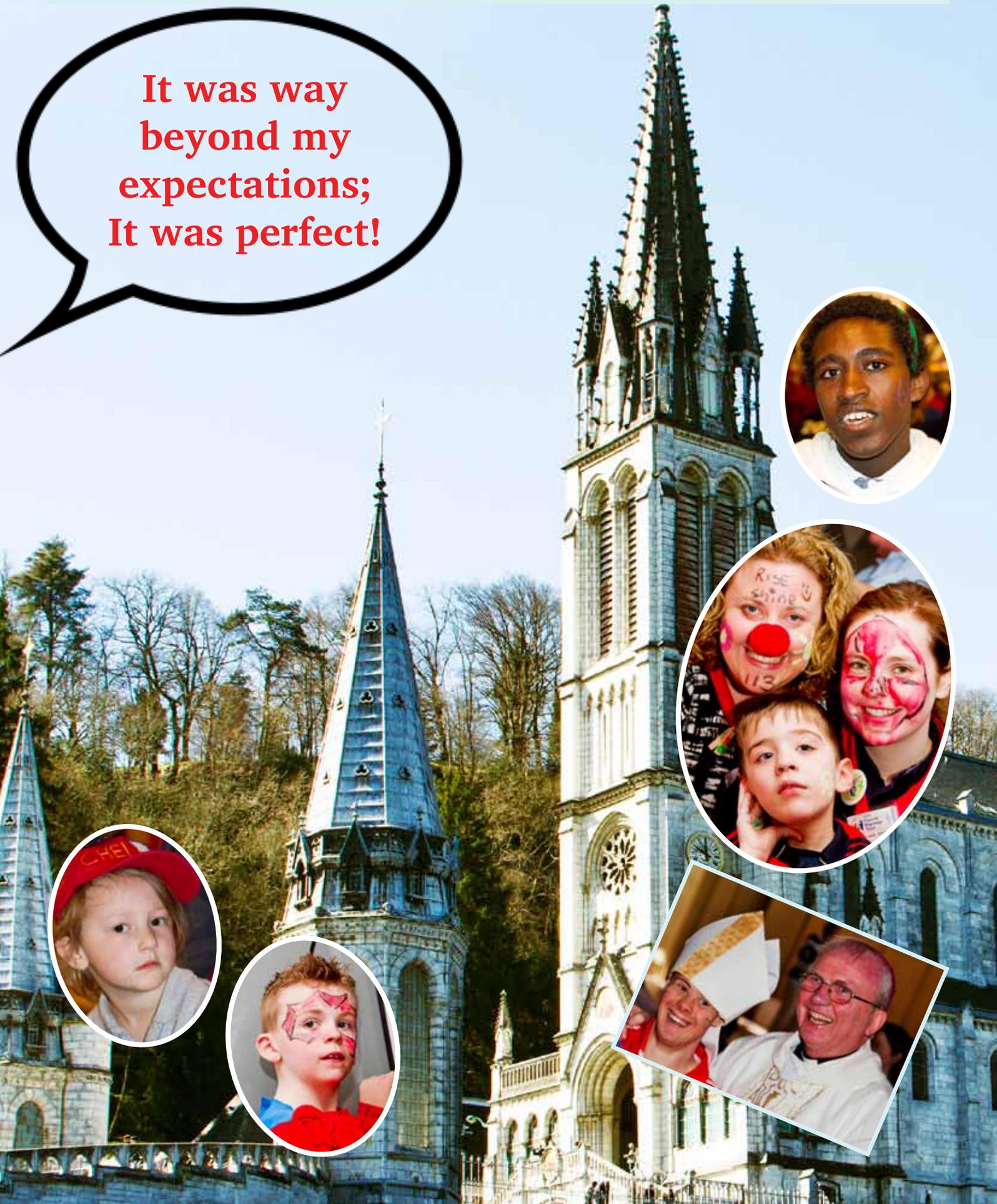


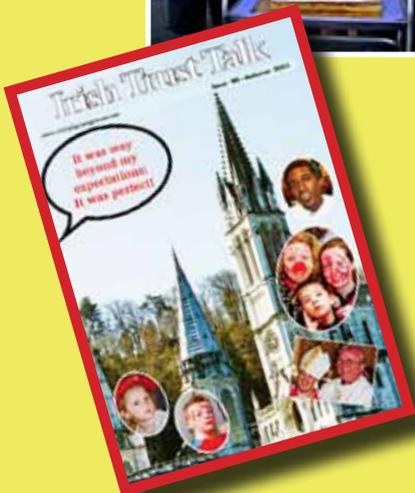
Irish Trust Talk

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Issue 93 - Autumn 2015

It was way
beyond my
expectations;
It was perfect!





Day of Prayer at Lough Derg

The Irish Pilgrimage Trust will participate in a day of prayer at Lough Derg, Co. Donegal on Saturday the 19th of September.

For more information and booking, please contact Mary Clancy 087 9070109 or Helen Kirwan 087 6817648



Safeguarding Officers



Liam Ahern



Mary Dunnion

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

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THE IRISH PILGRIMAGE TRUST

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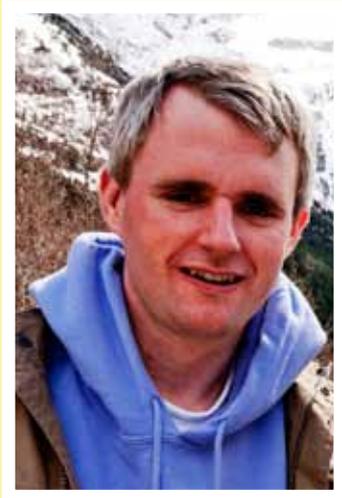


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A word from the Chair

Denis McCarthy

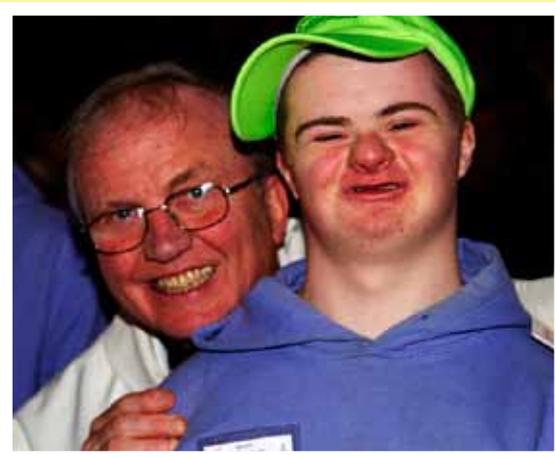


'Initium ut esset homo creatus est: That a beginning be made man was created'

This quote from St. Augustine seems especially relevant to the Irish Pilgrimage Trust family at this time of year.

Our 2015 pilgrimage is now but a happy memory, and our thoughts turn once again to the preparations necessary to begin again in 2016.

Of course, the work of the Trust never really stops: it has ebbed and flowed with the seasons since Dr. Michael Strode embarked with his little band in 1956. Those of us who are lucky enough to be part of the Trust have our own part to play, and we play our part in an organisation that is palpably greater than the sum of those parts.



Traditionally, Autumn is the reaping season. For the Trust, it is the season to sow: it is the time of year when we begin our search for new applicants to accompany us to Lourdes next Easter, it is also the time for recruiting new volunteers and to finalise group leaders and group nurses. It is also time of year when groups begin their fundraising - that unheralded activity carried out by volunteers throughout

the length and breadth of Ireland and beyond - without which the work of the Trust could not continue.

We pray for a successful conclusion to all of these efforts: for our fundraising, for the work being done to organise groups for 2016 and for our work to ensure that we have enough candidates to select as guests for our groups towards the end of this calendar year.

Many of the guests that will travel on our pilgrimage next Easter will not even have heard of the Trust at this juncture and we pray that those who shall be selected will experience the same joy, hope and renewal that so many of us who have travelled in the past have been fortunate enough to receive.

For me personally, it is an honour to have been elected chairperson of the Trust for the forthcoming year. However, I am acutely aware that the essence of the Trust lies within the many groups around the country. The group leaders and volunteers within these groups quietly go about their business from September to Easter, organising fundraisers, visiting families and schools, convincing volunteers to take that leap of faith required to travel with the Trust for their first time on our most special and unique pilgrimage.



The work of the Trust matters a great deal to so many people who are marginalised in so many ways across our society. Let us not forget this, and let us use whatever talents we have to further the work of the Trust in the coming year. Let us make the most of the opportunity that presents itself for 2016 and make a new beginning!

Denis McCarthy

Ring of Kerry Cycle - 2015

Helen Rea

For the second year in a row, friends of the Southern Region came together for a massively successful fundraising effort of running the Official Ring of Kerry Charity Cycle Shop 2015. This year saw over 11,000 cyclists pedal 180km on the 4th of July in what is undoubtedly Munster's largest charity event. The event is now in its 31st year and has raised over €8.4 million for Kerry charities with the final total of the 2015 cycle still to be announced. The Irish Pilgrimage Trust is blessed to enjoy a close association with the Ring of Kerry Charity Cycle with many of our volunteers also involved with various aspects



Molls Gap - Photo courtesy of Killarney Camera Club

of the cycle, including medical support, safety stewarding (Cork cyclists always love to see Kerry men waving red flags!), sandwich-making (over 23,000 sandwiches were provided on 4th of July), cleaning up after celebrations, countless behind the scene contributions and of course many, many cyclists.



Around the Beautiful Ring of Kerry
Photo courtesy of Killarney Camera Club

The Southern Region is most grateful to the Ring of Kerry Cycle committee for allowing the Southern Region to manage

the Cycle Shop in 2015 as this is our biggest fundraising initiative. Neither the Trust benefiting from the Ring of Kerry Charity Cycle or the cycle itself would happen without the hard-work of one particular modest and generous man - Tim O'Brien (Group 66 & National Treasurer). So a massive 'thank you' to Timo from the Southern Region and all ROK cyclists. The generous assistance of the following shops must also be acknowledged as they sold the Ring of Kerry jerseys for us at no additional cost at a time that was already very busy for them.

- David O'Sullivan,**
O'Sullivan Cycles, Killarney
- Joe O'Shea,**
O'Shea Cycles, Killorglin
- Eamon Casey,**
Casey Cycles, Cahersiveen
- Jim Cantillon,**
Kellihers Hardware, Tralee
- Brian Finnegan,**
Finnegan's Cycle Shop, Kenmare

These shops genuinely support the spirit of the Ring of Kerry Charity Cycle so please support them!

Planning for the 2015 ROK Cycle Shop began in November 2014 and over 50 volunteers from the Southern Region assisted with processing of jersey orders, delivering stock to shops, managing the website, attending meetings, organising PR, managing finances & accounts, monitoring emails (over 500 emails were sent on top



Processing & shipping Jerseys for online orders

of the 3,000 automatic emails) and running of the Official ROK Cycle Shop at the Expo on the 3rd and 4th of July.



Volunteers at the shop

The Official ROK Cycle Shop stand was the busiest stand at the Expo in Killarney on the eve of the cycle; so much so that all jerseys were sold that evening! Friends from eight Groups in the Southern Region were in flying form and would challenge the most experienced hawkers in Moore Street with their calls to purchase. The calm before the storm at the Expo in Killarney on the eve of the cycle

On top of all the hard work, we also had great craic and are looking forward to the 2016 ROK Cycle Shop and continuing to support the wonderful Ring of Kerry Charity Cycle!



Two familiar Irish Pilgrimage Trust and Ring of Kerry Cycle Committee faces on the right proudly wearing the ROK Cycle Jersey



From Around the Regions

Group 165 celebrate 30 years



Seen here is Martin Morris of **The Hibernian Inn** (The Hib) in Nenagh, presenting a set of jerseys to Vinny Savage and Michael Carroll of the North Tipperary branch of **The Irish Pilgrimage Trust**. The jerseys are part of the branch's celebrations of travelling to Lourdes for the past 30 years taking young people with social/physical disabilities from the North Tipperary and surrounding area.

Thanks to Martin from everyone in the group

Wedding Bells in Group 94

Great wedding celebrations for Padraig and Josephine - Group 94! Josephine's brother Sean gave her away. Sean travelled with group 308 this year.



Day of Prayer at Lough Derg



Once again **The Irish Pilgrimage Trust** will participate in a day of prayer at Lough Derg, Co. Donegal on Saturday the 19th of September.

For more information and booking, please contact Mary Clancy 087 9070109 or Helen Kirwan 087 6817648

"The Chapel on the Hill"

Fundraiser for Groups 66 & 189

The Pop-up-Café which opens for the the duration of Puck Fair proved to be a tremendous success again this year. It is now a well established and much-loved part of 'Puck'. Groups 189 & 66 are very grateful to Eileen & Eamon 'Edzo' Crowley for providing their unique premises for the café. Eileen also does a frightening amount of baking along with a host of other locals (too many to mention) to whom we are very grateful, how they manage to bake enough for the masses coming in to the café never ceases to amaze! We would also like to thank all of those who volunteered to work in the café making it possible to open from 11 to 7 on all 3 days of 'Puck'. Last but not least we would like to thank all of our customers who supported and gave very generously over the 3 days- long may the success of the "Chapel on The Hill" continue!!



Fundraising in the North West with Group 173



“Why not? It’s a free holiday!”

Keith Russell

When I was asked would I be interested in going to Lourdes with my severely disabled son Leon, my initial thought was *‘Why not, it’s a free holiday and I may never have the chance to bring Leon abroad again’*



As time was nearing our trip, I was looking for ways out as I was thinking, *‘Lourdes. Pilgrimage. Not for me’*, as I am not one bit religious, but I always knew I would go for Leon.



And never would have I imagined; I would not only have had an amazing week, but a life changing experience too! I had buried my partner of 14 years, Leon’s Mum, only nine months previously. I was just getting from day to day while trying to cope with Leon’s many needs and what took place while in Lourdes only sunk in weeks after we returned home.

While there was a Mass every day, it wasn’t a Mass I had ever seen before, it was more like a festival of fun and joy and everyone just wanted the children to have an experience of a life time. Which not only the children had, but everyone else there had too.

While this was during the daytime, the evening time was when the volunteers encouraged the parents to have time for themselves. It was about us having a break and taking advantage of the time we got, safe in the knowledge that our children were with people with so much experience around people and children with such special needs.



As most of the volunteers work or have family with similar needs, there was also a nurse in every group and a doctor at hand, which allowed us to unwind and share our day to day

worries and struggles, this made me realise I am not alone and there are many people going through what I am. For the first time in years I feel alive and have a sense of purpose again, I have learned to enjoy my time with Leon and have fun being his Dad.



I now view this week in Lourdes a special gift I received, not a free holiday. I had forgotten how amazing it feels to have hope. I can’t thank the people involved in the Irish Pilgrimage Trust enough, they are what make this charity so unique and worthy. I would wholly recommend any family who is offered this opportunity to take it with both hands, as it truly is an amazing experience.”

Keith Russell

Another successful walk along the Camino from Sarria to Santiago de Compostela for 13 hardy pilgrims on the first week of July



Photo Gallery



Photo Gallery



In memory of Dr. Marie Anne Smith, Group 91

St. Stephen's Day 2014 brought the sad news that Marie Anne Smith of Group 91 had died and gone to God.

Thankfully, her illness was short and she was spared lengthy treatment. However, for those of us who travelled with her and been friends for over thirty years, it is a bitter-sweet time. Yes, Christmas time is a lovely time to go to our eternal home, having completed the life journey here on earth. But St Stephen's Day will forever be tinged with sadness for the members of Group 91 who remember a treasured fellow helper, a generous woman, a tireless worker and advocate on behalf of children and young people.



Marie Anne was the doctor in Group 91 and first travelled to Lourdes in 1985. Her skills and experience of working in St. Anne's, Galway stood to her over the years, as she dealt with many situations before, during and after the trip. Marie Anne, and her home in Barna, Galway, was a welcoming and hospitable stop for group members any time they travelled west.

Her last trip was in 1999, but even afterwards she took a keen interest in all the activities and plans of Group 91. Retired in the last few years, Marie Anne travelled again, this time to the Holy Land, forever seeking and learning about her faith. She was a valued member of the Pastoral Council in Barna, a Eucharist minister amongst many other roles.

We will miss her greatly in Group 91. Our memories go down through the years, to the fun and enjoyment in the Bon Pasteur hotel by the river Gave, to all the young people who travelled to Lourdes, to the diverse and fantastic bunch of helpers who made it all possible. The meals, the sing songs, the Masses, the mountain trips, the late night visits to the Grotto, the quiet reflections and spaces for prayer, the mad cap last day shopping frenzy... when Group 91 gathers each year and remembers old times, Marie Anne Smith will be a central part of our story telling.

Given her adopted homeland, and her love of all things Irish, it's fitting that this piece ends 'as gaeilge':

Chaill grúpa 91 cara den scoth ag deireadh 2014. Bhí suim ag Marie-Anne i ngach gné den chultúir Gaelach-an ceol, an drámaíocht agus an stair. Bhí sí fial, flaithiúil le gach duine agus cuimhneimid go deo ar an oíche iontach a chaitheamar i dteanta a chéile in 'Clogherhead'!

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam uasal.



The Sean Kelly Tour of Waterford Cycle is now in its 9th year.



This event has grown from humble beginnings in 2009 when a small group of cycling enthusiasts got together to promote **Waterford** and **Healthy Lifestyle** while also assisting **local charities**. A Trust Cyclist and member of Group 203, the late Bobby Power, Carrick-on-Suir, was an inspirational driving force in establishing this annual weekend cycle, based in Dungarvan. Bobby made no secret of his expressed wish that one day The Irish Pilgrimage Trust would benefit from the event. This year Bobby's wish was realised as The Trust became the sole Charity to benefit from the 2015 event.

The South East Region took charge of all fundraising efforts and organised a wonderful support crew and a number of events to ensure its success. Some 7,000 cyclists of all ages registered and participated over the weekend 22/23 August 2015. The SKT caters for families and children on the Saturday and on Sunday the 3 routes offer challenges for the novice



and more experienced cyclists. Many of the Trust's Cycle to Lourdes team participated with some 50 Trust cyclists taking part on the different routes. The SE Region provided some 60 volunteers in supporting the event organisers, Waterford Sports Partnership and Waterford County Council. The Irish Pilgrimage Trust is delighted with its involvement and looks forward to further involvement in the future.



The North West 15th Annual Friendship week in Kilcuan from Saturday 11th July, 2015.

The Group Leader was Mary Clancy and the group nurses were Angela Trimble and Mary Judge. 10 guests and 31 carers had a very active and wonderful week. The carers gave very generously of their time and many talents to provide a week of a lifetime for the guests.

The group took part in many activities for the week – Bowling in Oranmore, A visit to the Galway Aquarium and a walk in the sunshine afterwards on the promenade in Salthill.



On Wednesday morning we went to **Knock Shrine** for *Mass* and the *Sacrament of the Sick* at 12 noon and afterwards for refreshments in the Knock House Hotel. We then returned for an enjoyable barbeque in the sunshine that Wednesday evening.

We all took part in many other activities in Kilcuan - card making, pottery, flower arranging, T-shirt painting, bingo, indoor and outdoor

games and many visits to Kilcornan's walled gardens.



The group enjoyed many therapies in "Our Beauty Room"; manicures, pedicures; hair and makeup pampering and also many relaxation exercises by Josie.

Music, singing and dancing took place every evening after dinner. Thanks to Frank, Carmel, Paul and Paddy who provided the music for us. Delicious food was prepared every day in the kitchen for the group by Maeve, Ann and Lourda with the help of many other carers. The food was sponsored by many companies in Sligo and Castlebar. A Group Mass



was celebrated in the oratory on Tuesday evening by Fr. Tom Mannion from Glencar and each night the group gathered to light their candles for night prayer in the oratory to give thanks for the day and remember



family and friends at home. A wonderful week was had by all and thanks to James McHugh in Kilcuan who had everything ready and was on hand to assist us in any way.

Beautiful memories of the week were captured by our photographer Margaret.

Laura Beston 19, is from Claremorris, Co Mayo.



A sixth year student from Mount St. Michael Secondary School, is involved in a number of volunteering activities, all focused on those with intellectual disabilities.

This passion stems from her younger sister Aoife, who suffers from dyspraxia as well as having a moderate learning disability and little speech.

Due to family circumstances,

the level of support that Aoife required was falling short, so Laura unselfishly took up the mantle of becoming more involved in her sister's care. Laura began by taking her sister to a local Faith and Light group and given that Aoife participated in the Special Olympics in 2003, Laura also decided to support the organisation by taking on a number of roles within the club, primarily associated with coaching and PR.

Mount St. Michael also presented Laura with the opportunity to volunteer with the Irish Pilgrimage Trust during their annual pilgrimage to Lourdes for which she and eleven other girls had to raise €7,500. Her experience

on the pilgrimage incentivised Laura to fundraise further when she returned home. On her 18th birthday in May 2014, Laura climbed Croagh Patrick for the 100th time and in July and she completed a 653 km cycle, from Mizen to Malin in three days! She has to date raised close to €3,000 for the Irish Pilgrimage Trust.

Laura's teacher, Mary Grealis, described her as being "truly inspirational," stating "I have consistently marvelled at her interest, commitment and dedication to so many voluntary aspects of life, both within and outside school."

My Lourdes Reflection

Chloe Mc Morrow



My Lourdes Journey started in September when I was chosen for the experience of a lifetime.

From then onwards the group of us and our brilliant leaders worked to get everything prepared for Lourdes. The other girls were such an important part of the journey. We all properly bonded as our **751 family** when we were brought on a retreat to Kilcuan. The months of preparation led to an unforgettable experience; to say the absolute least!



During our reflections at night we had many words to sum up the experiences: *unbelievable, magical, joyful, peaceful, happy, unforgettable* and our favourite *serendipitous*. I had been told so many times how amazing Lourdes would be and I, like the rest, feared that I would be the one person that didn't have that Lourdes experience we were told about. But it was way beyond my expectations; it was perfect! Everyday was just as special as the last, bringing more fun, plenty of laughs, tears at times, lots of ice-cream and some new songs and chants!

Lourdes is such a happy place and that happiness is infectious. Never being tired because of pure elation

from real joy. I learnt so much from the week.



It's so strange how much the seven days could actually teach me. It was unreal to feel such joy from such simple things, the happiness of others and seeing how much the smallest thing can mean to someone, even something as small as smiling at our guests, pegging them or giving them a badge. The week made me so grateful for everything I have and I also have so much more appreciation for the things people do for me.

One of the things I was never told about Lourdes was how much other people would teach me while I was there, the leaders, carers, my partner, the girls of group 751 and especially the guests! The guests of Group 306 taught me more than I could ever imagine. They gave me so much by just being themselves and it taught me how important it is to be yourself. Every single one of their personalities and their strength inspired me.

They showed me how important it is to see someone for who they are on the inside and not what's on the outside. They also made me realise how important it is to

give to others and be kind because the joy you give and receive is priceless.



To learn these things and many others was life changing and eye opening. I feel privileged to have gotten the opportunity to do so in such a fantastic way and I wish everyone got this chance. The week challenged us all but we were ready for this challenge. I really cannot put into words what the week meant to me, it was without a doubt the most physically demanding and mentally challenging week ever, but above all it was the best week of my life.

I enjoyed every second of it and will remember it forever!



Lourdes 2015: Experience of a Lifetime

Emma-Louise Ruane

Bright eyed and bushy tailed, the 20 newest recruits of Group 751 set off from the gates of St. Colman's church in Claremorris on Easter Sunday afternoon, embarking on our pilgrimage to Lourdes with the Irish Pilgrimage Trust. Full of apprehensions and excitement, few of us were anticipating the week that was to unfold. That said; accompanying us on our trip were the veterans of the pilgrimage, including our very own Fr. Mike, a true veteran! His antics gave us a taste of the colourful and vibrant atmosphere of Lourdes!



We had been well prepared for the pilgrimage... or so we thought! From day one, we were thrown in at the deep end, caring for kids with various disabilities and digging deep down inside ourselves and in our hearts to best serve the needs of those around us. We all dug up skills, qualities and gifts from inside of ourselves that we never knew existed and infinitely broadened the horizons of our comfort zones. Personally speaking, I have never found anything as challenging, or at the same time, as rewarding as giving of myself, my love and my joy to those around me. Seeing the happy, smiling faces of people whose lives I knew I had touched even in some small way, made all the hard work and effort worthwhile.

On Day One, we were all already exhausted due to our late flight and late night ice-cream cravings! However it was time to rise and shine and go meet our groups. We were all put into pairs and assigned a group. My group was group 108 from Longford-Westmeath and my group leader was Colleen Regan who instantly made me feel at ease. Over the course of the week, they became like a family

to me and I was bowled over by their kindness and genuine loving care. No one was afraid to be themselves in the group. Seeing the kids so open and at ease with each other warmed my heart and made me more confident in myself.

Fun and laughs were the order of the day while we were in Lourdes! Barely a minute went by when we weren't clutching our sides in laughter! We got up to the craziest of antics, including splashing in the sea, singing and dancing on the altar, wearing leprechaun hats and square dancing... in circles! We walked down the streets wearing Where's Wally costumes, Mayo jerseys and disco diva costumes, singing at the tops of our voices. It's fair to say in Lourdes... anything goes!



Every day we celebrated Mass, but not the kind of Mass we were used to! The theme of the week in Lourdes was 'Rejoice' and we rejoiced in love, faith and kindness in each Mass through singing, dancing and embracing. We celebrated Mass in all kind of places where we felt God's presence; on the beach in 30 degree heat, in the grand underground basilica of Lourdes and on a hillside open air cathedral.

As a group, connecting with the kids was probably one of the aspects we found hardest. Sometimes all it would take was a smile or a friendly hello

and someone would completely open up to you. Sometimes it was was for you to hold their hand and feel your presence, knowing you cared for them. I was absolutely astounded at the level of connection that I developed with each member of my group and I was completely overwhelmed at the positive impact simply being kind and friendly could have. No tricks, no illusions, just me, being me.

It's very difficult to describe the personal transformations that occurred. It made us all swell up with pride to see the guests coming out of their shells and enjoying themselves as the week went on. And something special touched all of our own hearts. We were all filled with sheer joy. We all felt a sense of freedom to be ourselves, a sense of discovery at who we really were, a sense of pride; a sense of friendship; a sense of renewed faith in God but behind it all a sense of pure love for one another – and for ourselves. We cannot properly love one another until we love ourselves and by the end of the week we were all filled with a sense of wholeness and unconditional love.

Our Lourdes experience touched and affected us all in different ways. It was a truly enlightening (and in the words of Vicky Lynch serendipitous) experience. We were all caught off-guard by the wonders of the pilgrimage and got more out of it than we ever could have imagined. Each and every one of us is truly grateful to be a part of the emotional rollercoaster.

We will all surely treasure the memories of Easter Week 2015 for many years to come.





Our Group Just Gelled from the Start!

I was given the forms for the Irish Pilgrimage Trust late summer 2014 by a friend who thought it might be a good thing for us to do. I filled them in for me, my husband David and our son Jack and sent them off and found out that we were accepted to go on our first Easter 2015 Pilgrimage. It was a fantastic experience.

Before the trip, we met our Group Leader Muriel and Group Nurse Keeva and we were put at ease as to what was to be organised for the trip.



Our son has a Mitochondrial Disorder which has manifested itself in him as chronic renal failure, profound deafness (but he has a cochlear implant), an intellectual disability, poor muscle tone, so he's in a wheelchair and is fed by a nasogastric tube. No two children with Mito are alike. Luckily we have travelled quite a bit with him and Muriel and Keeva were great telling us what was involved. The Trust are so well organised and from the time you get to the airport, they take over so that you have no stress. The flight is full, the atmosphere electric! We met the families from our group, but it's only during the week that everyone gets to chat and know each other.

The week itself is just wonderful, it is all about the children, who are a mix of special needs and children who have a serious illness and our group just gelled from the start. We were also blessed with beautiful sunny weather. It was an eye opener to see groups from all over Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, the USA, Croatia and many other countries participating in the Trust week. We had a lovely priest assigned to our group, Fr. Benny who celebrated Mass with our little



group on the Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. This was so very personal to our particular group. On Tuesday it was the Irish Mass and boy, is it a celebration. It's full of colour, singing and happiness – all of our group were saying it is the way mass should be, a celebration. It was all inclusive of the children and the parents, carers and volunteers who attended. The Trust Mass on the Thursday includes all the worldwide groups and is an even bigger celebratory Mass.

One thing you realise is that disability and illness does not discriminate, it can affect everyone anywhere. The other thing that really overwhelmed me is the kindness that is in the world which the volunteers totally embody. Nothing was a problem for them, they would mind your child if you needed a break - they babysat; they took care of everything; they were cheerful and caring of our children and it was wonderful to be a part of that. The bond that grows between all members of your group is amazing. There was a Pirates fun night in the underground Basilica, a trip to the little zoo, the Trust Mass on Thursday with all the various other groups from all over the World, a trip to the healing Baths, visits to the Grotto, the tea room set up on our hotel floor for catching up with other members of the group and of course a little bit of souvenir shopping on our last day!



Personally, I found some healing there. Having a special needs child with physical and intellectual disabilities and medical issues is a road that no one would choose for themselves and the constant battles with the health,



welfare and education systems take a toll on parents of these very special children. You tend to be on 'fight mode' all the time. This trip, while it being about the children, also gives the parents some time to relax and recharge. There is a massive wave of kindness that envelops you from the minute you meet at the airport until the time you arrive back home and for me, that was the healing part.

My favourite part was the candlelit procession. It was just beautiful, seeing all the candlelit torches reflecting a glow on everyone's faces.



At the end of the procession there is singing. To this day 'Rise and Shine' will be forever stuck in my head, a catchy children's hymn that is a funny song about Noah and the Ark and heard a lot during the week. The part about the animals coming out in 'threesies' still makes me laugh (Elaine, I can hear you roaring laughing right now).

For me and my husband David and our little munchkin Jack, it was a wonderful trip, full of kind and caring and extraordinary volunteers and families in Group 145. I have a bucketful of great memories that I will cherish for a lifetime. Now, I'm only waiting to be allowed go again.

*To the Irish Pilgrimage Trust –
Thank you.*

17th biennial Cycle to Lourdes



Plans are well advanced for our 17th biennial Cycle to Lourdes, which will take place in France during Holy Week 2016.

The Sponsored Cycle to Lourdes is the single biggest fundraising event undertaken by The Irish Pilgrimage Trust. Our 2014 cycle attracted 132 cyclists.

This very special journey only takes place every second year. In 2016 the Cycle will undertake a 7-day 800 km journey through the beautiful French countryside, arriving into Lourdes on Good Friday, 25th March 2016.

Pat Jordan is delighted to report great interest once again and that a good number of new 'first-time' cyclists have signed up for 2016. They will be joining many of our 'old' friends and support teams at the upcoming meetings and practice cycles in Kilcuan.

Our cyclists have been busy during recent months clocking up ever greater distances and time in the saddle as they prepare for the road ahead. We continue to receive applications and will remain open for registration for another few weeks.

In the Beginning....

1988

1984



2014

If you or someone you know wishes to join us why not contact us for information:

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James McHugh: jmchugh@irishpilgrimagetrust.com

Tel 091 796622 or directly to
Mobile 087 8119454
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Last Will and Test

I, the undersigned,

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.

You can help shape and protect the future of the Irish Pilgrimage Trust by leaving 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.

Maye, 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 us at info@irishpilgrimagetrust.com or on (091) 796622 for advice and information about how you can leave a gift to the Irish Pilgrimage Trust.

“To love someone is to show to them their beauty, their worth and their importance.”

Jean Vanier

My 306 Experience

Last September I was granted the opportunity of a lifetime! I was accepted to travel to Lourdes with group 751 and spend my week working with the wonderful people in Group 306. I didn't understand this whole aspect of Lourdes or even the idea of this pilgrimage, none the less I grabbed it with two hands and as Easter Sunday approached rapidly and I was on my way. I arrived to Lourdes on the Sunday night at around 11 p.m. We all headed for bed with thoughts about what the week ahead of us was going to bring. Monday morning came and



partnered with Chloe we walked to the hotel Padue, just around the corner to meet our group. We couldn't have felt more at home with the welcome Trish our Group Leader gave us and all the other carers on team 306, Chloe and I were completely relaxed; all the worry and nerves we had talked about since September had left us and been replaced with excitement.

Our week began on a high and it didn't drop once! The guests that I had the honour of spending my week with and getting to know were the most inspiring and affectionate people I think I will ever come across. I travelled to Lourdes with the thought that I was going to have to bend over backwards to make the guests smile and laugh and enjoy themselves and ensure that they got something out of it; I was so so

wrong! I got more out of my week in Lourdes that I will ever get out of any leaving cert or college course, I thought I was going to help the guests enjoy themselves and have the best week of their lives but no weight of gold will amount to how those 9 people made me feel, or amount to how much I learned about myself and about my perspective of life and indeed, no weight of gold will ever replace the happiness and joy I felt that week.

The extraordinary people that made up Group 306 2015 have left a mark on me that I never ever want to lose. I had the greatest and toughest week of my life and I will never be able to thank Trish enough for taking me on for this week in Lourdes!

Nothing I say will justify how Lourdes made me feel, utter joy and complete fulfilment to the highest feeling possible, I think just about does it! I couldn't possibly have enjoyed my week anymore than I did, I have so many stories and the best memories ever, to keep with me. I will always remember this special experience!

I think my favourite memory of Lourdes or experience in itself was seeing the transformation in the guests, when I walked in that Monday morning one guy in particular was having absolutely none of me, he wasn't tolerating my singing, my dancing or anything I did really. At our first

group Mass I stood at the front and acted out and sang the moves to *Rise and Shine* and every time I looked at him he would have his hands folded and eyes rolling! On the Tuesday he grabbed my hand whilst we were walking and still didn't say much still, but by Wednesday we were the best of friends. He would have lead the whole underground basilica to *Rise and Shine* at the International Mass if he could have. I will never forget the connection and love he showed for the rest of my life.



I learnt so much throughout my week. The guests taught me that the only thing that gets in the way of a person's happiness; is by not being the person you really are. Being able to be myself was a huge part of my time in Lourdes and seeing the love that was shown towards me by the guests and the carers meant so much.

Last September I would never have imagined how much one week and 24 people could have changed my life. I will forever be thankful for each of them. I cannot wait to return as a carer with Group 306 and I hope to continue for as long as I am able. There's no getting rid of a bad thing!



Going for Gold!

In September 2014, 88 of Ireland's finest athletes received the most important letter of their lives. They had been invited to compete at the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles in Summer 2015.

Fast forward to July of this year and those same 88 athletes, many of whom have travelled with the Trust over the years, plus 40 coaches gathered in Dublin Airport, ready to



depart on the adventure of a lifetime. As soon as they arrived in LAX they were whisked off to Downey their host town, for the first week of the trip. On arrival in Downey, they were given the warmest of welcomes. During their stay they were taken on a tour of the Coca Cola factory as well as having all 88 of their pictures on the front of the local newspaper.



On Saturday July 25th, the games began in earnest with a breath-taking Opening Ceremony, held in L.A.'s famous Memorial Coliseum. The games were officially opened by none other than the First Lady herself, Michelle Obama!

Team Ireland received one of the loudest cheers of the night as they



entered the stadium accompanied by Claudine Keane and Colin Farrell. As the evening wore on, Team Ireland rubbed shoulders with Stevie Wonder, Avril Lavigne and the most successful Olympian in history, Michael Phelps.



For the next 7 days the Team Ireland competed in events across 12 sports at venues including USC and UCLA.

When the dust had settled, Team Ireland had 82 medals, 41 placement ribbons as well as 31 personal bests.



Team Ireland's supporters were among the loudest and most recognisable at the games and even included Irish soccer captain, Robbie Keane, who

made a special visit to the 11-a-side soccer team.

Before all was said and done, Team Ireland had one last night to celebrate when they attended the Games' Closing Ceremony. They danced long into the night to the music of OAR and Carly Rae Jepsen.



Early the next morning they boarded their flight, now much heavier due to all the medals, and headed for home. The reception the athletes received in Dublin Airport was incredible, and truly well-deserved by 88 people who did themselves, their families and their country proud on the biggest stage of them all.



The sense of excitement, pride and competitive spirit as well as the camaraderie amongst the athletes from all countries is something that will never be forgotten by any of those lucky enough to have been there.

It was a true example of ability, not disability, in action. Go Team Ireland!

Paul Ahern

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 2016 is October 31st 2015.*
- *Closing dates for Hosanna House and Friendship Weeks are not until late Spring 2016.*

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 Clarinbridge, Galway 091/796622, or
- contact your local group for more information



THANKS TO YOU

These young ladies 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 from Ireland to Lourdes with the Trust at Easter.

In addition another 90 people travel from Ireland 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 almost 45 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.

"YOU don't choose your life; it chooses you. There's no point asking why life has reserved certain joys or griefs, you just accept them and carry on."

Paulo Coelho