

CA Hospitalité Newsletter

Volume 50

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Winter 2023



**Catholic Association
Hospitalité of Our Lady of
Lourdes**

**Volume 50
Winter 2023**

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Vacant Position

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Information contained in this edition is
correct at time of going to press.

Registered Charity No. 1071120.
Registered in England, as a
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3581414



Editorial

Ella Corcoran - Secretary

Welcome to the 2023 winter issue of your Hospitalité newsletter! This newsletter hasn't been sent in a few years due to the pandemic, so it's lovely to bring it back.

Traditionally, this issue covers the post Lourdes round up, and looks forward to the upcoming AGM. However, as it's been so long, this issue is a little more house-keeping than previous issues. We are blessed to be such a large and loving community, and we have lost a lot of our members during the past few years. Their names are remembered in this issue, as they were on our Pilgrimage Candle, and will be as part of our family forever.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to everyone who has contributed to this newsletter, from articles and reports, to photos and proof-reading. Content is always welcome, if you have anything to add to the next newsletter, please do get in touch.

President

Mark Smith

I'd like to start by thanking our outgoing president, Anne Hoskins who has done a fantastic job as President over the last few years and will be tough act to follow. When a pilgrimage arrives in Lourdes, one of the first jobs is for the President of the Hospitalité to go into the Hospitalité Notre Dame de Lourdes offices and collect the badge. Every pilgrimage does this, and on the walls of the office are insignia from pilgrimages all over the world. This was the first point it felt real to me, although I had August 2022 to shadow Anne Hoskins and learn the ropes.

I want to pass on my gratitude to those who work tirelessly to ensure our pilgrimage happens. Our Chief Handmaid and Brancardier, Lina Al-Araj and Brendan Roche, ensured that the helpers were where they needed to be, and dealing with the rescheduling of events when the heat became too oppressive. Our Chief Doctor, Nuala Mellows, and Chief Nurse, Tina Quinn, do so much throughout the year to ensure our APs are able to join, and the whole medical team works so hard out in Lourdes. Without them, we wouldn't have any APs, in the Hotels or the Accueil. A big thanks must go to Andy Joyce, who ran the Young Helpers Group single-handedly this year, and supported them throughout the whole process. The Trustees and in particular Steve Gill, as Treasurer, ensured that a number of grants and financial assistance was given, allowing so many people to return to Lourdes again. The Pilgrimage events were wonderful, under the careful guidance of Fr John Cooke (and Clare Ryan!) and Fr Nick King, and truly brought our community together.

I am more of a behind-the-scenes person, but it was very special for me to be a part of the new members joining. This year we had 5 new prayer members. Whilst most of us go to Lourdes to work and to serve, we accept that some people are simply unable to work as helpers. During the Lourdes week many of our Hospitalité members are so busy that we struggle to find time for Prayer.

Our Prayer members fill that important gap by praying for us, and on our behalf.

All members of our Hospitalité are encouraged to build upon and nurture the friendships that we form in Lourdes and keep those friendships alive.

I look forward to seeing you all in Lourdes again next August, and hope to see many of you at our AGM in March.

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Reports

**Brendan Roche - Chief Brancardier and
Lina Al-Araj - Chief Handmaid**

The Catholic Association needs YOU!

Why do we go on pilgrimage to Lourdes? Why do we keep on going on pilgrimage to Lourdes?

There is a new film out called *The Miracle Club* starring Maggie Smith and Kathy Bates. Maggie Smith plays Lily, still mourning her son who drowned 40 years before, though he could swim like a fish.

Kathy Bates plays Eileen, who has found a lump in her breast. A third member of their Dublin parish is Dolly (played by Agnes O'Casey) who has a son, Daniel, who can't or won't speak. The three women and Daniel join the annual parish pilgrimage to Lourdes.

Isabelle Grey has recently written a very interesting review of the film in *The Tablet* weekly magazine, in which she notes that the film omits many of the characteristics of Lourdes with which members of the CA Hospitalité will be familiar.

"No one in the film prays, celebrates Mass, makes confession, says the Rosary, lights a candle or drinks the healing water from the holy spring; and no attempt is made to create a vivid sense of the common humanity to be found amid the millions of visitors who visit the shrine each year."



There are a few shots of the river Gave de Pau, the Rosary Basilica and a long shot of crowds converging on the Grotto; but otherwise the entire film was made in Dublin.

Nevertheless the film does convey some of the deepest reasons why we go on pilgrimage and why many of us go year after year.

The film starts with some bitter recrimination and a painful

unravelling of the past but the protagonists return home having found forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. The shared journey bears fruit – the leaving, the unexpected interactions on the way and the returning with a fresh perspective.

A fourth pilgrim, Chrissie, played by Laura Linney, has returned to the parish from Boston, USA after an absence of 40 years. She comes for the funeral of her mother but finds herself joining the others on the trip to Lourdes. She is full of pain and regret for events that occurred 40 years earlier but herself finds healing as she helps Dolly to free herself of unnecessary guilt. Healing through helping others.



Another quote from Isabelle Grey's review: "The *Miracle Club* celebrates the kind of everyday miracles that do not require the drama of overt divine intervention, revealing instead the importance of earthly trust, friendship and generosity. As Fr Dermot [the parish priest] says as they board the coach for the return journey: ***"You don't come to Lourdes for a miracle, Eileen. You come for the strength to go on when there is no miracle."***

The parish priest, a shrewd judge of character, is an important presence in the story. He has faith; and he presumably has made this journey many times, with different groups of parishioners, each with their own prayers and hopes of a cure for emotional and physical infirmities. Even though he tells Chrissie that "not everyone goes to Lourdes for a cure", he has witnessed enough everyday miracles to understand that, in committing to the journey, people open themselves to change. He believes, for sure, in the centuries-old tradition and meaning of pilgrimage."

The Catholic Association exists to take Assisted Pilgrims to Lourdes so that they may receive the fruits of pilgrimage described above.

Many thanks to all the handmaids and brancardiers who worked so hard to ensure the success of the 2023 pilgrimage despite the Birmingham travel difficulties and the extreme heat in the second half of the week.

We looked after about 50 Assisted Pilgrims in the Accueil and the hotels. Picking up the reins again in our first medically-supported pilgrimage for several years was not easy and we were heavily reliant on our more experienced helpers to ensure that all our APs' needs were met.

We struggled to find enough team leaders, to fill the core care teams and to cover night duty. We need more helpers next year, particularly helpers with experience.

So we make a plea to all those members of the Hospitalité who were unable to join us in Lourdes this year.

Make 2024 the year you return to Lourdes with the CA! Without you, we shall have to turn prospective Assisted Pilgrims away. If you do come, you know you will love it.

And don't let the expense put you off. There are many inexpensive ways to travel to and stay in Lourdes and the CA may be able to give some financial support.



Please help us to plan 2024 by emailing us ASAP your expression of interest in joining us next year. Our email address is chiefs@catholicassociation.co.uk.

The dates of the next pilgrimage are 23rd to 30th August 2024. Many thanks.

Doctors

Nuala Mellows - Chief Medical Officer

It was wonderful to be back in Lourdes with our Assisted Pilgrims. The atmosphere was immediately joyous. All the frustrations and difficulties with booking and form filling were soon forgotten.

However the journey to Lourdes is never easy and this year was no exception. The Stanstead flight went smoothly but those on the Birmingham flight faced long delays and our Assisted Pilgrims reached the Accueil Notre Dame very late, and were tired. However, after a good night's sleep the journey was pretty much forgotten by the next day.

The medical team, doctors, nurses and all the helpers, young and old, worked tirelessly to ensure that a good time was had. Due to the weather, which was exceptionally hot, some of the programme had to be altered, but all the services went ahead.

Unfortunately the return journey was fraught with delays, with those on the Birmingham flight not getting off the plane until midnight. Despite the discomfort that this caused, our Assisted Pilgrims remained positive about the week in Lourdes. However, I hope that this never happens again.



I am most grateful to all the doctors and nurses who joined the Pilgrimage and I hope that they will be back next year. Our Assisted Pilgrims certainly appreciated the care that they were given. I am also delighted that there were no medical emergencies!

Looking ahead to next year, I would like to see even more Assisted Pilgrims, a greater medical team, and more helpers, so that our Assisted Pilgrims, who are central to our Pilgrimage can experience a wonderful week in Lourdes. I would also like to consider alternative accommodation, to give the Assisted Pilgrims a little more comfort.

Thank you to everyone, Assisted Pilgrims, helpers, nurses and doctors for making this such a memorable week. Each one of us answered Our Lady's call to come to Lourdes. We must encourage others to do the same.

Nurses

Tina Quinn - Chief Nurse

We were back on the road and very excited by the prospect of the return medically and nursing assisted pilgrimage.

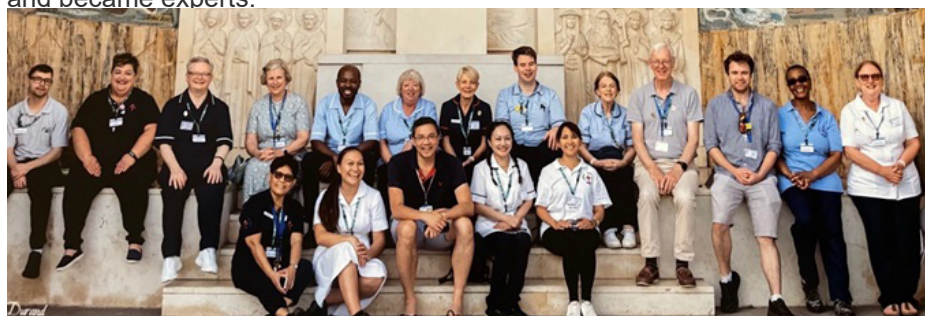
Recruitment was slow as Covid and a fallow year had clouded memories of what was possible and why we wanted to spend a week of our well-deserved annual leave nursing in Lourdes. so the team this year. The team was smaller but the enthusiasm and commitment was high and it was good to welcome back loyal punters and new recruits

We were a team of 16 (trained and untrained, including one newly qualified doctor) A smaller team enabled the nurses to focus on nursing tasks.

All APs with the exception of three self-medicated, so no rolling out of the drug trolleys this year which took up valuable time.

The nurses were on call at night but physically present on the floor which extended are capacity on day shifts. The chartered flights had their own challenges and the presence of nurses on both pilgrimage flights was essential.

The face-to-face training day didn't happen this year because of rail strikes, and once in Lourdes it is much more difficult to facilitate because as soon as we hit the Accueil it is all hands on deck. But the handmaids and brancs learnt very quickly and became experts.



Another challenge for the team this year, was the not knowing about which resources would still be viable and available in Lourdes. and how we could obtain extra medicines and supplies if needed. However, placing the emphasis and responsibility on the APs to bring their own additional nursing requirements worked well. Two of the nurses, including the chief nurse were members of the British Lourdes Medical Association and part of a WhatsApp group, which was useful for linking and thinking while out in Lourdes. And a quick message to nurses who had been out earlier in the year answered our query and the resourcing of overnight catheter bags!

The APs were given a high standard of nursing and medical care throughout the week, and there were no hospital admissions or acute events. Nurses were present and visible at all pilgrimage events and ceremonies.

For those nurses that came we were grateful and indebted to the Trustees for their assisted places on the pilgrimage and being able to pay just £500 made the pilgrimage more viable for a number of us.

Next year we will be back in force and wiser from our experiences in 2023.



We would like to pay tribute to one of team who should have been with us this year but was battling with cancer. Mary Lycett had served on the nursing team for many years. She died peacefully at home on 28th October 2023. May she Rest In Peace.

Young Helpers

Andy Joyce - Youth Group Co-Leader

This is the first time I have had the opportunity to write about our 'Young Helpers Group' since taking over as Co-leader of the youth at the end of our 2019 pilgrimage, along with Sarah Sparrow, who sadly was not able to join us this year.

For our 2022 pilgrimage we had six youth who were able to join us on the pilgrimage. Although, small, we were able to assist our pilgrims in escorting them to the various services and push them up to the 'Cathedral of the Trees' at the City of the Poor. Which was no mean feat!



This year we were blessed with just over forty youth in our group, with seventeen of the youth joining us from Gumley House School in West London, for the first time with the Catholic Association (and we very much look forward to welcoming them again next year). Not to be put off with our low numbers, the youth group, as always rose to the challenge and in some cases, having multiple roles, we were able to help our assisted pilgrims.



This year we were able to 'resurrect' our youth service, which was held in one of the chapels at the Accueil Notre Dame. Our service was led by the youth of Gumley House. We were able to reflect on this year's theme of Lourdes, which was "Go and tell the priests that a chapel should be built here".

We reflected on what it means to be part of a community and how as Christians, we can build our communities; be that in our own homes, parishes, and places of work or education.

After our service, we were able to 'process' down to light our candles from our service and remember our own intentions. We were then able to enjoy a social gathering, back at the hotel and share our experiences and get to know each other more.

We also had the struggle of coping with an 'extreme heat warning' where the temperature for several days reached 40 degrees. For those of you who had air conditioning in your room, you were very blessed indeed, as at night it was very difficult to sleep, especially as many of our youth had to get up very early in the morning for their shifts.

If you know of anyone aged between 17 and 25 years, and would like to join us next year, please do encourage them to join our youth group. It's a great opportunity to get to know others of the same age, and an excellent way to encounter the message of Lourdes, and share experiences.

This was how I started many years ago, with my own diocese, and have just clocked up my 36th pilgrimage to Lourdes.

We look forward to seeing our youth group back next year in full swing, with our more experienced youth, and our first timers, who are most welcome, and also having Sarah back with us too, you were greatly missed.

Chaplain's Report

Fr Nick King - Chaplain

In Lourdes with the Accueil pilgrims

After two blank years (though some of us were privileged to get to Lourdes during both of those) and the "hybrid" year when we were "virtually" present, it was an immense joy to be actually back in the Accueil, begging cups of tea from the gallant kitchen team.

There was a real sense that we were on the road again, and reconstructing the pilgrimage. Speaking as the chaplain to the APs, or at any rate those who were in the Accueil, there was a tangible sense that "we're back", and of reconstructing for the future.

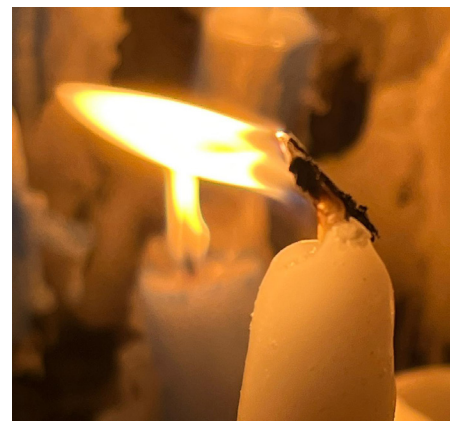
It was not in every sense the same, of course; the numbers were lower than in previous years, and we shall be looking for the diocesan pilgrimage directors to bring APs from their diocese in future years, and to make sure that there are sufficient numbers of experienced helpers. **Please start recruiting now.**

The fact is that we were very short of helpers, and various people had to combine jobs, which they did, willingly and competently enough, as always, but it is not always desirable to manage things that way, including assigning core care helpers to night duty.

But it was wonderful to be back, and to have a real sense of familiarity with our tasks. There was also, it must be said, an impressive group of young helpers starting out on the Lourdes experience. These are the future of our pilgrimage, and must be encouraged in every way possible.

For myself, it was really good to be once more sleeping in the Accueil, with the consequently greater contact with the helpers and with the APs. And I was also glad to be occasionally present with the Stonyhurst Pilgrimage, another part of my entirely agreeable duties. For the most part we managed very well indeed.

Until next year!



Secretary

Ella Corcoran - Secretary

Having only been in the role since June, I rocked up in Lourdes armed with my predecessors' notes in various digital formats and the knowledge that I was probably going to miss something; it was more than a little intimidating. But I was lucky enough to have long handover Zoom calls with Jonathan, and also Matt Betts, who held the role until 2009. They reminded me about the best bit involved with being Secretary. I get to know everyone. And they were right.

Out in Lourdes, I wear a couple of different hats. Organising the Hotel Wheelchairs means I get to meet the APs and Pilgrims in the Hotels, and all of the rotating teams. But as Secretary, I got to meet so many more people, and I had so much fun with all the random conversations we ended up having!

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of preparing for August 2023 was organising the list of members we have lost. Traditionally, this list is read out at the Hospitalité Service, and at the Grotto Service. There were many, many emails going back and forth trying to make sure we had every name to be remembered. We still arrived in Lourdes to realise there were more. In order to make sure we don't miss anyone going forwards, there is a living document that is updated as soon as news arrives.

If you know of a member of our CA family who has passed, please email contact@catholicassociation.co.uk with the news, or hosp_secretary@catholicassociation.co.uk.



It wasn't all missed names and paperwork, though. Perhaps my favourite part of the week was the Hospitalité Service, where we introduced 5 new Prayer Members to our community. It was also the moment where I missed something big - but thankfully the ever-lovely Anne Hoskins was on hand to discretely inform me that she had found a red plastic bag to take the collection in, and I was able to step up to the lectern after the final hymn (*Immaculate Mary, of course*), and draw everyone's attention to both my mistake, and Anne's rescue. Thank you to everyone who donated, the collection raised over £180!



We also had 10 new Ordinary Members, and 6 new Full Members joining. It was very special to be able to read out the names of so many people committing to joining our Hospitalité, particularly those who have given so much over the years, and that I have had the pleasure of working alongside.

My predecessors were completely right. It was an honour to introduce our new members and to see our community come together, and a joy to get to know so many more people. I am very much looking forward to next year - where hopefully I don't forget important things like collections and mass locations!

If you would like to join the Hospitalité as an Ordinary Member, or have done at least 2 pilgrimages as an Ordinary Member and would like to apply for Full Membership, please email me. If you are an AP or know of anyone that would like to join as a Prayer Member, please email me.

Pilgrimage Candle

Mark Smith - President

Some of you will have noticed our Pilgrimage Candle. Last year, we attempted to add decoration to our pilgrimage candle by printing out the names of the pilgrims we lost and sellotaping it to the candle. Unfortunately, this did not work as planned.

This year, however, we were able to get the names decorated directly onto the candle. The candle was displayed in the Accueil and at Fr Nick King's suggestion, was present at our services, often being held up by a young helper. The candle continues our prayers after we leave Lourdes, so to have it so present at all our services was a wonderful thing. *Although perhaps the young helpers standing so still for so long would disagree.*

Despite the heat, after the final mass the Pilgrimage candle was taken from the Basilica down to the sheds on the Prairie we took the candle down with an Accueil AP, Hugh Cooke, a Hotel AP and new Prayer Member, Anne Davies, and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Christopher Page.



We said a short prayer together, and lit the candle. With hindsight, this was a poignant moment. Amongst the list of names on the Candle was Pat Cooke, Hugh's wife, who had passed away the previous year. Sadly, Hugh passed away himself only a few weeks after we returned from Lourdes.

If you have any suggestions for decorations for the Pilgrimage Candle next year, please email Ella at hosp_secretary@catholicassociation.co.uk

Parenting in Lourdes

Cliona Devereux

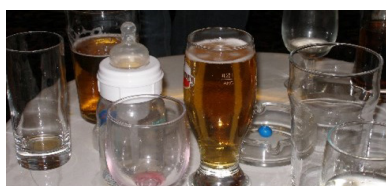
The arrival of children does inevitably make you re-think how you come to Lourdes on pilgrimage but having brought ours for 17 years and bringing them from 3 months old we've certainly learned a thing or two along the way.

At the centre of our plan is bringing the car, staying in an apartment, eating out in the evenings and wrapping the week up with some different holiday activities either on the way to or from Lourdes.

Being able to fit them all into the car long with their kit makes it financially a possibility rather than the cost of 5 flights. The car has taken buggies, sterilizers, potties, nappies, toys, books, colouring paper and pencils etc.- the kit list has changed over the years! Now they need much less- just great big instruments instead!

The apartment is a fantastic option allowing us to have a small kitchen, separate bedrooms to enable afternoon naps and night time feeds and the ability to do our own breakfasts and lunches- we could do dinners but it's much more fun to meet up with friends and eat out- those cafes with highchairs became our favourites for obvious reasons. Once old enough the children go out and buy breakfast pastries and bread for lunch daily.

Calling in to Leclerc supermarket to stock up for this is a trip out in itself. Our children have come away with a variety of things that weren't on the shopping list- eg a gigantic Tigger (Cian aged 3) but now they tend to get lost either in the stationery aisle or the Haribo aisle!



The cafe lifestyle of Lourdes has always been key to bringing the children. They can add squash squirts to their water, choose their own food that is kid friendly and be happy with a main course and an ice cream. A

menu often in English and with kind café waiters all adds to the mix, they can hone their early grasps of French and they can sit with friends and busy themselves with colouring, card games, wind up toys etc. Yes, they've nodded off at times when they were younger- a buggy is a fab portable bed! I think Darragh summed it up well aged 5. He said '**when I grow up Mummy, I want to live in Lourdes. Breakfast, lunch and dinner at the Orleans. Pink fish and ice cream with an umbrella.**' Clearly the religious aspects hadn't quite sunk in at that point but what was apparent was that Lourdes was a place where they were happy- a little slice of heaven.

Childcare is another consideration. Whilst they were small enough to sleep in arms (and there's no shortage of volunteers) or buggies or sit and share a picture book during Mass, they tended to stay with us but eventually they get too big to be strapped in a buggy!



At 3 months old Darragh was full of colic and just wanted to be held- he was still tiny, he had just about grown into newborn clothes having been born premature and very small. He found the arms of an assisted pilgrim, Anne Trist. Little did I realise at the time that whilst Anne helped us cuddling Darragh practically all week, he listened in to her confession, was in her lap as she was anointed- Darragh was meantime ministering to her. Anne died a few months after the pilgrimage returned- she knew she was expecting a granddaughter that she probably wouldn't get to meet....Darragh's hugs meant a huge deal to her. It is fair to say there is no limit to the age when you begin to be a helper ministering to others in Lourdes.

HCP (Helpers Childrens Programme) has been fantastic in giving the children a place to meet other child

pilgrims, explore and make sense of Lourdes as children, play and make friends. They also got to contribute to the liturgies either helping with collections, serving at Mass, offering up their artwork, leading dramas and readings for the children's Mass and visiting and hosting events for the Assisted Pilgrims. They have made lifelong friends from across the Dioceses and groups and have started to value the sense of service and the gift of empathy Lourdes teaches them.

Wrapping Lourdes into a family holiday has also been a way of mitigating the cost. By wrapping it up with a family holiday it shares the travel costs.



Over the years we have stopped off at Disneyland- (*don't muddle basilicas with fairytale castles!*), Chartres and Orleans for the cathedral illuminations which are amazing, Seignosse for some surfing lessons on the wild Atlantic coast and the Gaillac/ Albi area for wine tasting and bastide village exploring. We have stopped and 'done' Paris- climbing the tower, tracking down the Mona Lisa, the statue of Liberty- *the original one*- and Versailles zooming around the gardens in golf buggy and on bikes as well as the glamorous interiors, we've also taken in Monet's garden in Giverny and military memorials eg Vimy Ridge.

As the children are now teenagers and starting to join the Youth Group in Lourdes we hope they become the future pilgrims shaping and contributing their talents in the years to come.

We hope the pilgrimage allows them to see there is a role for them in the church, that they feel they belong to a worldwide catholic community of believers that matters to them and their future. We are grateful for all the people that they have encountered in Lourdes over the years who have contributed to their growing up!

Jean Mellows

Jean Mellows came to Lourdes with the Catholic Association for the first time in 2009, at the age of 86, and for the last time in 2019 – before the pandemic

This was found amongst her photographs of Lourdes after her death:



My husband and I were both brought up in Anglican families and in due course after we were married we supported and worked in our Parish Church for 45 years.

We had five children, one of whom married into a Roman Catholic family and in time, after much prayer, thought and preparation, he too became a Catholic.

We felt happy that he had come to this decision as it would lead to his family being in harmony over the things that mattered most.

Eventually their three boys went to Stonyhurst [and their daughter went to St Mary's Ascot], where their parents became very involve with the Catholic Association Pilgrimage to Lourdes.

Meanwhile, sadly, my husband had died and I lived alone for twelve years. In 2009 they asked me, tentatively, if I would like to go on a Pilgrimage with them.

I jumped at the chance, mainly to have the pleasure of being with my family of six and seeing them working hard as doctors and volunteers to help with the Pilgrims.

But it became much more than that.

Naturally, in the beginning I felt I was an intruder, but that left me when I felt enveloped by the wonderful Christian atmosphere and friendship.

At Mass I went up for a blessing with crossed arms as I felt I did not really belong, but a kind Priest called me aside one day and said he had seen me in a service and that I should take Communion as we were all Christians together.

I immediately felt a whole part of this wonderful Pilgrimage in which to worship God and to follow in the path of Bernadette and carry through the instructions to her from her Holy Mother, Mary, in the Grotto.

This is the point where, at the age of 93, I feel I have “seen the light”.

On one of Bernadette’s visitations by Mary she revealed herself as “the Immaculate Conception.”

I have learned so forcibly that God chose Mary to be the instrument through whom his son, our Saviour, was brought into the world, and it is right that she should be lived and revered within our concept of worshipping our Lord and Master.



I have now been to Lourdes nine times and it is, in many ways, the apex of my year. Every Mass is peaceful thought-provoking and uplifting, and **at the end of each Pilgrimage I feel at peace within myself.**

I have been asked why I do not become a Roman Catholic.

I feel that during my long life my faith has grown and developed and it is purely between me and my God.

I just want my family to be able to plan and arrange my funeral in the church in which we were brought up.



Jean died in August this year, and her funeral was as she wished in the church where she had worshipped for over 50 years. It was a joyful day, and apart from family and friends from her town, some of her Lourdes friends went to a great deal of trouble to travel a long way to be there.

We all know where she is now.

Addie Vivian

Addie Vivian was a much-loved member of our pilgrimage, an AP who went out of her way to check in and support all of the helpers around her. Affectionately styled the Queen of the Accueil, she was generous with her love and her prayers.

Addie lived not far from my parents, and I was able to visit her regularly, chatting on the phone when work took me away. Being in Lourdes this year, knowing that I wouldn't do the Torchlight Procession with her, or call her from her favourite statue, was unbelievably difficult.

I know that so many helpers will have happy memories of her loving manner, swift catching of any swearing, and utter devotion to her faith. Addie passed away October 2022, a few weeks before her 61st birthday.



Mumsy, I have no doubt that you are with Our Lady, St Bernadette and St Therèse of Liseaux.

John Sayer

John Sayer was the last of the famous triumvirate of Johns of the late 80s Women's Wards of the Accueil. The three musketeers of John's Lewis, Holden and Sayer were the mainstay of women's ward team A with various additions as and when needed. There was a joyous simplicity of working alongside this team of Johns. If anyone needed assistance called out the name 'John' three eager faces would suddenly appear. I was lucky enough to work alongside this group and learned so much from them.

Although John Sayer came along with the Cambridge mafia he originally hailed from the West Midlands, the region known as the Black Country.

The inhabitants of the Black Country hold themselves to be: chatty, quick witted, hardworking, and are known to enjoy a modest libation after work to converse with others. Whilst in Lourdes John lived up to these characteristics well which made him a well-loved member of Women's ward team A.



He had a wonderful manner around the Accueil and quietly got on with doing what needed to be done. I'd been the only un-John on the team for a while and then one year I found myself on the list as team leader. The same team, just rearranged. I'll never forget John standing there and asking "What do you want us to do then Boss?" I think I replied "Same as before"

They were the best support a new team leader could have wished for.

But John Sayer had a very secret skill that only a few knew of and it relates directly back to his time in the Black Country. The Black Country has a town called Dudley and Dudley has a Castle and a Zoo. The zoo famously held a polar bear who had a very characteristic head swing as he moved around the edge of his pool.

John Sayer was/is/always will be the only man ever who could perfectly imitate the head swing and walk of the Dudley Zoo Polar bear.



I learnt a lot from John and the other two musketeers. They loved the women's ward duties, they cared deeply, prayed openly and laughed when necessary. When his time on the wards was complete, he remained dutiful to the task of general roller where he continued to serve with confraternity and prayerful enjoyment, and very quietly, I'd often see him folding blankets and parking voitures, these jobs needed to be done so that the next shift could start without issue. He just got on with what needed to be done, with joyful dedication.

A Black Country man, a Cambridge pilgrim, Women's ward stalwart, and polar bear impressionist, friend and mentor.



Have Your Say!

The next article will be sent out next summer, before our 2024 Pilgrimage.

The theme will be **"What we bring to Lourdes"**

Do you have a list of must-have items to pack?

A checklist for all the paperwork needed?

Photos of places that you always visit?

Suggestions for how to best prepare spiritually for a pilgrimage?

Or even the most useful French phrases to note down?

Then please email Ella your submissions at hosp_secretary@catholicassociation.co.uk



Catholic Association Hospitalité AGM 2024



The Council would like to extend an invitation to all Hospitalité members to our Annual General Meeting, taking place on Saturday 2nd March 2024. The AGM is an opportunity for you to put forward your ideas, receive updates from the Council as well as to meet with your friends and more.

St Laurence RC Church, 91 Milton Road, Cambridge, CB4 1XB.

Information regarding times and travel arrangements will be sent out in the New Year.



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[Tag your photos #CA2023 to share your pilgrimage with us!](#)

[Please ensure you have the permission of everyone in your photo before posting it online.](#)

agua de la Gruta

I go back home with some water from the Grotto

avec l'eau de la Grotte

Next Year's Pilgrimage: 23rd - 30th August 2024

We can't wait to see you out there again!