

Tips for families on pilgrimage from a seasoned pilgrim-Mom

For families with youngsters making the modified pilgrimage mostly in camps, and/or with older children marching in the main column.

1. Campsite. Especially the first night (Thursday) try not to set up the family bivouac too-near the public bathrooms or the port-a-pots trailer, or along the road leading up to them. Desperate pilgrims need to use them throughout the course of the night, and arriving & departing vehicles of pilgrims are inevitable – esp. Thursday, even late into the night. When the bathroom or vehicle doors slam, or pilgrims use their ‘stage-whisper-voices’ searching in the pitch dark for a site, the babies wake, then they wake the neighbors, their babies keep your babies up, and everyone internally complains that ‘we shouldn’t have to be suffering like this yet’.

2. Weather. The weather can fluctuate greatly. The daytime temperature has ranged from 30 - 90 degrees! It is almost always cold in the mornings, and Mass is early and outside. It’s best to dress the children for a normal autumn day – in the Adirondacks – and bring layers for colder weather. This is especially helpful when we start walking. We start to feel hot and can easily remove a layer and put it back on when we stop. It has rained at least one day each year we’ve gone, and has not infrequently rained the whole time. **Always bring rain gear for everyone:** shoes, ponchos, hats. Also, in case the kids get caught in a cold rain – always a good chance of that happening! – bring light gloves and hand warmers.

3. Walking. A hiking/jogging stroller or wagon is indispensable. An umbrella stroller will work, but with much difficulty and assistance. A tarp or rain cover for the stroller is a must. Bring two pairs of wool socks for each child – young or old – per day because wet, sweaty socks will rapidly cause blisters, or lead to colds. Changing to a fresh pair during the lunch break eliminates that concern. Bring band-aids, vasoline, and mole skins because the nurses may run out.

4. Packing. Put everything in your back-pack in ziplock bags – and in your luggage, use large plastic ‘trash’ bags to protect *everything* from rain and damp! During hurricane season, when it rains, it can really pour. Everything in your pack or large bags – food, socks, books, you name it – gets soaked through. Best advice: Keep your back-pack as light as possible with only what is positively needed for that day. For more tips about packing – and for meals and just about anything else you need to prepare for – look at the FAQs and the Q & As posted each season to pilgrimage blog at pilgrimage-for-restoration.org/blog/. Those posts really drill down into the details of *essentials-only*.

5. First-aid. Besides the band-aids and mole skins (cf. above, at nbr. 3.), we always bring ibuprofen, Icy-Hot (muscle cream), and lots of hand warmers or foot warmers to combat muscle cramps. Salty snacks or Gatorade can also help prevent or treat cramps.

6. Meals. In the morning, organizers provide hot water. But there is no convenient and sanitary place to wash your dishes – esp. Friday morning, so consider bringing paper and plastic. Washing a family’s worth of dishes can throw one behind schedule. Bring a large box or tub to tote the food & wares. The meals are not near the campsites so it’s best to have everything consolidated, instantly accessible and portable. (MOM ALERT: Walking to hot water station with two bowls in hand at a time will ruin your mood for the day! One solution is to bring a stainless steel pitcher, fill it, and bring it back to the table. One trip and everything goes so much faster.) Breakfast foods to bring include instant oatmeal, boiled eggs, coffee, a jug of milk, hot cocoa (powder) – mornings are often particularly cold, and Friday morning there is practically nowhere to sit, besides the ... wet ... ground. Lunches are eaten with the families under a pavilion in camp, or under the sky for those older members of families who do more walking. Breakfast & lunch are when the large plastic tub really comes in handy. Ideas for lunch include pb&j, apples, hearty crackers like triscuits, cheese, cut-up vegetables, chips, hard salami. For moms not walking with dads & older children, the walkers do well preparing a packet of hearty lunch meats & cheeses or pre-seasoned tuna (like lemon pepper or herb and garlic, which are already drained and easy to open), plus triscuits or tortillas, applesauce packets, trail mix, salty snacks and single-serving pouches of Gatorade powder (to prevent muscle cramps), granola bars, beef jerky, a fruity candy with some natural sugar in it. Be sure to pack hiking snacks for the family as well, for when we walk. Dinner is eaten with everyone together after the walking pilgrims arrive. Soup and sliced bread are provided. If this is not something your children like, consider bringing supplemental food. (Pilgrims are dispensed from the obligation to abstain from meat on Fridays, by the way. But the organizers’ Cooking-Team prepares meatless supper Friday.)

7. Prayer. Besides the obvious necessities: rosaries, missals, sacramentals and veils: consider bringing a tarp or large plastic bag to kneel on. The ground is always wet, cold, and gritty where they offer the Mass outdoors.

8. Organization. It helps to keep things organized by “station” so that things are easy to find. For example, a “mommy station” with everything from toothbrushes, toiletries, a few extra water bottles, flashlights, prayer books, veils, etc. – basically, anything that the children count on mom to find for them in a hurry. I keep those in the passenger side door of the family van. Children can just brush their teeth by the side of the van and spit into the dirt or bush. (Hey, it’s the woods!) Then they can grab their missals and go!

9. Time Saving Tips. Have the walkers sleep in their clean outfits for the following day. It saves a lot of time in the morning, but also a lot of misery. It can be freezing cold at 4:45 a.m. and changing can be a very unpleasant task, always in the pitch dark.

Write to Mrs. Erika Zepeda at zepedae@pilgrimage-for-restoration.org if your questions about families on pilgrimage are not answered by the tips above.

For additional tips on just about every essential detail of preparations, read the FAQs and Q & A’s posted each season to the blogsite at pilgrimage-for-restoration.org/blog/. The posts there really drill down into the details of essentials-only.

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