 County Rd 12, Picton, Ontario K0K 2T0.

Driving directions from Picton United Church to the Dunes Trail:

Leave the parking lot of Picton United Church. Turn left, then left again onto Picton Main Street. At the roundabout, take the 2nd exit onto Loyalist Pkwy (33W). Turn left onto County Rd 32. Turn left onto County Rd 12. Enter Sandbanks Provincial Park. (No need to visit Registration.) Turn right into Dunes Beach. Park in P3 which is near the Dunes Trail.

Do I need a pass to enter the provincial park?

Yes, a Day-Use Vehicle Pass (DVP) or a seasonal pass is required. The organizer will obtain day passes for each car entering the park. (Fees for the event cover the cost of these passes). The organizer will pre-register your car with the park, so there is no need to visit the Registration Desk. The organizer will bring a print-out of your day-pass, which must be displayed on your car’s dashboard at all times when in the park.

Where do I park my car?

Park your car at Dunes Beach in the P3 parking area. The Dunes Trail is at the far end of the P3 parking area. Please wait for the organizer and all pilgrims to arrive. We’ll enter the trail together.

Can I stay at the park after the pilgrimage is over?

Yes. If you want to stay at the park longer, you must reserve your own Permit, which must be reserved in advance of your visit. To do this, go to the Ontario Parks website, choose Reservations, choose Day Use, choose Daily Vehicle Permit (DVP), and select Sandbanks. Then, follow the prompts. Advance daily vehicle permits can be purchased up to 5 days before your visit, starting at 7:00am Eastern Time. It is strongly suggested to reserve early, as passes go very quickly.

LOGISTICS

What gear or supplies should I bring?

Pilgrims need to carry their own backpack with water, snacks, hat, sunscreen, bug repellent, comfortable walking shoes or walking sandals, health needs (example: bandaids, asthma pump, epipen, etc). Pilgrims may like to bring: handkerchief or tissues, paper and pen, art supplies, walking poles, tissues, camera or cellphone camera. The guide will carry their own backpack with their needs, plus a basic first aid kit, toilet paper, list of all contact information, emergency contact info and a cellphone.

Are there washrooms and other facilities near the trail?

Dunes Beach (near the Dunes Trail) has accessible washrooms, a canteen with food and drink, a covered picnic table area and handicap parking.

How can I identify the guide and the group?

The guide will supply each pilgrim with a coloured handkerchief (for example) to wear as an identifier.

Who is the Pilgrimage Guide?

The pilgrimage guide is Aaron Miechkota, who is a progressive Christian minister serving two United Churches in Prince Edward County. Aaron is an affirming minister, meaning she affirms the lives everyone, including minority, oppressed and vulnerable peoples. She respects and welcomes people of a wide variety of perspectives, philosophies, beliefs and faith backgrounds.

Diversity

Pilgrimage appeals to all sorts of people, for all sorts of reasons. You can expect the pilgrim group to include a diversity of ages, genders, sexual orientations, cultural backgrounds, income levels and spiritual perspectives. Travelling together creates many opportunities to practise mutual respect and hospitality toward each other.

REGISTRATION INFO

How do I register?

Send an email to unitedinpec@gmail.com for the registration form. You'll be asked to provide your: Name, cellphone number, name of town you live in, name of your community of faith (if applicable) and the name and phone number of your emergency contact. Please provide any relevant health concerns (such as asthma or bee sting allergy) or severe food allergies.

Registration is due two weeks before the gathering date.

Fees. What is the cost of the pilgrimage?

The cost of the pilgrimage is \$20 per person. Bursaries available. The fee covers the costs of the day-pass to the park and the agape meal. Payment must be received 10 days before the day of the pilgrimage. If you don't have access to e-transfer, please be in touch to arrange another payment method. Any funds remaining after expenses will be donated to Alternatives for Women, a local non-profit serving those experiencing intimate partner violence.

Are there any safety concerns?

Participants are responsible for taking care of their own health and safety throughout the day. Here are some things to keep in mind. The trail is intermediate level, 2.5km and about one-hour-thirty-minutes to two-hours in duration. The trail surface varies, sometimes it is sandy, sometimes uphill or downhill, there are uneven stairs and protruding roots. There are no support rails along the trail. Please stay on the trail at all times to avoid poison ivy and to protect the ecosystem. Stay hydrated. Wear sun protection. Emergency contact info is required. If you have any relevant allergies or health concerns (such as asthma or allergic to bee stings), please bring the medications you require and let the guide know on your registration.

Will I need insurance?

Please ensure that your provincial health insurance is in good standing. For all participants, the purchase of additional personal insurance is at your own discretion and is your responsibility. In case of emergency, an ambulance will be called and the participant will be taken to the hospital for care.

WITH GRATITUDE

“Walk the Ancient Sands” pilgrimage is offered in celebration of the 100th Anniversary of The United Church of Canada in 2025. In this centennial year, we are inspired by the deep spirituality, the bold discipleship and the daring justice of the people of the United Church.

We extend our gratitude to Rev. Dr. Rob Fennel, United Church minister and Associate Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at The Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, Nova Scotia. His book *Camino Close to Home: How to Plan and Thrive on Local Pilgrimages* inspired this project.

Last, but certainly not least, much gratitude is extended to the people of Cressy Glenora United Church, who have served as a sounding board and support for this project. Their wisdom and guidance has been instrumental in offering this project to the community.