

## LEADING THE WAY

A Palmerston North couple are taking Kiwi Christians on the journey of a lifetime.

**MEDIEVAL LEGEND** has it that the Milky Way is the dust flicked up into the sky by the feet of pilgrims. Even today, in a far more secular world, some 200 million pilgrims travel to sacred sites each year – and about a quarter of them are Christians.

In 2013, Anglican priest Rev John Hornblow and his wife, Jenny Boyack, set up PilgrimageNZ, a not-for-profit venture leading pilgrimages to Europe.

The idea was to provide a way to “engage people with their spirituality in a world where the established church has less relevance than it had 50 years ago”, says Hornblow. “In some ways, spirituality is more important than ever, and the Christian faith has to find new ways to draw and hold people.”

A former human resources manager, Hornblow was ordained in 2006 and spent six years as deputy mayor in Palmerston North, where the couple still live. Boyack, who

holds a PhD in music education, teaches music at both primary school and university level, and is an organist and choirmaster in her local Anglican parish.

The germ of an idea for PilgrimageNZ emerged from conversations between the couple and their friend Archbishop emeritus Sir David Moxon and his wife Tureiti. Now also their colleague, he joins most of the pilgrimages as chaplain.

Hornblow and Boyack lead journeys of a few weeks to early Celtic Christian sites in the United Kingdom and Ireland, Franciscan pilgrimages to Assisi in Italy, and a pilgrimage across Greece, Turkey and Palestine. In Europe, accommodation is largely in converted monasteries. Any surplus income goes towards the next pilgrimage, and is occasionally used to subsidise people unable to meet the full cost (around \$7000 excluding airfares). The couple are also working



on a guidebook of significant Māori-Pākehā Christian sites throughout New Zealand.

While the pilgrimages are unapologetically liberal Christian, anyone who accepts the spirit in which they are conducted is welcome. A typical day starts with prayer and a gospel reading, before the group travels to a site.

"We go to places with historical, cultural, political and spiritual significance," says Boyack. "For example, St Francis of Assisi reformed society and the church in the 12th and 13th centuries. Today,

Assisi is a significant place of refugee resettlement in Italy. We meet with those people.

"At each site, there is a lot of time for people to wander, sit, pray, paint, write – it's a deliberately slow and individual process of reflection. Then back to the monastery, where they talk about what they have experienced before sharing a meal."

Hornblow says it's common for people to make a pilgrimage when they're in transition: from work to retirement, for example, or after the death of a spouse.

The leaders foster camaraderie, encouraging people to share their stories, much as Geoffrey Chaucer did in *The Canterbury Tales*, which he wrote in the late 14th century.

"As they talk openly about their lives, the pastoral care we offer can help them make transitions and resolve deep-seated pain," says Boyack.

"People say they most appreciate the sense of community that is found on pilgrimage. It's something many are actively seeking because they feel it is rare to find in modern society." **NATHALIE BROWN**

**John Hornblow and Jenny Boyack suggest pilgrims use the Benedictine *Lectio Divina* approach (read, think, pray, act) or the Franciscan focus (gaze, consider, contemplate and imitate) at each sacred site they visit.**