



Irish Trust Talk



2024

50th

**EASTER PILGRIMAGE
TO LOURDES**



The Irish Pilgrimage Trust, Kilcuan, Clarinbridge, Galway
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Charity Registration Number 20009953 CHY (Revenue) No. 5992

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The Irish Pilgrimage Trust

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The Irish Pilgrimage Trust

The Trust was established in 1972 to provide special pilgrimage holidays to Lourdes for children and young people with special needs. The Trust also provide special summer holidays for people with special needs to Hosanna House in Lourdes and at our purpose built holiday homes - Kilcuan in Clarinbridge, Galway and Cois Cuain, Kiltrane, Wexford.

Check out our website on www.irishpilgrimagetrust.com for more details or call +353 91 796622

The Irish Pilgrimage Trust is a Registered Charity - C.R.N. 20009953; Revenue Chy. No. 5992



The Irish Pilgrimage Trust Safeguarding



**Designated Liaison Person
Bernadette Connolly**

Person Designated with responsibility for the safety, welfare and protection of our guests

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**You can support your local Group by simply pressing the
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YOUR LASTING GIFT

A Word from the Chair

Charles Digney



Like many of you I have travelled to Lourdes at Easter for many years but for me Easter 2023 was almost like experiencing it for the first time again.

During COVID there was the fear and worry about what the Trust would look like when it got going again. Would there be the same demand from guests, enthusiasm from helpers etc. The Trust family arrived in Lourdes full of colour, song and positivity. I don't think we all realised how much the loss of going to Lourdes at Easter had impacted upon us until we were there and meeting friends we hadn't seen in a few years, experienced the joy and celebration of the Irish Trust Mass and torchlight procession.

A very moving part of the week was our Friday morning mass at the grotto and particularly when we remember those who had died since our last grotto mass. It was sad to hear so many names read out but lovely that we had the opportunity to acknowledge and give thanks for them at the grotto.

Nearly 800 guests and helpers travelled to Lourdes at Easter 2023, which was fantastic and along with the positive feedback from guest families and volunteers we can be confident that the need for the Trust and the value it provides in its many forms is still as relevant today as it was all those years ago when the Trust formed.

The success of our Easter pilgrimage has been followed up with planning for our cycle to Lourdes in 2024. This cycle will mark 40 years of the Trust cycle which has been a massive success and we wish all the organisers and cyclists our best wishes as they continue their preparations.

During the summer we have had several of our Friendship Week groups stay in Kilcuan and experience a wonderful week with their guests.

This is a very different experience from the Lourdes week but very much fulfilling and appreciated by our guests and guest families. Thank you to the group leaders and volunteers for committing to our friendship weeks. We would encourage others to try this unique experience and anyone thinking of taking a group please contact the Trust office and you will be supported in doing so.



Many of our groups are now actively preparing for next year which will mark our 50th Easter pilgrimage to Lourdes. We will be doing various things to mark this great occasion and will update you about these later.

Thank you to all our staff, volunteers, guests, guest families and benefactors that helped restore the Trust to its vibrant self. We also give thanks to Our Lady for guiding us. As an organisation we are extremely blessed to have so many skilled and talented people willing to offer themselves for the benefit of others. Thank you all for your continued support of the Trust.

Charles

Our Lady of Lourdes pray for us.

St Bernadette pray for us.

LOURDES 2023 Report

LOURDES, Easter 2023

Tarbes Airport, Lourdes, Easter Sunday morning April 9th 2023. There was a heightened air of anticipation among the Trust welcome party waiting in the quietness of the empty airport building. This was the first time since Easter 2019 for The Irish Pilgrimage Trust to return to Lourdes with our Easter Pilgrimage groups. All the preparations and planning in the preceding months were coming to fruition.

A mobile phone rings, news from Dublin, everyone safely on board the first flight and the plane had departed for Lourdes on time. Soon afterward the Tarbes Airport sound system announced that our first plane had landed. It was “all hands-on deck” as everyone sprang into action.



Led by Trust Chairperson Charles Digney, the groups began to disembark and suddenly, as if by magic, Tarbes Airport was transformed into that familiar sea of colour, singing, noise and excitement. The buses were lined up outside awaiting their passengers. Teams of volunteers scrambled for trolleys and took up their stations at the luggage conveyor belts, collected their group's belongings, and boarded the buses for the short journey into Lourdes. The sight of the snow capped Pyrenees mountains is one of the first impressive scenes to greet us.

We were back! Finally.

In one sense it was business as usual. For some it was back on familiar territory, doing familiar things, and getting on with it. For our special Guests and new volunteers, the newness of it all is wrapped up in excitement and anticipation of the week ahead. And this is very much the scene as our groups move from the travel phase of the journey and finally get settled into their hotels in Lourdes. The weather was fine with warm sunshine to greet everyone on their arrival in France.

Throughout Easter Sunday 2023 our five chartered

flights from Dublin, Shannon and Belfast brought The Irish Pilgrimage Trust pilgrimage group of almost 800 guests and volunteer helpers to Lourdes.

Later that evening it was a joy to hear all the Irish accents, witness the transformation of Lourdes into a sea of group colours and to realise that we would once again be able to provide our special guests with that unique experience of Easter pilgrimage holiday in Lourdes. Many of our early arrivals availed of the opportunity to visit the Grotto or attend the welcome Mass in thanksgiving to be back in that special place for St Bernadette and Our Lady.

Easter week has a certain rhythm for the Trust groups. Old friendships are rekindled. New friendships are formed. New volunteers begin their week with a little apprehension but quickly settle in. Our guests and volunteers build on the companionship and friendships formed during their pre-pilgrimage meetings. We get to know our hotels and their friendly staff and become familiar with the French language. Many within our groups reconnect with friends in other groups. Many others meet friends from our sister organisation HCPT from the UK, our friends in ASCPG from the USA, DUH from Croatia, and the ever-colourful Jamaican groups. And of course our wonderful Youth groups add that special splash of colour and boundless energy that is so important to the Trust.



Trying to capture that magic moment, photographers get their chance to take pictures as guest present the gifts during Mass

Our Irish Trust Mass on Tuesday morning in St Bernadette's Church was one of the highlights of our 2023 Easter pilgrimage. The entire Irish Trust family came together in a display of colour and celebration. This was the first time that we were all gathered together and the atmosphere in the beautiful St. Bernadette's Church was “electric”. The procession of Trust and Group Banners is always an exciting time involving

LOURDES 2023 Report

members from every group proudly parading their colours. Our Choir, our Trust Bishops and Priests led the gathering in Hymns and a very special Mass. The celebration gave thanks for the blessing of being able to once again return to Lourdes and resume the Trust's mission.

Trust chairperson Charles Digney welcomed everyone and was ably assisted by a young guest who decided to join him on the altar. The draw for the Early Bird prize of a free trip to Lourdes in 2024 took place and Charles announced that the lucky winner was Martin Kennedy, Group 172.

The Trust Mass was concelebrated by Bishop Fintan Gavin, Bishop of Cork and Ross, who is a good friend of the Trust, along with Bishop Donal McKeown Trust President and the group Chaplains.

Wednesday was excursion day with poor weather forecast but the day was fine and Gavarnie in sunshine.



Group 308 in all their glory enjoying their trip to Gavarnie, high up in the Pyrenees

We cannot forget the Trust's medical team led by Trust Doctor, Trust Nurse, incoming Trust Nurse, and group doctors and nurses who are so dedicated to the care and wellbeing of all our guests. They are always on hand 24 - 7, available to respond to every call in support of our groups.

The backroom team of Trustees and Staff under the leadership of the Trust Chairperson along with the National Co-ordinator work tirelessly in support of our groups throughout the week.

Groups attend the Candlelight procession on Wednesday night and host party nights on Thursday.

Friday morning Grotto Mass was a solemn occasion attended by a large number of Trust member's representing their groups. Rain did not deter people. This is a hugely significant part of our week in Lourdes as we remember our benefactors and are reminded of



Our dear friend Máire Begley O'Shea, Group 189 sharing her wonderful musical talents with her group and also as part of our Trust Choir at the Trust Mass and the Friday morning Grotto Mass in Lourdes

all those who have gone to their eternal reward since our last pilgrimage to Lourdes. This is a time when we pause, pray and give thanks for their contribution and support to the work and mission of The Irish Pilgrimage Trust.

Saturday returning home after a fantastic week. Back to the airport to fly home.

Our Hotels in Lourdes, the Bus companies, the cafes and all the activity centres were excellent and welcoming to all our groups. The Airport teams in Tarbes Airport were exceptional and ensured that the whole transfer operation went smoothly.



Our groups gathering for Mass during our Easter Pilgrimage week in Lourdes is just one of the memorable highlights

Seamus Collins, Family Group 103

Seamus Collins has been a Volunteer with the Northern Region for many years. Many within the Trust will know Seamus and his involvement with the Family groups, in particular Group 103. Over many years Seamus has been there to help make it possible for families with very ill children to visit the Shrine at Lourdes with the support of The Irish Pilgrimage Trust

Group 103 is one of the Irish Pilgrimage Trust's Family Groups and has its base in the Northern Region. The Family Groups are a very special part of the Trust and those involved form special bonds with their Families and fellow volunteers.

The Family Groups differ from our "mainstream" Trust groups as they cater for children with serious or terminal illness up to the age of 11 who are accompanied by a parent or guardian on the Easter trip to Lourdes. Generally, each family group cares for 4 or 5 families and their Lourdes trip will always be a unique and special experience for everyone involved.

The children and parents are supported by Trust volunteers during their week in Lourdes. The Easter trip to Lourdes is the culmination of a preparation period when the family group leader, nurse and Trust doctor will have visited each child and their family, assessed their needs and put in place all the necessary supports to ensure that their trip can go ahead.



Seamus Collins (centre) with guest family during the Irish Trust Mass in Lourdes

Seamus Collins from Newry is a past Group Leader of Group 103, which he led for many years. Seamus joined The Irish Pilgrimage Trust as a volunteer 36 years ago when he first travelled to Lourdes with Group 67. He became very active in the region and served as the Northern Region chairperson for 5 years. In 1998 Seamus was invited to join the newly formed Group 103, the Northern

Family Group. Throughout his years serving with Group 103 he found the experience to be a very rewarding one.



Seamus Collins (right) with the King's representative in Co. Down, Lieutenant Gawn Hamilton who presented BEM to him

On the 1st of December 2022 Seamus received an emailed letter from the cabinet office in Lourdes stating that he was recommended to King Charles III for the Medal of the Order of the British Empire (BEM) in the 2023 New Years Honours List. He was initially stunned and very surprised to the point of incredulity. When asked about this honour Seamus stated "My first reaction was to refuse this but after some reflection I thought of all the people who went to great lengths to nominate me, especially the parents of very ill children who struggle daily with the burden of life limiting illnesses. I humbly accepted in honour of all those courageous children and their parents."

We in the Trust are delighted for Seamus, his family and his Trust family who have been honoured in this way. In his truly humble way, Seamus was very gracious in accepting this honour, all the while with thoughts and recognition for all those whom we serve and his fellow volunteers in the Trust.

OUR ROSE OF TRALEE 2023

The annual Rose of Tralee Festival has not been a regular feature in the Irish Trust Talk. However, the 2023 edition of the Festival deserves a special mention.

We were delighted to learn that “one of our own,” past youth carer, Kate Heneghan from Castlebar was selected to represent her home county as the **MAYO ROSE** at the recent Rose of Tralee festival. Kate gave a great interview during the live TV show. She is an accomplished musician, on the Harp, Violin and Piano and is a music teacher. She entertained the Dome in Tralee and the international television audiences with ‘Bealtaine’ (May), her own composition, on the Harp.



In her interview with Dáithí O'Shea, Kate related her experience of being quarantined and isolated in a cabin on the cruise ship Ruby Princess in Sydney Harbour for 32 days at the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. The entire crew were put on lockdown and quarantined following an outbreak on the ship. Although being covid free, Kate was not allowed to leave her cabin. She was working as one of the musicians on the cruise liner at the time

and this incident made international news headlines.

When Kate was a Transition Year student in 2013 she joined the Trust Easter pilgrimage to Lourdes as a youth carer with Group 751 under the leadership of Fr Mike Murphy. She participated in all the youth group activities including the choir at the Irish Mass. Kate also joined Galway Group 125 each day during the week and enjoyed a busy time in support of the group carers and as a companion to the guests.



It was delightful to catch up with Kate following the Rose of Tralee Festival and to express our pride in her success and performance at the Festival. She shared happy memories of her time with groups 751 and 125, playing her “fiddle”, enjoying the fun and the craic with her group. Kate talked about the time with Group 125 and especially her unforgettable experience of sharing time with the wonderful guests. She also reminded us that her sister Maggie followed in her footsteps and travelled as a TY student with Group 751 in 2016!

We wish Kate every success in her future endeavours and extend our congratulations to her on her great achievements to date.

PETITIONS for LOURDES Easter 2024

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Following the wonderful response to our offer to bring petitions to Our Lady's shrine in Lourdes last Easter 2023 we decided to open this offer once again for next Easter. The Irish Pilgrimage Trust's Easter 2024 pilgrimage will be very special as it is our 50th Easter pilgrimage to Lourdes.

If you or any member of your family or your friends would like to avail of this opportunity all

you have to do in place your petition on a sealed envelope clearly marked “PETITION” and send it in an envelope to us. If you wish to make a donation please keep it separate from your petition.

**The Irish Pilgrimage Trust, Kilcuan,
Clarinbridge, Galway, H91W596**

All petitions will be presented with the gifts during our Benefactors Mass at the Grotto in Lourdes on Friday morning 5th April next.

From LOURDES to BERLIN Part 2



In our Spring edition of the Irish Trust Talk we featured the Special Olympics, World Games 2023 due to take place in Berlin, Germany. The Games were held in June and Ireland was well represented. Team Ireland's team of athletes, gymnasts, coaches, trainers and supporters did themselves and our country proud.

The Special Olympics World Games 2023 will live long in the memories of many in Ireland and in The Irish Pilgrimage Trust. The games took place during the summer month of June in Berlin, in Germany. Once again, the games attracted very large crowds and our own Team Ireland was supported by many families and friends of our team members.

The Irish Team of 73 Athletes participating at the games included quite a few members of The Irish Pilgrimage Trust, past Guests and Volunteers. Of course, we were exceptionally proud of all our Irish Athletes. Team Ireland were thrilled with their success and the "haul" of medals and special awards they brought home. It was a massive endorsement of all the hard work, training and preparation that went on at home in the run up to the event. All our athletes went through a rigorous team selection process. They overcame challenges and obstacles that most of us can not imagine. To their credit, they performed so well and achieved success on the world stage. In addition, they managed to have a wonderful time from the opening ceremony to the homecoming back to their local communities.

The opening ceremony took place on Saturday, June 17th 2023, followed by 8 days of events in 26 different sports. Among those participating were five (5) very special friends of the Trust who were Lourdes Easter pilgrimage Guests over the years. Representing Ireland at the games were they were:

Dearbhla Savage - Golf (Group 67)

Leah Fegan Equestrian (Group 67)

Maire Connolly Gymnastics (Group 125)

Ryan Griffin Athletics (Group 135)

Jenna Carty Basketball (Groups 94, 308 & FW6)

Michael Murphy Coach (Gr Leader 308)



Pictured after the Medal presentation in Berlin following the Golf competition is Irish Golfer Dearbhla Savage

We are so proud of you guys

Back home we anxiously kept watch on their progress each day, anxious to know how they got on and that they were enjoying their experience.

We received updates - Special Olympics, former Group 67 members Miss Leah and Miss Dearbhla produced fabulous results at the Special Olympics in Berlin. Leah received 2 bronze medals for Equestrian and Dearbhla a silver in Golf !! Everyone in the Trust are so proud of your achievements.



Pictured at the homecoming reception in Kerry is Ryan Griffin (centre, wearing Irish top) with family and friends

From LOURDES to BERLIN Part 2



*Jenna Carty (Basketball) pictured with family and supporters in Berlin following the medal ceremony for her event.
Leah won Gold in the exciting Basketball Team final.*

Another great story from Berlin. Huge congratulations went to Jenna, (who was a member of Groups 94, 308 and also Friendship Week 6) who won GOLD with Basketball tournament at the Special Olympics World Games in Berlin. Congratulations on your massive achievement Jenna. Well done!

Máire won a gold medal and three bronze medals in Artistic Gymnastics. Another fantastic performance while representing her country.



Leah Fegan (Equestrian) pictured with her parents in Berlin following the medal ceremony for her event

Waterville's Ryan Griffin received a hero's welcome in Cahersiveen as thousands turned out to celebrate him winning silver for Ireland at the Special Olympics.

The Community of Clarinbridge welcomed home local Olympic Champion Máire Connolly from the Berlin Special Olympics World Games 2023 on Monday 26th June.



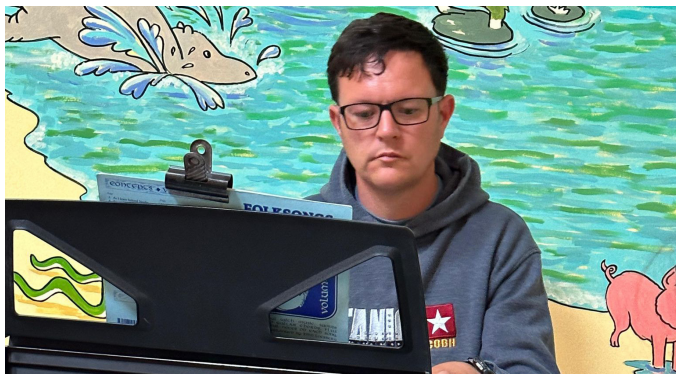
Máire Connolly Gymnast with her parents Mike and Ber and her brother Eoin, pictured in Berlin after receiving her medals.

Finally, we in The Irish Pilgrimage Trust wish to send a huge congratulations to all in Team Ireland who recently participated in the Special Olympics World Games 2023 in Berlin. What a wonderful games and performances by Team Ireland.

Liam Kavanagh - a Guest's Reflection

Liam Kavanagh has been to Lourdes with the Trust as a young guest on our Easter trips and to Hosanna House on our summer trips. Liam has also been a guest with Friendship Week groups in Cois Cuain, in Wexford as well as Kilcuan in Galway. Liam's brother Dara is a longtime Volunteer with the Trust having travelled with the South East and in 2023 with Group 67. Dara is also one of our Trust Cyclists.

This is Liam's report in his own words on the impact of recent events and the work of The Irish Pilgrimage Trust. Liam was previously published in his local Parish Newsletter in Co. Wexford.



Liam entertaining FW 6 in Kilcuan recently

Hi all my enthusiastic readers

Since Covid- 19 has struck each and everyone who have being effected by this terrible virus in the last two years, we haven't being able to gather at social gatherings, wedding events, music events, agricultural shows and enjoy the things we love to do because everywhere has being in lockdown and we haven't being able to travel foreign with our airports shut and ferry ports closed also with restrictions in place.

But now last March thanks to our doctors and scientists they came up with vaccinations to protect us from the virus and everywhere is starting to slowly open up again because everyone's mental health was being effected with worry and cases were rising and the loss of a loved one and hospitals were getting to full capacity everywhere and nursing homes couldn't be visited by a loved one.

One of the things I have missed out on for the last two years is going to a Special place in France called Lourdes where Saint Bernadette is said to have being visited by the Virgin Mary in 1858.

The Irish Pilgrimage Trust caters for young people with special needs on a weeks Pilgrimage during Easter every year and I go with a Wexford group around August and it is an amazing experience. The Easter pilgrimage fly out Easter Sunday and come back the following Saturday. The group I go with stay in a accommodation called Hosanna House where you have your food and bedrooms and you can have sing songs and dancing and play games and musical instruments and a gift shop and an oratory for services to use and that's where the group I go with have their services and I play the organ for

them at their services which are led by a priest normally and group leader.

The group normally go to The Trust Mass in a under ground basilica and the anointing of the sick. The guests decorate a giant candle and put their petitions on the candle and bring it down to a place full of other candles and the candle stays lighting for a long time and you can visit it at night also.

They normally go down to the Grotto the sanctuary of our Lady of Lourdes during the day and some of the volunteers come back down to visit at night because Lourdes is opened till 12 midnight and it is beautiful and really special.

Then another day they visit Bartres the place where Saint Bernadette was sent as a shepheress and visitors visit the church also after the service in Hosanna House. Then they visit Gavarnie high up in the Pyrenees mountains another day, one of the places people visit while on the Camino walk and it is beautiful up there also well worth a visit on pilgrimage. Then one of the nights they go down to do night time procession where they go around carrying candles and pray the rosary and that is another highlight of mine in Lourdes. The other thing they do is go down to the baths in Lourdes and get in a wash themselves with the holy water and anyone who wants to buy gifts they can get them before they go home.

Overall it is an excellent week to go because you make lots of friends and the craic is brilliant and it's a break from your parents also.

Now one of the other things the Irish Pilgrimage Trust offers also is there is two respite purpose built self catering holiday homes and they have friendship weeks in their houses one is in the South East in Kilrane, 1 kilometre from Kilrane village a short distance from Rosslare Harbour called Cois Cuain and another one in Galway called Kilcuan and it is the head place for the Irish Pilgrimage Trust. The volunteers provide a weeks long program of holidays for young people with special needs and they include fun activities, music, excursion, entertainment and visit local attractions and go to Our Lady's Island and they have their own garden to play games and cook a barbeque.

So basically the guest goes down on their own and stays and gives the parents and other family members a break and enjoys the craic. If you like more information on voluntary or would like to go as a guest please email

info@irishpilgrimagetrust.com

Liam Kavanagh

New TRUST NURSE

We wish our new Trust Nurse Eileen Doyle every success in her very important role within The Irish Pilgrimage Trust. A Carlow native, Eileen succeeds Mary Dunion who completed her term following the 2023 Easter Pilgrimage to Lourdes.

Eileen worked closely with Mary during the Easter pilgrimage and has been very busy since then in preparation for the National Group Leaders and Nurses meetings in September and for Easter 2024.

Eileen joined the Board of Trustees in 2022 and becomes the fourth Trustee to occupy the role of Trust Nurse. It was delightful to meet all four Nurses in Lourdes at Eastertime.



Trust Nurse Eileen Doyle (right) with former Trustees and Trust Nurses (L to R) Mary Wade, Teresa Lee and Mary Dunion pictured in Lourdes during our 2023 Easter Pilgrimage.

CYCLE to LOURDES, 2024



Dr Michael McGloin, Chairperson of the IPTC (Irish Pilgrimage Trust Cycle) Organising Committee provides us with a flavour of what Cycle 2024 has in store for all the lucky participants. This will be the first Trust cycle in France for 6 years.

Cycle 2024 was formally launched by The Irish Pilgrimage Trust Chairman, Charles Digney, in Lourdes last Easter. It was promised that this cycle, the 40th anniversary of the first Lourdes cycle in 1984, would be special and might involve a new route. Well, the hotels are booked and the provisional route has been outlined. The 2024 route promises to be challenging, varied and different to anything we have done before.

At the start of Holy Week 2024 the cyclists will fly from Ireland to Nice on the Mediterranean coast. There are three distinct historical elements to this new route. On the initial three days the cyclists will generally follow along the old Roman Via Domitia – a highway which connected Rome with Spain. We will stay along the coast passing through some of the famous towns of the Cote d'Azur – Antibes, Juan les Pins, Cannes, Frejus and on to Marseilles. As we continue southwards, we will come to the Canal du Midi near Beziers, the oldest town in France.

The Canal du Midi was built in the late 17th Century by Baron Pierre-Paul Riquet, on the orders of Louis XIV, to connect the Atlantic with

the Mediterranean. We will follow this amazing construction as far as Toulouse, visiting en route the impressive citadel of Carcassonne.

From Toulouse we will turn south and take up the pilgrimage route towards Lourdes. Lourdes was known even before the apparitions as it was on one of the traditional Camino routes to Compostela (Chemin du Piemont Pyrenee). Since 1858 when Our Lady appeared to St Bernadette, Lourdes has itself become the destination for millions of pilgrims.



We look forward to our arrival on Good Friday, March 29th 2024 - but lots of work to be done in the meantime! We are limited in terms of numbers by the capacity of hotels on the route. Cyclists who have already signed up are busy training for this demanding event.

And of course, this is a fund-raiser for the Irish Pilgrimage Trust. Participants pay their own expenses, and all funds raised go to the Trust. If you pass one of our cyclists training, give them a wide berth on the road and give them a shout of encouragement. Any support is always much appreciated.

KILCUAN Friendship Weeks 2023

Summer 2023 saw our Friendship Weeks return to Kilcuan once again. Four Friendship Weeks took place this summer and they were –

FW 6 from Wexford was led by Helen Kirwan,

FW7 from Sligo/Leitrim led by Mary Clancy

FW3 Galway based led by Maureen Cox

FW 12 (Family Group) led by Michael Loftus.

Despite dire weather forecasts and reports in the media about the poor summer weather, we are happy to report that all our FW groups enjoyed a fantastic time. The sun obliged and shone when required and generally facilitated our groups' outdoor activities. Each of our Friendship Week groups provide a fantastic week of diverse activities, fun, excursions, and of course, lots of entertainment to keep everyone busy.

Friendship Weeks mirror our Easter/Lourdes Groups in lots of ways. Our teams of Volunteer carers form a group that includes a Group Leader and a Group Nurse. Many of our Friendship Weeks include friends, family and colleagues and importantly, it is not necessary for them to have travelled to Lourdes to join or form a FW group. Our talented young Student carers contribute a great deal to the groups. One of the endearing features of the Friendship Week groups is that each one has its own "personality". While each one differs from the other, it is nonetheless the joy and happiness that each group brings to their special guests that unifies the experience. Happy memories and wonderful friendships are formed and the sense of fulfilment from completing a successful week is very much similar to that which we experience in Lourdes. Generally, members from our Lourdes groups form the nucleus of the Group. All volunteers participating in the group are required to complete a Volunteers Form and must undergo NVB vetting. Safeguarding and the safety and welfare of everyone in the group is paramount.

The Trust is really very fortunate to have our own premises and grounds surrounded by lots of facilities within easy reach. The Trust office is situated beside Kilcuan house and assistance is always available from staff to help with advice on activities or planning for the week. There is great interest being expressed by young people with additional needs of all ages in joining Friendship Week. The sad news is that we have many more applicants than available places at present.

We are hopeful that more interest will be shown in forming Friendship week groups. Recent experience has shown that groups and guests have successfully travelled from around the country to Kilcuan, for example from Wexford, Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Clare, Dublin and many other areas. The Trust would be delighted to hear from anyone interested in forming new groups and every assistance will be provided in supporting new groups as well as our existing groups.

Friendship Week 6 arrived in Kilcuan on Saturday 1st July. They enjoyed strolls to the walled garden and visits to the Kilcornan swimming pool. Their group availed of excursions including a day trip to Bunratty Castle. A trip to the Pet Farm is always a great hit



with our guests. The group was even invited to join an aerobic class in the Kilcornan Hall! Their days were filled with activities, crafts and some chill time. After dinner, each evening was filled with entertainment that included dancing, singing and group activities. This allowed many of the guests to showcase their talents, playing music, singing and dancing. Liam Kavanagh, guest with the group kindly shared an article he had written for his local Newsletter in Wexford. Liam's article is reproduced in this issue of the Irish Trust Talk - see page 10.

Friendship Week 7 arrived on Saturday 8th July.



The group had a full program of activities, trips and games organised. The group loves Kilcuan and the Kilcornan grounds. They like to spend time in the walled garden where they have fun with the different facilities, take photos and have refreshments. FW 7 can be a noisy lot sometimes, especially when the drummers start up. Everyone joins in and the rhythm and sounds creates a great atmosphere. The group make a special effort to visit the beautiful grotto just

FRIENDSHIP WEEKS 2023



outside Kilcuan and spend quiet time reflecting and remembering their friends and families. Fr Charlie, their group chaplain from Group 164 also pays a visit mid-week and celebrates Mass in the Kilcuan oratory.

From Hosanna House to Kilcuan

This year FW 7 was joined by Dymphna and her sister Anne Marie who travelled all the way from Donegal. Anne Marie travelled to Lourdes as a guest along with her sister and carer Dymphna with the first Hosanna House group in 1994. During their week in Kilcuan the group was visited by Dr Brigid Keane, a past Trust doctor. It just so happened that Bridget was also a member of that first Hosanna House group in 1994. They had not seen each other in the intervening 29 years. To add to the situation, Anne Marie had formed a special bond with another member of the HH Group, Ann



Finn and particularly Ann's daughter Celina. Bridget and Ann happen to be friends and Bridget managed to contact Ann. They arranged a hasty reunion in Kilcuan that evening to the joy of everyone present.

Friendship Week 3 came to Kilcuan for their week on 6th August. Once again their week was packed with activities, entertainment and trips. Miraculously, they dodged all the showers and always arrived back to Kilcuan after their day out just before the rainfall. FW 3 love their trip to Renville beside the sea outside

Oranmore. Once again, the sun came out and they enjoyed their picnic in the glorious weather beside the playground. They also paid a visit to Coole Park near Gort. Their week had its poignant moments as they remembered their friends who have passed away including Mary Hunt, Marty Grealish and Fr Micheal. The group was in no doubt but that they were blessed by their friends during the week.

Friendship Week 12 arrived in Kilcuan on Sunday 13th August led by Michael Loftus. FW 12 is different from the previous groups as it is a Family FW Group. The group cater for very young children who are ill, accompanied by their parents for the week. The families within the group gain great support from each other and from the care and support of the group



volunteers. This is a great opportunity for them to enjoy a full program of events including a trip to the pet farm, Bunratty Castle and a Boat Ride up the Corrib. Their trip to Bunratty was a little overshadowed by



some light rainfall, but that did not dampen the mood or good spirits within the group. They enjoyed a fabulous BBQ in Kilcuan in the evening and received visits from two members of the Galway Minor Ladies All-Ireland champions. They brought along the cup and created great excitement. Local World Games Olympic Champion Máire Connolly also dropped in to meet the group and show off her medals. All in all, FW 12 had a very successful week and are looking forward to returning in 2024.

2024 - Our 50th Easter Pilgrimage to Lourdes

2024
50th

EASTER PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES

anniversary during our preparations for next Easter and more particularly during the wonderful week in Lourdes. Plans will be discussed and finalised at our National Group Leaders meeting in September.

The Trust overcome many difficult challenges since its founding in 1971. Our very first trip to Lourdes took place in 1972. At that time two groups, under the leadership of Tom McAteer and Fintan McAneney along with two Chaplains, Doctor, Nurses and carers brought 14 young guests from around Ireland on that first pilgrimage / holiday to Lourdes. It was a huge success and generated a lot of interest and attention at that time. The Trust quickly began to expand, so much so that five (5) groups were formed and travelled the following year, 1973. By the end of the 1970s the Trust had grown to 19 Groups from around Ireland. This growth continued through the 1980s and 1990s. Currently there are Easter groups, Hosanna House summer groups travelling to Lourdes each year. Back home in Ireland we have established our Friendship Week groups that avail of our Trust Home, Kilcuan in Clarinbridge, Galway.

2024 is a very special year for The Irish Pilgrimage Trust as we embark on our 50th Easter pilgrimage to Lourdes. The Trust is looking forward to marking this very significant

2020 to 2022 was a difficult period for the world at large when the covid pandemic shut down travel and restricted gatherings. This was the only period since our foundation when our organisation was unable to come together or undertake any of our pilgrimage/holiday activities. Thankfully, the Trust was wisely guided through this difficult period. Yet again, the Trust members responded to the onerous challenges we faced, including overcoming the burden of increased costs and rising prices. Most of our groups managed to successfully emerge and to return to Lourdes for our first post-covid Easter pilgrimage in 2023. Our Kilcuan Friendship Weeks also ran a successful 2023 summer program.

Now as we look forward to Easter 2024 the Trust is preparing to celebrate and mark our 50th pilgrimage holiday to Lourdes. Under the guidance of the Chairperson and Board of Trustees it is intended to acknowledge all those who have benefited from the work of the Trust together with the huge cohort of volunteers, supporters and benefactors who have given so much and so generously to bring us to this important milestone. We look forward with a spirit of joy and gratitude to continuing the very important mission of The Irish Pilgrimage Trust.

A 50th Pilgrimage logo has been designed for 2024 and will be presented at the National Group Leaders meeting in September. The meeting will also be presented with a number of events that are being planned for Lourdes to coincide with our 2024 Easter pilgrimage.

National Ploughing Championships 2023

The National Ploughing Championships take place in Ratheniska, Co. Laois from September 19th to 21st and The Irish Pilgrimage Trust will be there! Thanks to Angus Beef Ireland and the other exhibitors on their stand, we are delighted to accept their invitation join them and promote the Trust at the event. The National Ploughing Championships is the largest show of its type in Europe and attracts over 300,000 visitors.



The Irish Pilgrimage Trust will be present on the stand each day where we will play an important role in meeting the general public, promoting the Trust and selling tickets for the Angus Beef Ireland draw. This is a valuable opportunity to highlight the work of the Trust and to raise awareness of our organisation. Thanks to Angus Beef Ireland and their fellow exhibitors on the stand, the Trust will also benefit from the proceeds of the draw, an important fundraising event.

This is also a great opportunity to meet many of our members, guests, their families and supporters from all around the country. If you or any of your family and friends are attending the show please drop in and say Hello! We will be on Stand 25, Block 4, Row 1.

Memories from Lourdes 2023



YOUR LASTING GIFT



Please remember us in your Will

You may have supported our work in the past by contributing to our fundraising to bring young people with additional needs to Lourdes at Eastertime or to Kilcuan for a summer break with our Friendship Weeks. Or you may have volunteered and travelled with us to Lourdes and experienced at first hand the joy and happiness of the young people who join us as our guests for that wonderful week. Or you may have simply heard about The Irish Pilgrimage Trust for the very first time recently. Please be assured that your involvement is always remembered and appreciated.

One way to ensure your enduring support is to leave a gift in your Will. A gift means that The Irish Pilgrimage Trust can continue to serve future generations of special young people and give them the experience of that unique trip to Lourdes or to one of our holiday homes in Ireland.



The value of your gift is immeasurable for many reasons, for example,

- Maximum benefit is gained from donations and fundraising as our Volunteers pay their fares.
- Our Nurses and Doctors are Volunteers who also pay their own fares.
- Our Volunteers fundraise every year to raise the money to pay fully for the costs of the young people.
- Our organisation is run by a Board of Trustees who are volunteers and do not receive expenses.
- The precious memories of our guests are treasured for a lifetime and invaluable.

If you wish to leave a gift to The Irish Pilgrimage Trust, please contact your Solicitor to make the arrangements.