



“Mom, I’m Nervous”

Conor’s story told by his Mom Elma



Easter Sunday 2014 as Conor and I travelled to meet the Group 135 bus in our local village, Conor stated with a degree of clarity that I have rarely if ever witnessed in him, “Mom, I’m nervous.” My son with the learning disability who speaks with a stutter and repeats himself particularly when anxious had made this simple statement.

As a family we had played on the ‘hype’ for months prior to this impending departure so that Conor would want to travel to Lourdes with the Irish Pilgrimage Trust Group 135. But in truth we really did not know what

to expect. We had hoped it would serve to develop Conor’s independence and self esteem but that was a big ask.

We talked while waiting for the bus to arrive and when it came along he boarded with some trepidation and that was it. He was gone.

Over the next number of days when I tried to check in with him I got excited messages such as “Oh Mom we were dancing at Mass” or “I was a great goalie” all of which left me elated but yet curious about this pilgrimage that my son was on.

On Saturday evening, Conor alighted that bus again amidst a cloud of kisses and handshakes and a tangible air of comradarie, fellowship and love that was infectious. He said good bye. I could see he was torn. He didn’t want it to be over, yet he was tired and happy to be home.

IRISH TRUST TALK is the official newsletter of
The Irish Pilgrimage Trust

Each year the Trust provide pilgrimage holidays to over 1,060 young people with special needs. The Trust has it’s head office in Kilcuan, Clarinbridge, Co. Galway.

The Irish Pilgrimage Trust is a Registered Charity, Number 5992 and relies fully on donations and fundraising to carry on its work.

He related stories, way into the night, from under drooping eyelids, still too excited to sleep. He spoke of magic tricks, water pistols and Kerry Vs Cork football games. He told us of deserts every day after dinner, Lourdes Mushroom Soup and TV in his bedroom. He dropped names like, Aidan, Denis, Ashley, Roisin, Noreen, Margaret Mary, John, Dermot, Zelig and Caoimhe and many more besides, like they were old family friends that we just ought to know.

He spoke of long walks and people who needed his help. He spoke about St Bernadette. He told us about the young girl who told him she would “keep him in her heart forever.” And that was when he admitted that he might be in love! He spoke about how much fun he had with Fr Alan. And then he asked “**when can we go again?**”

Continued overleaf

The Irish Pilgrimage Trust is a Nationwide charitable organisation founded in 1972

2017 will be our 46th consecutive year providing pilgrimage holidays to special children and young people, who are disadvantaged, disabled or have other special needs regardless of faith or ethnicity. Each year over 1,060 Volunteers and Guests join our annual Easter pilgrimage to Lourdes. All Volunteers pay their own fare and they fund raise to fully cover the costs for all our Guests.

The Trust is a volunteer led organisation, directed by a Board of Volunteer Trustees and staffed by four part-time employees based in our administration Office in Kilcuan, Clarinbridge, Co. Galway.

PLEASE consider the **The Irish Pilgrimage** when you are writing your Will. Leaving a gift for the Trust will help to continue the very important work in providing life enhancing opportunities to those less fortunate.

Contact Bernadette Connolly at our office in Kilcuan to find out how you can include the Trust in your will.

“Mum, I’m Nervous”

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This has been such a great opportunity for us and I want to sincerely express my gratitude.

Yes it did serve to develop Conor’s self esteem and independence. It helped him to believe in himself, he felt the fear and did it anyway. He learned of new places and new people. He learned about helping others. He had fun. He felt safe and well looked after. He was part of a club, a group, - The 135 Group.

As his Mom it helped me to step back and realize Conors abilities instead of concentrating on his disabilities. I now know with confidence, that if surrounded by good people like those on the Irish Pilgrimage Trust and those who boarded that bus with him, Conor will be ok. That may not sound very important but it is a huge relief for any Mom of children with additional needs.

Oh my God, I can now remember that I forgot to mention all the background work that became so obvious in the end, the door names for his room with pictures of his favourite things like tractors and diggers, or the scrap books and photographs that were painfully time consuming yet invaluable to us and the kids to jog the memories and lock the trip into our hearts. Oh look I could go on and on. You all know what you did. It was hard work but Bless you All ye did it for Conor.

It was my little Lourdes Miracle.

Mile Buiochas.
Elma Griffin.



A Note From THE CHAIR

Denis McCarthy

Hello, and welcome to the latest edition of our Trust Talk. In only a few short months we will be once again wending our way to Lourdes with our Easter Pilgrimage. Preparations are well underway, with group leaders and nurses traveling the length and breadth of Ireland as they visit the children and young people that have been chosen to accompany us this year.

We have booked our flights, and Ber and members of her team have visited Lourdes for the pre-pilgrimage meeting. The stars are aligning!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bishop Donal McKeown of Derry for accepting the position as honorary president of the Trust. Bishop Donal has traveled to Lourdes with the Trust for the past couple of years, and has a clear affinity and affection for the work that we do. Given our history and our status as one of a small number of charities under the patronage of the Irish hierarchy, the Board is delighted to welcome a member of that hierarchy as our president. We wish Bishop Donal well in his role with the Trust, and indeed in his pastoral work as he ministers to his diocese.



Finally, a word of thanks to a few people is in order. Firstly, I would like to thank our good friend and former trustee Tom Doyle for his wonderful work over the past few years in compiling and editing the Trust Talk. Tom was and is the epitome of professionalism, and we will miss his input in many ways as he steps down from the Board of Trustees and his associated role with the Trust Talk. Secondly, I would like to thank his able replacement, James McHugh, for taking on the editorship. James is a man for all seasons, and I look forward to enjoying the fruits of his labours in this and future editions of the Trust Talk!

God bless, and I hope to see you all in Lourdes.

Denis



THANK YOU

We want to say THANK YOU to everyone who supports the work of **The Irish Pilgrimage Trust** in any way, especially on behalf of all the young people who benefit in so many ways from the wonderful work of our volunteers. We can assure you that your support brings unmeasurable joy and happiness to so many deserving special people. **Thank You!**

Easter 2017 The Irish Pilgrimage Trust will bring 480 young people with special needs and 600 volunteer carers, nurses, doctors and chaplains on our annual Easter pilgrimage holiday to Lourdes on Sunday 16 April this year. PLEASE SUPPORT OUR FUNDRAISING EVENTS throughout the country or DONATE online at www.irishpilgrimagestrust.com or by phoning 091 796622

WELCOME
Bishop Donal
New
President of The
Irish Pilgrimage
Trust



**Bishop Donal McKeown,
 Trust President**

Lourdes has been in my family's blood for a very long time. Just under a century ago – c 1923 – my grandfather came as a Co Monaghan stone mason to work in the parish of Duneane, Co Antrim. He was the head stone cutter on a building that was planned as 'The National Pilgrimage Church of Our Lady of Lourdes' – and included a large Lourdes Grotto. The PP was a great devotee of Our Lady of Lourdes and brought my grandfather with

him on the Second Irish National Pilgrimage in 1924. In 1950, my parents went to Lourdes and since 1963, I have been there on very many occasions. That included four years with CLM, 10 years as Down and Connor Diocesan Pilgrimage Director. And now I have the honour of being invited to act as President of The Irish Pilgrimage Trust.

Easter Week in Lourdes has a very special atmosphere. And it is a privilege to be working as part of The Irish Pilgrimage Trust. There are so many wonderful volunteers and friends. The joy of the Gospel rings around every part of the town and sanctuary. Visitors are really moved by everything from the Processions to the Masses on orange boxes in fields beneath the snows at Gavarnie.

It is a time of celebration and blessing in the face of all the challenges of life. And it is a blessing for me to be included in those special days of grace in a special place – with very special people.



- CYCLE 2018 - The 18th Sponsored Cycle to Lourdes



This is a very special 7-day cycle event that will cover almost 1,000km from the north of France to the southern Pilgrimage Shrine in Lourdes. It is also a major fundraising event for the Irish Pilgrimage Trust.

For those in Lourdes this Easter, the launch of Cycle 2018 will take place in the Hotel Roissy, Lourdes and details of times will be published in the Tatler. For anyone else interested in getting more information or joining Cycle 2018, please phone Kilcuan or email jmchugh@irishpilgrimage.com

Application Forms and Information will be available at the Launch. Forms are also available from James McHugh at Head Office or phone James on 087 2508074.

Time to stop cycling in circles?

Are you one of the 40,000 people who cycle the round trip to work every day in Ireland, or one of the 20,000 who cycle to and from school? Or are you one of the thousands who cycle for fitness and exercise? If you are, we would like to offer you a challenge and an opportunity. Instead of cycling around in circles, why not join us next Easter and cycle to Lourdes?

Our 18th fundraising "Tour de France" will run from 24 – 30 March 2018 and will be officially

launched during our annual Children's Pilgrimage in Lourdes at Easter. We look forward to welcoming back many of our friends from past Cycles who have already committed to participate in 2018. The Central Statistics Office tell us that there are 10% more people cycling now than five years ago and we want to increase our numbers by at least 10%. New cyclists are always welcome, and even if you have not yet started cycling there is still 12 months to prepare. This is an opportunity to meet new people and experience Ireland and France from a new perspective. A Diary of dates for Practice cycles and meetings for the event is available on the Trust website www.irishpilgrimage.com under the '2018 Cycle to Lourdes' tab.



- KILCUAN - Our Special Home in Clarinbridge

**Available to Groups for Special
Holidays, Retreats and Much More**



KILCUAN is a unique and very special Holiday Home, purpose built and single storey with fully accessible Ensuite accommodation to cater for every need. We can accommodate up to 29 people staying on a self catering basis for short holiday breaks and camps throughout the year. Kilcuan is located in a beautiful woodland setting on the grounds of Kilcornan close to the famous oyster village of Clarinbridge in County Galway. Groups renting Kilcuan can enjoy:-

- Relaxing, secure and private accommodation in tranquil peaceful surroundings
- On-site facilities for leisure walks, outdoor games and a garden patio
- Use of the nearby swimming pool and a walled garden
- Close proximity to Galway City and Connemara, North Clare, Cliffs of Moher, Bunnah Castle, Knock and all the associated local festivals, entertainment and activities
- An intimate unique sacred space / oratory
- Nearby restaurants, or arrange for in-house catering with local caterers and chefs

If your organisation or group would like to arrange a stay in Kilcuan or make an inquiry please contact our Office at 091-796622 or email:- jmchugh@irishpilgrimagetrust.com

DONATE

Please help us to continue our work

The Irish Pilgrimage Trust fully relies on your generosity to provide much needed opportunities to children and young adults who are disadvantaged, disabled or have special needs. We do not receive public funding or subventions.

Through the work of our organisation and our volunteers their lives are enhanced, very often in positive life changing ways when they travel on our annual trips to Lourdes at Easter and Summer or join our summer camps at our special homes in Kilcuan and Cois Cuain.

YOU CAN

There are many ways you or your company can participate in this wonderful work. YOU CAN

- Simply click **DONATE** on The Irish Pilgrimage Trust website
- Sponsor a Child
- Support a fundraising event
- Match funding to support employees fundraising events
- Donate by direct debit
- Provide a legacy in your WILL
- Run a fundraising event for the Trust
- Make a Donation directly
- Contact our Head office - details below