

Irish Trust Talk

AUTUMN 2014

Issue No 91



Trust TalkDigital

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

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CAMINO DE SANTIAGO



Walk the Camino Frances
from
Sarria to Santiago de Compostela
with The Irish Pilgrimage Trust



The Way of St. James
27th June 2015 – 4th July 2015

For Further Information please contact:
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Charity No.: 5992

A word from the Chair

Dear Friends,

We are about to start The Trust's 43rd year in Ireland and we can truly say it is now a year round operation! In the last twelve months we have:



- Brought 1,100 people to Lourdes to join with 11 other countries now part of HCPT family.
- We cycled 900 kilometers in France along with countless kilometers in Ireland in preparation for the 30th Anniversary of the Lourdes cycle and on other cycles.
- We have brought 90 people to Hosanna House in June.
- We have had brought 7 Friendship weeks on holidays to Kilcuan and Cois Cuain.
- We have welcomed many other groups and families for holidays to Kilcuan and Cois Cuain.
- We have fund raised for this in many different ways from selling tea cakes to selling jerseys at the Ring of Kerry Cycle. A special mention to our cyclists referred to above.
- We have insured that our Trust is run in a compliant and transparent way and that all funds raised are used as efficiently as possible with salaries averaging 10% of all funds received.
- We have been to Lough Derg as a group and are about to go again on the 13th of September.
- We have celebrated 40 years in the Southeast.



We have done all this in the spirit of love and sharing, which epitomises the spirit of the family of Irish Pilgrimage Trust as envisioned by Brother Michael Strode.

Take a moment to reflect on the last year before you look forward to the coming year. Appreciate the things that have gone well and acknowledge the areas where we can improve. Each of us will have our own memories and views on this. Let us grow by building on the successes and recognizing the failings.

The key focus at this time of year which is our "Spring time" is when we issue our application forms to various people and organisations for Lourdes 2015 and the Groups that will be travelling to Lourdes are beginning to form in preparation for selection in November. Can I ask you to make a special effort to ensure forms get to people and families who need our help? Look around your area and reach out. What we sow we will reap!

Also you might consider travelling as a carer or encourage someone you know to join us in this most rewarding of experiences. Other ways you can help is by fund raising or helping your local group. If you are not sure who your local group leader is please contact HQ in Kilcuan and they will supply you with the details. Every member of the family makes a valuable contribution. Always keep us in your prayers.



Continuing the Farming theme we have been offered a stand at the National Ploughing Championships, Europe's largest Outdoor Exhibition and Agricultural Trade Show. There will be up to 250,000 people there between the 23rd and 25th September at Ratheniska, Co. Laois. This gives us a great opportunity to tell the country about one of Ireland's best kept secrets. An organizing committee has been working tirelessly on this over the last few months. If you would like to know more please contact myself or any of the people at HQ. Tell all your friends to drop in and see us at stand No. 640.

We are also running a **National Draw** in conjunction with Ploughing. We have fantastic prizes see later in News letter with our star prize a Nissan Car worth €22,000. Tickets are €5 each or 3 for €10. I would encourage you to support this phenomenal draw by either purchasing a ticket or selling some to your friends. Please contact your local Group Leader or HQ if you wish to be involved.

People regularly say "Aren't you great to do this" but we all know that the secret of being part of the Trust

family is that we receive much more than we give, and the more we give the more we receive. The Irish Pilgrimage Trust is truly about actions not words, it is about giving and sharing whether we are involved as Carers, Guests, Group Leaders or Administrators.

An extract from the Bible puts it in context:

“Corinthians 9:6-7 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

The experience of The Irish Pilgrimage Trust family is that of “a cheerful giver” which is evidenced by the permanent smiles that abound wherever we go.

On behalf of all of us who receive this gift “Thank You”



A couple of dates for your diary:

- Lough Derg day is on the 13th September.
- National Ploughing Championships 23rd to 25th September.
- Closing dates for application forms for Lourdes 2015 is 31st October 2014.
- Camino Walk 2015: 27th June to 3rd July 2015

Please keep checking the Website for news and updates. Also if you are on social media why don't you keep in touch via Facebook and Twitter? Be part of the Irish Pilgrimage Trust family.

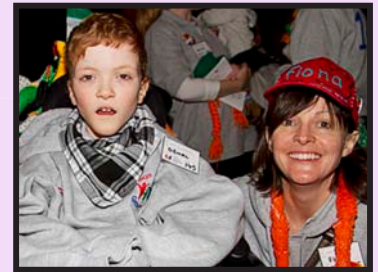
Wishing each and everyone the very best for 2014/15 year.

Our Lady of Lourdes Pray for us.
Saint Bernadette Pray for us.

From Lourdes to Cois Cuain

Fiona Murphy

From Lourdes to Cois Cuain



Myself and my son Donal travelled to Lourdes with Group 145, for Easter 2013. During that fantastic trip, someone mentioned to us that the Irish Pilgrimage Trust have a fully adapted holiday home in sunny Wexford that families can rent during the Summer. We were lucky enough to stay there for a week early July this year. The house is called Cois Cuain and is a fully adapted holiday home near Rosslare. It's in a beautiful quiet peaceful area, within walking distance of a number of



lovely beaches, and St. Helen's Golf club. We were a group of 14 in total consisting of myself and our 3 children, one of whom Donal is severely disabled and a wheelchair user, and some family friends and their children. First of all, on a practical level. It sleeps 17, is very spacious and airy and there is a portable hoist available for use. As far as I recall all the rooms downstairs were fully wheelchair accessible, as were the many bathrooms. There was a hospital bed in 2 of the bedrooms.



Well, we all had a ball!!! We were blessed with great weather, we all had a fabulous time, kids playing in the huge garden, down at the beach crab hunting (caught some huge ones!), swimming, Donal bum shuffling on the sand and in the rock pools (!), some lovely walks, visiting Rosslare Strand, BBQ's on the sunny deck, and also some chill out time for TV/Games in the extremely comfortable and spacious lounge at the front of the house.

As a family with a child with high needs, we often feel our two other children Sean and Aisling miss out on 'normal' family holidays as we are so restricted with what we can do. Not so on this holiday... It really worked out being able to use this fantastic facility as a group.

Thank you so much to all involved in getting this house up and running. We had the 'best holiday ever'

Steve McDonald's Story

Frank O'Beirne



Steve McDonald is a New York City Police Detective, who thought that working in Central Park would not be exciting enough for him.

Unfortunately, on 12th July 1986, he discovered that working in Central Park provided too much action. On this summer afternoon, he was engaged in a routine investigation on the north-east corner of the park. As he was questioning three teenagers about bicycle thefts, he was shot three times – in the head, throat and spine. Detective McDonald was left paralysed from the neck down, leaving him quadriplegic and needing intensive nursing care for life. Steve McDonald was 29 years old at the time of his shooting in Central Park; the gunman, Shavod Jones, was 15.

Steve McDonald and Shavod Jones only met on one occasion, on that fateful Saturday afternoon in Central Park. That could have been their only contact. However, with the help of modern technology, Steve started to write to Shavod and he chose to forgive him for his actions. Eventually, Shavod replied to the letters and he later phoned Steve's house to apologise to him, his wife Patti Ann and his son, Conor, who was born six months after the shooting. They accepted the apology and Steve told Shavod of his hope that they could eventually work together, telling others how one violent act had changed both their lives.



In late 1995, Shavod was released from prison, but three days later he was killed in a motorcycle accident. Steve McDonald did not want his message of forgiveness to end here. He now travels widely, speaking about how his physical incapacity has not destroyed his human spirit.

Easter 2014 was not Steve McDonald's first visit to Lourdes with the Pilgrimage Trust (HCPT). However, it was the first time that most people staying in the Solitude Hotel that week had encountered – or even heard of – him. Among those staying in the hotel were groups from Meath, Kerry, Scotland, USA and Group 91 from Dublin. On Wednesday 23rd April, after many groups had visited Gavarnie, Steve gave a 45 minute talk, in which he told his life story – he spoke of his mother's faith, his family's proud connection with the NYPD and his inability to play games with his son or to hold his wife. He also spoke about the other side of 'luck', whereby his brother, a fellow police officer, was unexpectedly off work on the morning off 11th September 2001, and how many of his colleagues were killed at the World Trade Center.



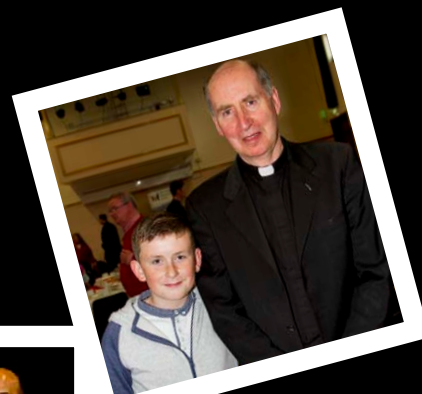
Steve concluded his talk by reading the poem 'You Are Special' by Peta Crane - 'In all the world there is nobody like you....You are the only one in the whole world who has your particular set of abilities'.

The most profound effect that Steve had on guests of all ages in Lourdes was not through his Wednesday afternoon speech, but through his daily interactions with people in the lobby of the Solitude hotel. While unable to move, he was still able to control his audience, no matter how small and he gave equal attention to all. Teenage guests, in particular, were never happier than while talking to Steve or listening to his words. As a long term friend of the Trust, Steve continues to inspire all those fortunate enough to meet him.

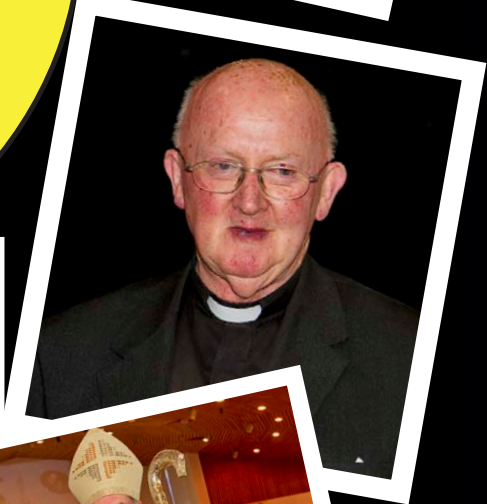


This year the we are running the retreat on September 13th 2014. Contact info@irishpilgrimagetrust.com or 091 796622 for details.

South East celebrate 40 years with the Trust



The South East commemorated their 40th Anniversary on the 25th May.
 Many carers and guests who travelled with groups 69, 92, 94, 129, 174, 191, 203, 308 & 358 over the past 40 years were treated to the celebration of a wonderful colourful and musical Mass in Church of the Annunciation, Clonard. This was followed by light refreshments, chat and much reminiscence in the parish hall. Thanks to Bishop Denis Brennan, chief celebrant and Mgr. Denis Lennon P.P. who provided the chapel and facilities.



"In giving we receive"

"In giving we receive".

Never has this phrase meant more to us than after spending a week in Lourdes with the Group 165 of the Irish Pilgrimage Trust. Our group consisted of ten guests and ten carers, including our group leader Michael, our nurse Marie and our priest, Fr. Gerry.



We attended a meeting and some fundraising events before we met the parents and guests in the Art's Centre in Nenagh. We were delighted to meet such wonderfully vibrant, happy, young adults and their families. We celebrated Mass and got to see a short film clip that gave us a taste of what to expect on the pilgrimage.



On Sunday, April 20th we greeted the guests and they bid farewell to their families. As planned we arrived in Shannon airport a few hours early. This worked well as it gave the guests and carers an opportunity to get to know one another. We saw the guests' initial shyness fade away as they chatted over breakfast. That evening we arrived at **Hotel Chapelle et Parc** in Lourdes. The staff welcomed us and did everything they could to make our stay special. Before going to bed, we walked around Lourdes and visited the Grotto. It had a great sense of peace and tranquillity. This was in stark contrast to the hustle and bustle

of the streets and surrounding areas.

The next morning two Youth volunteers, Clíodhna and Emily joined us. They were a welcome addition to the group with their upbeat and caring attitudes. Our first outing was a visit to the City of the Poor. Here we had a guided tour followed by Mass. We returned to the hotel for lunch and later prayed the *Stations of the Cross*. Half of our group went to the Baths while the others socialised and put up previous year's photos of Group 165 in the hotel. Some of the guests explained that they had relations who had visited the Baths and so they were keen to experience them



too. Despite the cold icy water they all said they were glad they did it. When evening fell we went to the concert in the underground Basilica. The place was alive with colour and exuberance. We looked with amazement at all the people singing and dancing while dressed in costume. This was the first time we heard the song "Rise and Shine" and it wasn't long before we were singing and dancing to the songs ourselves. Louise and I really enjoyed the concert and believed it was an important event for developing the dynamics of our group. The guests seemed to be having a ball. It was a turning point for some, as their initial reservations of the trip were washed away amidst the jubilant celebrations. Tuesday morning started with the

Irish mass. We readied ourselves with our wigs, face paint, banners and flags before entering St. Bernadette's church. Our group was excitedly laughing and chatting above the din of the crowd. The mass was unlike any other mass we've experienced. Thousands of people danced and sang to the joyful upbeat



hymns performed by the Youth Group choir and band. The theme for the week was "Give me joy in my Heart" and was very apt for the sight before us. It was fantastic to witness so many guests participate in the mass readings and prayers. Their contributions were received with a huge round of applause from the congregation.



After the mass we got together for our group photo. It was nice to know that it would be on display for pilgrimages to come. Subsequently, we went for a walk to see St. Bernadette's house and took a trip to McDonald's. The night marked one of the highlights of the trip for Louise and I. It was the Pilgrimage Trust candlelight procession. It consisted of approximately nine thousand pilgrims, all holding a candle and joining in the Rosary. It was a vision that will forever

“In giving we receive”

by Ciarán Cunniffe and Louise Egan

be etched in our memories.

Wednesday took us on a beach trip to the beautiful and sunny Saint Jean de Luz. Fr. Gerry led us in a special mass on the promenade that ended in an energetic rendition of ‘Rise and Shine’. This was much to the amusement of passers-by. We then devoured our lunches before heading down to the beach. Some of our group were engrossed in a lively game of soccer while others swam in the sea and climbed the sand dunes. On the way back to the bus we scooped our ice cream and stopped at a nearby café to enjoy some tea and soft drinks. The bus journey was a little quieter on the way home as tired pilgrims rested after the day’s exertions. That night our guests went to bed early and some of the carers went to a very emotional Reconciliation service. We had goose bumps as we listened to the choir sing beautifully and to the heart-warming sentiments of the Irish Pilgrimage Trust chairperson, James White, as he explained his involvement with the trust.

On Thursday, we joined the celebrations of the Pilgrimage Trust Mass. Like the Irish mass, this was a fun-filled occasion with thousands of people singing and dancing in St. Peter’s Underground Basilica. It’s easy to see why so many people return to Lourdes for the week when you see such happy faces. After the mass we visited the Grotto

and bought a huge 15kg candle. Back at the hotel we decorated it with ribbons and flowers. We then fastened on our names and prayers of petition. The guests filled out their diaries of the week’s events, played football in the corridors with the carers and had a singsong led by Clíodhna and Emily. That night we donned our glad rags and fancy dress for our hotel disco with the Irish Pilgrimage group from Derry. The guests mingled and danced while



singing the various anthems the karaoke machine blared out. All too soon the music ended but weary pilgrims didn’t pose much resistance as their beds beckoned.

On Friday we had an intimate group mass led by Fr. Gerry. It was an emotional time for the group as it was hard to believe that this magnificent trip was coming to an end. The occasion brought smiles and tears. When the mass was over we took our candle to the Grotto. There we lit it and prayed together. It was gratifying to think that our candle would still be burning long after our departure from Lourdes. We headed back to the hotel for some more fine food before hitting the shops for presents and souvenirs. When we had almost emptied our pockets we got together for another trip to McDonald’s. Later we returned to the hotel to pack and Fr. Gerry blessed our gifts. We finished the day with a hotly contested table quiz and bid

farewell to Clíodhna, Emily and Fr. Gerry.

Before heading home on Saturday we made one final visit to the Grotto to leave our petitions. By now our guests had swapped e-mail addresses, phone numbers, Facebook accounts, and Snapchat contact details. They were already planning their reunions on home ground. On our flight, we overheard our guest’s remark that they would love to come again as guests or even as volunteers. We took this as a reflection of the successful week we spent together. The group had mixed feelings on our bus trip back to Nenagh as we were happy to see our families but sad to be leaving our friends. Louise and I won’t deny that our trip to Lourdes was at times challenging and exhausting. However, the pilgrimage was also one of the most rewarding things we’ve ever done. After giving a little charity, time and energy, we received what we put in ten fold. We gained a wonderful friendship from our fellow carers. We were blessed with the trust of the families to look after those in our charge. We got to meet an amazing cohort of young people who were kind, open and honest. They selflessly shared their talents and gifts with us. It’s hard to express the sense of community we experienced on the trip and we will always be grateful for the incredible time we spent with Group 165 of the Irish Pilgrimage Trust.

**Ciarán Cunniffe &
Louise Egan.**

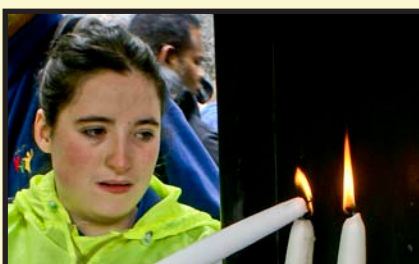


Photo Gallery



Photo Gallery



Reflections from Family Group 103

Lisa McGarel

My name is Lisa McGarel and I have been blessed by having the opportunity to attend the Lourdes Easter Pilgrimage, not once, but twice with my son Marc!



We were very fortunate to attend on both occasions with Group 103 (The family group)

Our first visit was in 2009, Marc was three years old. Marc's condition is spina bifida and hydrocephalus. I was nervous and anxious about attending Lourdes. I was not familiar with everyone in the group and I thought that a week away from home was a very long time, on the contrary a week was not long enough! The helpers made everyone feel welcome and we had lots of opportunities to mix socially, although this trip is first and foremost a pilgrimage, after the daily visits to the grotto and the usual rounds of sightseeing had been completed; everyone was keen to discuss their favourite parts of the day over an ice cream or coffee in the local cafe that we took refuge from the rain, these pit stops gave us some respite from the weather! Marc still talks about his mystery trip to the zoo and the lady bus driver! He really enjoyed the mad hatters tea party also, it allowed adults and children to relax together on their last day before we were homeward bound.

There was Mass on a daily basis, we came together to celebrate Mass with all the other groups three times in total during the week. Our own group Mass played an important part in the bonding process of the group. A poignant moment for me was when Seamus our group leader read out the names of all the children who had been on pilgrimage with the group and were no longer with us. It made me realise that our children are a blessing from God and each individual is so precious in their own right.

Our favourite spiritual experience was the candlelight procession of the Rosary. Marc really enjoyed this, as he knew the prayers and he could participate. There is something deeply moving about hearing the Rosary said in different languages; it just brings it home to you that although we are all different, we can all pray the same.

Fast forward to 2014 and my little boy is now nine years old. He did not recall the details from his first visit so much, except that there was a lot of rain! We were all surprised that he didn't remember the baths. Marc was so excited about meeting the group leaders before our trip, he had lots of questions! He was wanting to know who would be looking after his medication. His eyes lit up when he got to try on the group 103 coats and tops. I was so glad we had them too, it made it easier to spot one another in the crowds of people at the larger group Mass.

Marc's favourite Mass was the Irish Mass because he and his friend Criostai were able to carry the banner for group 103. I know how proud he felt as I had this honour in 2009. I thought that it was lovely for The McKenna family as a whole group were able to bring up the offertory during this Mass.

I feel so honoured to be Marc's mum, the journey over the past nine years has not always been easy, for we have had our share of operations and hospital visits like many other families in similar circumstances, because of this Marc and I were able to go to Lourdes. Easter is my favourite time of year and with Marc in our lives we were able to participate in a truly wonderful experience that is Lourdes. Lourdes is a very special place, whatever your level of faith. Your life will be enriched from the experience of meeting different people from different backgrounds and countries. God willing Marc and I will return one day, as he wants to take his family to this very special place. So if you are reading this and someone offers you the opportunity to see Lourdes and experience a wide range of emotions, please say yes! For you will not regret it.



Are You Eligible?

We in The Irish Pilgrimage Trust welcome applications from a wide range of young people to travel with us; to Lourdes on our Easter pilgrimage; to Hosanna House on our June pilgrimage; or on a Friendship Week to one of our holiday homes in either Wexford or Galway.

The Easter Pilgrimage

There are a number of groups of people who travel on the Easter pilgrimage to Lourdes. These groups include:

- A physical disability or illness or a learning disability aged between 11 and 30;
- Children under 11 who have a serious illness and who will be accompanied by a parent;
- There are places for other young people also and their application MUST be accompanied by a written recommendation stating why the young person would benefit from the Lourdes experience.



Friendship Weeks

Friendship Weeks are holidays for young people with special needs in our houses in Wexford or Galway. Most Friendship weeks are during the Summer months and applications are invited from the same categories of young people as the Easter pilgrimage. These weeks offer the young person an opportunity of a holiday independent of his or her parents and offers parents much needed respite. Application forms are readily available from the above sources.

Hosanna House June Pilgrimage to Lourdes

The June pilgrimage invites applications from adults with intellectual disabilities to travel to Lourdes as part of a group of approximately 50 people (guests and carers). This group stays in a wonderful house called Hosanna House located in the countryside outside Lourdes. They enjoy the peace of the French countryside and the richness of the Lourdes pilgrimage experience.

Applications are available from the office in Galway.

If you know anyone who may be eligible to travel on any of the above trips please let us know or speak to them and encourage them to contact us. We are always delighted to hear from prospective guests.

- *Closing date for the Easter Pilgrimage 2015 is October 31st 2014.*
- *Closing dates for Hosanna House and Friendship Weeks are not until late Spring 2015.*

We look forward to hearing from you.

Any young person wishing to apply to travel should

- visit our website www.irishpilgrimagetrust.com and download an application form, or
- contact our office in Clarenbridge Co Galway 091/796622, or
- contact your local group for more information



From Humble Beginnings

Starting from humble beginnings in 1972, The Irish Pilgrimage Trust brought its first group of 14 special guests to Lourdes.

Today the Trust brings nearly 450 young guests from all 32 counties together with as many as 600 voluntary carers to Lourdes every year on Easter Sunday. This large contingent of people is broken down into nearly 50 separate groups of approximately 22/24 people each, (11 guests and



11/13 voluntary carers). Uniquely our pilgrimage does not use the hospital at Lourdes: we stay in many of the hotels that have mushroomed around the



city of Lourdes. Every group, among its carers, has its own Group Leader, chaplain and nurse. Many groups have doctors travelling with them too. All of the carers are voluntary, pay their own fares and fund raise to cover the cost of the young people.

The groups share both a prayerful and wonderful fun filled week together, that includes playing games on the Prairie,



a day excursion to the Mountains, Zoo or one of the Beaches at Biarritz, fancy-dress parties, large Masses full



of music and colour, the Candlelight procession, visits to the Grotto and sharing in the water from the spring that St. Bernadette uncovered in 1858. While no week is the same year after year and no group follows the same programme, there are certain characteristics which make a visit with The Trust to Lourdes so unique.

Each pilgrim with The Trust is assigned to a group which is identified in Lourdes by their group number. From the first moment at the airport each pilgrim becomes familiar with this number and wears it with pride during the week in Lourdes. While there can be a certain reservation by 'new' comers at the beginning of the week very quickly it becomes the most natural thing in the world.

Easter Sunday is our day for travelling! Lift off is from Dublin, Belfast, Shannon and Cork. Once we arrive we meet our friends from the wider community of HCPT, over five thousand pilgrims enjoy this unique experience every year, travelling from the UK, Croatia, the US, The West Indies and many other nations around Europe.

Hosanna House

In addition to the Easter pilgrimage, since 1994, two more groups also travel from Ireland each year in June, staying in HCPT's Hosanna House in Bartrès just outside Lourdes.



This is a very different week to the Easter Pilgrimage. At a more relaxed pace, it is designed for an older pilgrim and a wonderful way to experience Lourdes. Lourdes is different at this time of year also, warmer yet quieter. The pilgrims participate in all of the

activities at the Grotto and also manage a day excursion away from Bartrès. Evening times are spent relaxing on the verandas of the house taking in the spectacular panoramic views of the Pyrenees and countryside. The beautiful oratory in Hosanna House is available at all times for the groups.

Kilcuan and Cois Cuain

The Trust also has two amazing facilities at home in Ireland too, where it provides respite care in its purpose designed self-catering holiday homes, in both Kilcuan, Clarinbridge, Co. Galway and Cois Cuain, Kilrane, Co. Wexford. Both holiday homes have been the venue of many friendship weeks for our own groups and the Trust has also welcomed many other organisations with a similar ethos as The Irish Pilgrimage Trust.



Kilcuan, situated in the beautiful woodland setting of the grounds of the Brothers of Charity in Clarinbridge, Co. Galway. The building was designed with the special needs of our guests in mind. All rooms are en-suite and are wheel chair accessible. A carefully designed oratory welcomes all into a wonderfully peaceful sacred space.



Cois Cuain, our holiday home in the sunny South East is just a short distance from Rosslare Harbour and can accommodate up to 17 people. It is ideal for the smaller friendship weeks or families that might otherwise find it difficult to find suitable self-catering accommodation with disabled facilities.

Student nurse experience of Lourdes

I got the opportunity to travel to Lourdes at Easter with The Irish Pilgrimage Trust. It is rather difficult to put the experience into words. Magical & special are words I would use to describe it. When the opportunity came up in college to travel to Lourdes I jumped at the chance. I did not know what to



expect from the week at all. I was rather nervous in the beginning as I had not met the guests or leaders prior to travelling due to distance. Nerves quickly left when I met everyone in the hotel.



We began the week as strangers but left as friends. It felt like being part of a large family and we were lucky that the group bonded so quickly. Everyone was in great spirits and I believe the young people got so much out of the week. They enjoyed the dancing, singing, social interaction and activities we did throughout the week. Each young person is special and will always have a place in my heart. I am so thankful for being given the opportunity to go and will never forget the week. Undeniably the best week of my life to date.

As a general nursing student I did not have a lot of experience in working with young people with physical or learning disabilities but I soon learned. I learned so much about each guest, about likes,

dislikes, about various conditions. I learned about the medications that the young people were on and helped to perform basic first aid. The nurse of the group was very encouraging and explained anything I was unsure of. I learned a lot about myself throughout the week and that after my general nursing I hope to do intellectual disability nursing. My faith in God grew stronger through the experience and I believe the same happened to some of the guests. The hardest part of the journey was leaving my Lourdes family, coming home back to reality. I really felt I made lifelong friends and look forward to future reunions. My advice to anyone thinking about going to volunteer, just go for it you really will not regret it. You will love every minute of it. Also I would encourage parents to allow their children to go to Lourdes as they are very well looked after. I saw such a change in the young people after one week, shy young people began coming out of themselves which was great to see.

**Rebecca Boggs
Group 172**

On Easter I went to Lourdes with my mummy.



It was the most amazing time ever, at first I thought it wasn't going to be good, but then I met everyone and it was so good. Everyone was so nice and happy, it was so peaceful and quiet.

I had the time of my life, I was a part of **Group 145**, a family group. Everyone was so nice and they were so kind, I had the time of my life and will never forget it.

I am going there again when I'm older!

Caitlin xx

Some Reflections from 5th yr. Students of St. Colemans College, Claremorris, Co Mayo

On the 20th of June 2014 The Irish Pilgrimage Trust's Group 754 jetted off to the pilgrimage destination of Lourdes. But why did we choose this location? Located in the Pyrenees Mountain region of France, Lourdes is the home of one of the most important shrines in the Catholic Faith: the Grotto of Massabielle. Approximately five million pilgrims, a great number of whom are sick or disabled, go to Lourdes each year. It may be through curiosity, through a desire for a physical cure, in a movement towards belief, or to be of service to those who suffer, that they come to drink the water from the Holy Spring.

Between February 11 and July 26, 1858, Bernadette Soubirous, a 14-year-old peasant girl, experienced 18



apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the nearby Massabielle grotto. During the 9th vision, an underground spring with healing powers was revealed. The Holy See recognizes 67 miracles attributed to the water that flows from it.

This story and many firsthand accounts of great work being done in Lourdes inspired my friends and I to bite the bullet and volunteer. For young people this would seem a very courageous act to partake in as many are submerging themselves into the unknown. I suppose our attitude was life only comes to each of us once and we might as well do as much good as we possibly can.

On our first day in Lourdes we were divided into two groups. We were then merged with another group in each case. This group consisted of both carers and people who were being cared for. There were many people of different ages each with their own wonderful personality. They truly brightened up every day that we spent in Lourdes. Our first night consisted of travelling from Hosanna House to Lourdes and partaking in the Candle Light Procession. This

was an amazing experience allowing me to truly note the great faith that still exists among Catholics. Even though we did some great activities throughout the week, the real inspirational aspect of Lourdes has to be the people we met. Each one emitted an infectious

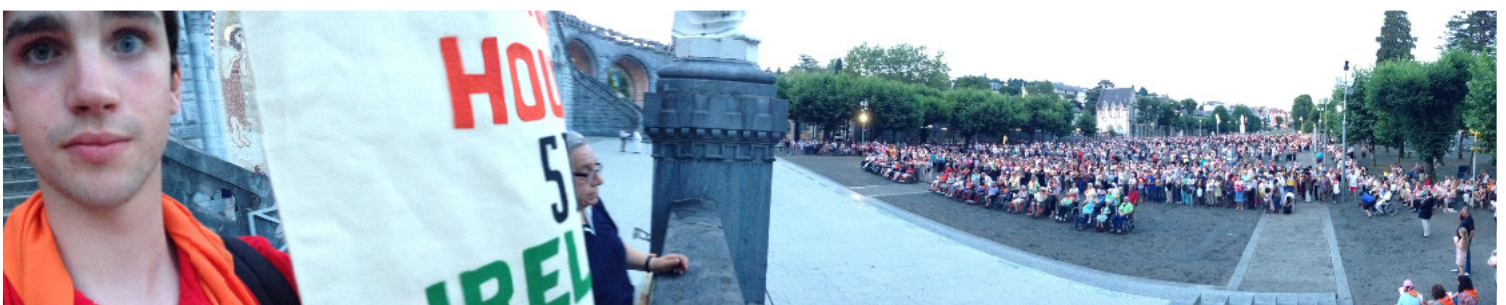


aura that you could almost become addicted to. I cannot express the heartwarming feeling that overtook me each day that I saw these people. Even if they had their own difficulty to overcome, you were so special to them. When they hugged you, said thank you and rubbed your back you knew they were doing it with true compassion. I went out to Lourdes volunteering to help the sick but they helped me in ways that aren't even comprehensible by one who hasn't experienced it for themselves.

Furthermore each activity on this pilgrimage was both fantastic and rewarding. The overall feeling of Lourdes made even the simplest of things sensational. "Love one another as I have loved you" would describe this experience comprehensively. When you arrive home you are overwhelmed with memories but you also feel a great emptiness. Each day thinking I wish I could again share many experiences with the different people from Lourdes.

Volunteering requires a lot of self-sacrifice, or that's what you may believe. Volunteering in Lourdes feels tremendously different. You gain an abundance of memories, happiness and compassion whilst immersing yourself in every aspect of what Lourdes is. This great place allows you to not only pray but actively partake in what religion is: Helping one another as you would like to be helped some day. The day will come that we all need caring for and Lourdes promotes this in the greatest way possible.

Luke Gibbons



Some Reflections from 5th yr. Students of St. Colemans College, Claremorris, Co Mayo

This was a once in a life time experience, one that I will definitely never forget!



It started when Fr. Mike Murphy talked to us about a chance to go to Lourdes. He was looking to bring some students to help some groups (with elderly and special needs people) that were going to Lourdes in June. I decided that I'd give it a go.

Preparations included a manual handling course and an information session of what it was going to be like and where we'd be staying. Along with 8 students, there were 6 adults travelling with us too, they were; Trish Gallagher, Seamus Cafferkey and three of our own teachers from the college, Peter Geraghty, Mary Egan and Cathy Freeley, along with Fr. Mike. So in total 14 of us were going.

So early on June 20th, we set off. Once we got through the airport and on the plane we were buzzing with excitement. We landed in Biarritz airport at around 4:00pm. We then began a 2 hour journey to Hosanna House. At around half six, we arrived. We went inside and met up with the group that we would be with for the next week. While eating dinner that evening I remember looking around and asking my friend Jamie "should we be helping instead of eating, I don't know I just feel like I should be doing something." For me personally I found it to be very daunting and unusual. Then it was time for Mass, well what was one of many Masses to come. We sat down and Mass began as normal, then the priest gave us the chance to say our own prayers of the faithful instead of him. This it was nice. Then, out of the blue, one of the groups said a prayer for us as he found the Mayo lads to be very quiet and hoped we'd find our voice! When Mass was over I remember thinking to myself that my faith is nothing compared to that of the people we were helping. I felt that I may be in the wrong place and remember asking a friend of mine what I had let myself in for.

The next day was when it all started. We walked Lourdes itself and saw the significant religious places; where Bernadette grew up and we learned a bit about her. Having been there less than 24 hours and barely had chance to meet everyone, a lot of people already knew my name and that shocked me! Also I learned straight away that the group had a really strong faith. This made me question my own. This pilgrimage made me question myself as a person. While there I look around and see a group of fantastic people that are really no different to you or me.

That evening we sat down as a group and reflected on our day and we listened to how everyone felt their experience

was and what they got out of it and learned from it. This was great time and you just sat there and thought. You sat there with no pressure and a complete weightlessness around you. We sat on the grounds of the grotto, beside the river in the dark. That for me was one of the best things. You sit there in darkness and listen to the water lapping and flowing away. Peace, something you just cherish.

Then on Sunday was the turnaround for me. I started to get to know the people and sit down with them. We wrote post cards for them to send home and that was something that was nice as they really appreciated it. Then we set off for the grotto with them. They looked around and had a chance to embrace it all. We went to a ceremony in the underground basilica. This lasted two hours and let me tell you there were some of us happy when it was over as it was very stuffy and packed with nearly 10,000 people!



On Monday I twisted my ankle and unfortunately was out of action for a portion of the day. It was here that I met a young lad called David from another group. He was a lad who could not speak fully and used sign language. He saw me and decided to sit down beside me. Colin (one of the students) told me about him and how to say hello and some of the ways to converse with him. After playing bingo with him and helping him win he was smiling away, never stopped all that day. He'd smile when I came to say hello. It was saying goodbye to him later which I found hard and I ended up crying afterwards. But I heard behind me, "Ethan you have barely gotten in the car and you're already missing us!"

We made a trip to the Pyrenees Mountains and I did something I thought I'd never do, climb a mountain. Sean (who is 79) led the climb. For me this was not only a fond memory but also an achievement. As one of the lads said half way up, "Jasus Ethan, we didn't think you'd make it this far." And although I may have climbed the Pyrenees, I'm still in no hurry to climb Croagh Patrick.

There are a lot more things I could talk about from candle light processions to Mass to the baths, but for me what I have talked about here are just some of the best short ways to summarise my recent trip to Lourdes. I had "craic go leor" with both the group and also the lads. It was such a great experience and one I would gladly go on again. It was a once in a lifetime experience that I shall never forget. It is something that I encourage other young people to do and something that can change and educate you in so many different ways. Mainly what I would say is embrace everything and everyone around you. Enjoy the little things and take whatever chance comes your way.

Walk the Camino Frances from Sarria to Santiago de Compostela with The Irish Pilgrimage Trust

The Way of St. James

27th June 2015 – 4th July 2015

The Irish Pilgrimage Trust is organising a fundraising walk along the Camino Frances from Sarria to Santiago de Compostela, from 27th June, 2015 – 4th July, 2015. The proceeds of the walk will be for the work of the Trust and specifically for Cois Cuain, our holiday home in Kilrane, Co. Wexford.

Saturday 27th June 2015: Arrive in Santiago Airport and transfer by bus to Sarria (1.5hrs).

Aer Lingus schedule flights between Dublin airport and Santiago Airport. www.aerlingus.com

The cost of the walk is €500 and this will include:

- Bus Transfers
- Dinner, Bed & Breakfast for 7 day
- Pilgrim Passport
- Luggage transfers along the route
- Travel Insurance

Price will not include:

- Flights
- Lunches



Sunday	
<i>Sarria – Portomarin</i>	<i>22km</i>
Monday	
<i>Portomarin – Palas de Rei</i>	<i>25km</i>
Tuesday	
<i>Palas de Rei – Melide</i>	<i>15km</i>
Wednesday	
<i>Melide – Arzua</i>	<i>14km</i>
Thursday	
<i>Arzua – Lavacolla</i>	<i>29km</i>
Friday	
<i>Lavacolla – Santiago</i>	<i>12km</i>
TOTAL	117km



The Way of St. James is the pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in northwestern Spain, where legend has it that the remains' of the apostle, Saint James the Great, are buried.

The Way of St. James was one of the most important Christian pilgrimages during medieval times. It is said that St. James' remains were carried by boat from Jerusalem to northern Spain where they were buried on the site of what is now the city of Santiago de Compostela.

There are many pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela. However, The Irish Pilgrimage Trust is planning a walk along the ancient pilgrim path, also known as Camino Frances from Sarria to Santiago de Compostela. The route was proclaimed the first European Cultural Route by the Council of Europe in October 1987 and was also named one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites in 1993.

If you would like to join us for our 2015 walk to Santiago de Compostela and traverse the hilly landscape of Galicia for The Irish Pilgrimage Trust, please contact the office in Kilcuan at **091 796622** or info@irishpilgrimagetrust.com for an **Application Form**. Closing date for receipt of application forms is 28th November, 2014.

We will be asking all participants to fund raise €1000 euro.



Your Lasting Gift

Over the last year you may have been to Lourdes with us at Easter or in June or maybe experienced the wonder of a Friendship week in Kilcuan or Cois Cuain. You may have travelled some years past or you might have been one of our many supporters. Whatever your involvement please help us to keep the treasured memories continuing.

One way of doing this is to leave a gift in your will. A gift will help us to continue to give future generations of special guests the unique experience of an Irish Pilgrimage Trust holiday in Lourdes or to one of our holiday homes in Ireland.

May, a longtime supporter of the Irish Pilgrimage Trust, has left a gift in her will and says:- *“I’ve been going on pilgrimage to Lourdes for many years helping many amazing guests. I’ve seen at first hand the positive effects for both the special guests and for carers. The joy and magic is priceless! I really want this work to continue so that more guests and their families can benefit in the same way in the future”.*



“With your help of a gift in your will, we can continue to offer this lifetime experience to future generations of special guests and their families for the years ahead.”



Please contact Hilary O’Sullivan, fundraising co-ordinator at hosullivan@irishpilgrimagetrust.com or on (091) 796622 for advice and information about how you can leave a gift to the Irish Pilgrimage Trust.

THANKS TO YOU

These young brothers travelled to Lourdes with the Irish Pilgrimage Trust last Easter.



AND they were not alone!

YOUR support also made it possible for nearly 500 more young people with special needs to travel to Lourdes too. That's right! Your support resulted in all these people getting the chance of a life time, an opportunity to travel on pilgrimage to Lourdes with The Irish Pilgrimage Trust!

This support was not only from your generous donations, also

- Many of you supported and assisted at numerous fund raising events;
- Some of you have cycled the 700 km to Lourdes on our bi-annual sponsored cycle;
- Many more travelled with us as a group leader, voluntary carer, doctor, nurse or chaplain.

Our voluntary carers are the backbone of the Trust, we simply wouldn't be able to operate without them.

Each year, over 1,100 people; 500 guests and 600 carers travel to Lourdes with the Trust at Easter.

In addition another 90 people travel each June to stay in Hosanna House, the HCPT's holiday home in Bartres, just outside Lourdes. Hundreds more also avail of our holiday homes in either Galway or Wexford, where Groups and Families with Special Needs can have a welcome break.



Cois Cuain, Co. Wexford



Hosanna House



Kilcuan, Co. Galway

The Trust has been going from strength to strength since its founding over 40 years ago. To maintain this growth it needs your continued support, not only with funding, but also if you are interested in travelling as a voluntary carer to either Lourdes or to one of our holiday homes in Ireland, we'd love to hear from you.

"Love doesn't mean doing extraordinary or heroic things. It means knowing how to do ordinary things with tenderness."

Jean Vanier