

# Irish Trust Talk





## The Irish Pilgrimage Trust

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## The Irish Pilgrimage Trust

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

Check out our website on [www.irishpilimagettrust.com](http://www.irishpilimagettrust.com) for more details or call +353 91 796622

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



## The Irish Pilgrimage Trust Safeguarding



**Designated Liaison Person**  
**Bernadette Connolly**



**Deputy Designated  
Liaison Person**  
**Catherine Foley**

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

### Please consider DONATING to The Irish Pilgrimage Trust

You can DONATE online by visiting our  
website  
[www.irishpilimagettrust.com/donate](http://www.irishpilimagettrust.com/donate)  
or  
email to [info@irishpilimagettrust.com](mailto:info@irishpilimagettrust.com)  
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Contact us by 'phone on +353 91 796622

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# A Word from the Chair

Helen Kirwan



Dear Friends,

Welcome to Trust Talk Christmas 2020! It is very unusual to be producing a Trust Talk at this time of year. However we are all very aware of how unusual 2020 has been. Firstly, we had to cancel our Easter pilgrimage and all activities for Summer 2020 and then in September we once again had to take the very disappointing decision to cancel pilgrimage 2021. Covid has had a massive impact on everyone and everything. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas we in the Trust are looking towards the future with hope and enthusiasm. While we will not be travelling to Lourdes in 2021 we are planning to refocus the work of the Trust for Summer 2021.

The young and not so young people we serve have suffered immensely during this pandemic and we look forward with great eagerness to being able to serve them again in different ways in Summer 2021. We hope to focus on holidays within Ireland in Kilcuan or Cois Cuain or indeed in other parts of the country. These breaks may be of a very short duration, perhaps a day trip or weekend but they will provide much needed support for families, giving some independence to those with additional needs and some rest to families. To this end we will need funds. I would urge you to please do your best to contribute to our fundraising in whatever way you possibly can. I am very aware that our normal sources of funds are not available to us at this time but we could still come together as groups and perhaps come up with innovative ways to fundraise online or simply ask for donations. This would have a two fold benefit, bringing our volunteers together and providing us with funds.

As I already mentioned our guests have suffered hugely at this time but so too have our volunteers. The sense of friendship and purpose enjoyed by so many of us has been sorely missed and we are all very eager to re-engage with the work of the Trust. Many of our volunteers have worked tirelessly throughout this pandemic in caring for those struck down by covid and indeed others who have been ill. Our doctors, nurses, carers and all working in health care have experienced and continue to experience very challenging times. On behalf of all of us in the Trust

I would like to take this opportunity to thank them most sincerely for their dedication and selflessness at this time.

Closer to home our staff in Kilcuan have been hugely impacted also. Their work has changed dramatically and this has been a very difficult time for them. We are extremely lucky that we have a small but dedicated staff who work so hard for all of us throughout the year. As a Board of Trustees we had to take the very difficult decision to reduce the salaries of our staff. I would like to thank them most sincerely for their patience and understanding in accepting this wage cut. This is certainly testament to their commitment to the Trust! Sincere thanks to Ber, Zoe, James and Celine for their work, their care and understanding at this time. We are also receiving the temporary wage subsidy which will enable us to safeguard the funds of the Trust going forward.

Many of you have visited Kilcuan over the years, attending meetings and organising and participating in friendship weeks. It has been a great facility for the Trust. The building is now over 20 years old and is in need of renovation. While the building has served us well it needs to be adapted to facilitate smaller independent groups and families as well as the larger groups. The Board with the expert assistance of James McHugh have been examining the future needs of the Trust and drawing up plans for future work. Extensive building work will need to be carried out and this will be a long and very expensive process. We are committed to moving forward with this in the new year. We will therefore be seeking as much funding as possible. If you know of any sources of funding please contact the office. Let us work together on this and secure Kilcuan for the generations to come.

During the Summer we said farewell to our very dear friend Maureen O'Loan. Maureen was the mother figure of our office for almost 20 years. Maureen passed away in July and her passing leaves a huge void in the lives of her family and in our lives as her Trust family. Maureen certainly viewed the Trust as her second family. Restrictions had been eased somewhat at the time of Maureen's funeral and it was wonderful to see so many Trust faces line the route from her home to the church. To her husband, Fergus, her daughters Lara and Celine, her sons Pat and Colin and to her beloved grandchildren we extend our sincere sympathy. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam uasal.

Finally, may I take this opportunity to wish you a holy and happy Christmas. I hope and pray that you will be able to spend time with family over the festive season. Above all keep safe and look after each other!

Best Wishes,  
Helen

# A Guest's Story, Colum McNabb - Gr 137

We were delighted when a very special young man from Galway accepted his invitation to join the Easter trip to Lourdes in 2018. Colum McNabb was just 20 years old and, like so many of our Guests, he was about to embark on his first independent trip away from home and family. Colum's parents James and Nicola were understandably very anxious and concerned as Colum has autism, is nonverbal and cannot communicate.



Colum McNabb, Group 137

Colum joined Group 137, a Galway based group from the Western Region. The Group, together with the team at Trust HQ worked with Colum and his family in preparation for the trip. We are happy to report that Colum's experience with the Trust was a great success and is filled with joyful memories.

From early childhood Colum, and his parents and siblings endured a rollercoaster of emotions and challenges. The inability to communicate in any meaningful way is isolating and unimaginable to most of us. The impact on daily life and family events often causes heartache and pain for everyone in the family. In 2014, through RPM Ireland, the family heard about yet another system that might be helpful to Colum. Almost immediately and unbelievably, Colum connected with RPM or Rapid Prompting Method that allows

him to communicate. At 18 Colum joined Ability West and began attending the Meitheal Centre in Moycullen.

We were thrilled to learn about this massive breakthrough for Colum and his family. This has opened up a whole new chapter in their family life as everyone is beginning to learn so much more about the wonderful intelligent young man who is Colum McNabb. He has found his voice and is now advocating for more opportunities and understanding for people with disabilities. We are grateful to Colum for his permission to tell his story and publish his words. We also thank Nicola and James and Colum's siblings for their kindness and belief in The Irish Pilgrimage Trust so that Colum could experience that special Easter pilgrimage trip to Lourdes.

Below you can read one of Colum's recent pieces that is truly powerful, direct and challenging.

## Disability and Me

**What it is like to have a disability I was asked.  
It is like being trapped in my body with no escape.  
I want people to see the person I am  
And for them not to stare  
For they will never see the real me  
The me who is not just my disability.**

**Have they no decency?  
Have they no empathy?  
To not make me feel their eyes  
To not make me feel their pity.  
To just look.  
How can people think I am not able to think for myself?  
When all they do is think for me.**

Colum McNabb



# NEWS FROM KILCUAN



L to R - Ber Connolly, James McHugh, Zoe O'Dea, Celine O'Loan

## Greetings from Kilcuan

I am writing to you from the office of The Irish Pilgrimage Trust – an office that is vastly different from previous years due to Covid-19.

It has been hugely disappointing to miss our pilgrimage to Lourdes last Easter and our summer trips to Hosanna House and our Friendship Weeks in Kilcuan and in Cois Cuain. The Board have sadly had to take the decision that we will not be able to travel to France in 2021. However, we have big plans to organise holidays for young people and adults with special needs in Ireland. The people who normally join

us on our Easter and Summer pilgrimages to Lourdes and our Friendship Weeks in Ireland have been hugely impacted by Covid-19. All services normally available to them were suspended and many have yet to resume. We are really conscious of the need for us to offer breaks to these special people and we will be working hard to make these happen.

The Trust has been operating as a charity in Ireland for 50 years and we hope to be still offering services as a charity in 50 years time. We are therefore working “to keep the show on the road” and prepare to offer services to young people and adults with additional needs in 2021.

In the meantime, we have been working on a huge scanning project – scanning thousands of documents and forms to ensure that we have hold accurate records. After 50 years, we have a huge amount of paperwork and secure storage of this paperwork has been posing a problem for the Trust for a number of years. This is a very time consuming project and we

would not have had the time to do it at the same time as planning Easter and Summer pilgrimages to Lourdes and Friendship Weeks in Ireland. In the past we discussed the option of engaging a company to undertake this work for us but the potential cost was prohibitive. Every cloud has a silver lining and we now have time to do this work and we are 40% of our way through it.

In addition to this we have been updating our website and concentrating on improving our social media content.

Hello to all our past guests who have joined us in Lourdes and in Clarinbridge and Wexford – we hope that you are keeping well and we are really looking forward to seeing you again soon.

We are also very aware of our many wonderful volunteers throughout the country. These great people have given so much to the Trust over the years – fundraising, promoting the Trust, taking time off to prepare for and go on trips with young people with special needs. Our many volunteers give their valuable time freely to the Trust and to those we serve and we are immensely grateful to them for their goodness. We hope to stay in touch with them and to meet them again when this pandemic allows.

Ber



# Trust Funding and Donations

Like so many other charities our traditional means of fundraising have ceased due to the pandemic and the restrictions imposed on our daily lives. The Irish Pilgrimage Trust can only function and continue offering its services to people with additional needs so long as we have the funds to do so. We are a volunteer led Registered Charity and rely fully on private donations and fundraising to finance our services. We do not receive an annual statutory income from the State or other public bodies.

As we begin to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic our challenge is twofold –

- Resume activities providing independent assisted holiday breaks to people with additional needs in the new world and respond in new ways to make this happen safely
- Respond to the challenge of how to best raise the funds needed to deliver our services.

Success in meeting both challenges is vital so that we can once again reach out to and serve our special guests. Over the past year young people with additional needs have been disadvantaged more than any other section of society. Recent news

regarding the success in development of vaccines gives hope for a brighter future and a resumption of activities.

Many ‘one off’ social media fundraising campaigns have been very successful during recent months. However, we in the Trust must look further to the future so that we can continue to deliver the services we have provided for almost 50 years. The Trust is launching an opportunity for people to contribute to our work with our €21 for 2021 campaign. We are asking you to set up a standing order or direct debit to donate €21 per month to The Irish Pilgrimage Trust for 12 months. If you are self-employed or a PAYE worker then your annual donation of €252 qualifies for the Charity Donation Scheme which means that the Trust can claim 45% in Tax relief. In real terms therefore your generous annual donation of €252 benefits the Trust to the value of €362! By simply completing the CHY Charity donation form the Trust will receive a tax refund worth 45% of your donation.

We look forward to your support for this campaign and that you will consider signing up to help the Trust continue its work in serving people with additional needs.

€ 21

for

2021

**Sign up now**

**Sign up to donate € 21 per month for 12 months to The Irish Pilgrimage Trust**

**If you are a PAYE or Self-Employed worker your generous donation of € 252 can benefit the Trust by an additional € 112 from the Charitable Donations TAX REFUND Scheme!**



# The North West Region - a story of the Trust in Action

For the past 50 years The Irish Pilgrimage Trust has been serving young people with special needs. The happiness and joy of being involved with our groups is equally shared by our Guests and Volunteers. Many will say that their involvement in the annual trips to Lourdes, or summer breaks to Kilcuan in Galway or Cois Cuain in Wexford is a highlight of their year. We are a volunteer led organisation and the 'normal' holiday pilgrimage experience organised by our volunteers is hugely important to so many people with additional needs and their families. The role of the Trust in local communities is very important.

The North West region is an excellent example of the vital part we play in contributing to our local communities and how the Trust has grown over the years. Group 164 from the North West has travelled to Lourdes with the Easter Pilgrimage for more than 30 years. Based in Sligo the group has earned a very special place in the communities of Sligo, Leitrim, North Mayo and South Donegal in general. In the year 2000 the group expanded its services to provide Friendship Weeks summer holidays in Kilcuan, Clarinbridge in Galway. Kilcuan is the Trust's headquarters where our special holiday home provides all the facilities necessary to support people with special needs. This unique facility has served us well over the past 23 years. More recently, the former leader of Group 164 and Friendship Week 7 Mary Clancy set up the Summer Hosanna House trip to Lourdes. This group caters for the older adult guests, many of whom travelled with the Trust as children on our annual Easter pilgrimage.



All these services and activities provided by the Trust are financed by our volunteers fundraising and private donations. The Trust does not receive an annual statutory income from the state or other public bodies. All our Trust carers, nurses, doctors, chaplains and trustees are volunteers and give of their time and expertise freely for the good of others. The Trust volunteers come from every walk of life and span the generations from teenage transition year students to the young-at-heart active retired members and everyone in between. This demographic alone ensures renewal, energy, talent and a solid core of experienced carers to the benefit of

all. All Trust volunteers are NVB vetted and undergo safeguarding training. There are always opportunities for anyone who might like to become a volunteer to help others and make a difference. And so, the community support of our fundraising activities is repaid directly back into the local community as the people we serve and their families benefit from the very necessary services we provide.

While the Trust may not have a very high public profile we are very well known within the community we serve. And it is for this reason that community support is very important and our links with local businesses and communities helps to sustain the Trust. The Trust is very grateful for the generosity of so many unseen supporters and donors who are often in the background. Many provide essential supplies to support and feed our groups during their trips. Their participation and encouragement contribute to our work in such a special and practical way. They are all part of the jigsaw puzzle that makes up The Irish Pilgrimage Trust. It is also particularly important at this time that we make every effort to support all these businesses and help to ensure their survival in very challenging circumstances.

Mary and Johnny Clancy along with their wonderful group of volunteers and supporters in the North West have worked tirelessly to support so many individuals and families over the years. Through their commitment and hard work with the Trust more than 520 people with special needs from the Sligo and Leitrim area have enjoyed many happy occasions and pilgrimage holidays in Lourdes and in Kilcuan. A highlight of their program of events is their Annual Social hosted by the Great Southern Hotel in Sligo. 2020 was to be their 25th Anniversary Social. Unfortunately, the 25th Anniversary Social along with their trips to Lourdes and Kilcuan were all cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. This disappointment is in addition to difficulties experienced by many of our guests who have been disproportionately impacted by the restrictions and loss of services due to Covid-19.

We are now looking forward with renewed hope following news of the success in developing vaccines for the coronavirus. While the Trust has had to make the very difficult decision to cancel our 2021 Lourdes pilgrimages, we remain hopeful that conditions might allow us to run Friendship Week holidays to Kilcuan in late summer 2021. Our Board of Trustees continue to monitor developments and will review matters again at their meeting in late January 2021. We pray that 2021 will see a new beginning as we emerge from this difficult period for all of us.

# A LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

Please consider leaving a gift in your will to help ensure that the life changing work of The Irish Pilgrimage Trust can continue for many years to come.

## KEEP CYCLING!

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a major resurgence of CYCLING in Ireland. The cycle shops will tell you that there has been a huge increase in the demand for new bikes and that their biggest problem is getting their suppliers to satisfy this demand. Old bikes are being given a new lease of life and serviced for the first time in years. Government and Local Authorities are responding with the investment of €millions in cycle lanes, 'greenways', promoting safe cycling and bike to work finance schemes. Of course, there is also the major positive health and environmental benefits of cycling.

The Trust has a long association with cycling, going back to the late 1970s. Our biennial sponsored Cycle to Lourdes was established by Dr Michael McGloin in 1984. From humble beginnings our cycle to Lourdes now attracts 120 participants. Many new members who take up this challenge become 'repeat offenders' and return again and again.



Over the years the Cycle to Lourdes has raised significant funds for the Trust. It is the biggest single fundraising activity organised by the Trust and its importance cannot be overstated. The Trust is always in awe of our wonderful cyclists who have a common purpose and understand the value and importance of the work of the Trust in serving young people with additional needs.

Like so many other activities, our 2020 Cycle to Lourdes was cancelled due to the pandemic. Now, as the world begins to take tentative steps to re-emerge from the pandemic, we are considering the future. The Board of Trustees decided last September that the Trust will not be travelling to France in 2021. They agreed with the proposal to hold a 5-day cycle in Ireland for registered members of Cycle 2020 during summer 2021, providing conditions allow. This could coincide with relaunching the Trust and beginning the process of preparing for the Easter Lourdes Pilgrimage and Cycle 2022.



We look forward in hope to meeting all our cyclists and back-up crews and new members for 2022. Keep a lookout for our next communication in the new year. In the meantime, keep training, enjoy your cycling, and stay safe and well.

As one of our cyclists June stated in her recent email -

*It is a great pleasure to have this interest and a goal which will take us to better times in the future to meet up with the Team and hear all the news of the Guests and their Families as they get excited at the prospect of such a lovely holiday when it is safe for everyone.*