

Greetings from the Chaplaincy desk where we have many exciting plans for the new academic year ahead . . .

Firstly, I wish to draw your attention to the five student reflections on their Lourdes experience below. It is safe to say that the accounts only give you a snapshot and flavour into their wonderful experience with the Dublin Archdiocese which has only been a second for Castleknock since last year but one that is building huge momentum with near 40 student applications after Christmas.



The students and I travelled with over one hundred pilgrims and up to five hundred helpers (including one hundred students from surrounding 29 schools, doctors, nurses, white shirts, teachers, cross care and many other volunteers). One can imagine the camaraderie that was created during the pilgrimage and one which I can safely say will remain with the boys for a very long time to come. Over the five days, we had many opportunities to pray and remember our school community: Vincentians, Students, Parents, staff and their families.



While on pilgrimage we also managed to catch up with pastmen, Sean Brown ('24) and Liam Hawkes ('13). Matthew Lynch ('78) was assistant medical director to the pilgrimage and was as last year very supportive to the students and I during the pilgrimage.



Asking the students about their expectations before they departed, they replied in honesty that they had no real expectations but were rather open to what may or would unfold and that they were . . .



They say that ***Pilgrimage is a powerful metaphor for any journey with the purpose of finding something that matters deeply to the traveller.*** On this pilgrimage there were so many opportunities for finding this ‘something deeper’, from the beautifully planned liturgies with moving and uplifting music, to our own school’s morning, night prayers, pastoral packs led by the school’s chaplain Fr. Paul Thornton and students, to experiencing the water ritual, to the comraderies experienced and so evidentially witnessed by one and all between students, helpers and our VIPS (pilgrims).

Now upon our return I have tried to continue to reflect and have invited the students whom I have shared this unique and humbling experience with to do the same. At this question the students faces beam at me with joy and love but they truly struggle to put into words their

experience. As the weeks and months pass, I hope we will find those lines and words that will somewhat explain the experience to the current fifth year group as we recruit interest for next year's archdiocese pilgrimage. Having said that I am reminded by the **line 'Let go and Let God'**. Why – because since returning in only two days, I have already had students and staff come to me and reiterate the joy and delight they can evidently see in our students who travelled this year.

However, I will leave you with and finish on a line that a colleague shared with me on the pilgrimage last year, when he tried to put into words the experience with his students;

An unbelievable experience in an indescribable place

PLEASE REFER TO THE COLLEGE INSTAGRAM PAGE FOR VIDEOS AND PICTURES FROM THE PILGRIMAGE

STUDENT REFLECTIONS

From the minute we stepped foot in Dublin airport on September 5th we were helping pilgrims (known as VIPs). This required us to help and support the pilgrims safely on to their flight and while they waited in the airport to and from Lourdes. Once we arrived in Lourdes itself, Ms. Dolan took us on a short walking tour of the main square and around the sanctuary, which was very peaceful as it was quiet with being so late. The next morning, after some training we began our duties straight away. We were assigned ref. duty for our morning duty. This job entailed sitting by your assigned table and chatting to the VIPs (very important pilgrims) and if they needed anything to help them. We all enjoyed this job as we got to know the pilgrims really well and for our evening job we were on ward duty where we would be assigned 2 wards. This meant chatting to whatever pilgrim was there and if they wanted to go somewhere to bring them i.e. to mass/ liturgy or shopping. We had a prairie (night prayer) every night, where Fr. Paul would lead us in prayer and then 3 schools would have a presentation / reflection for the assigned theme of the night. We were assigned on the night of "reconciliation" and decided to act out The Prodigal Son which went very well. It's safe to say that every minute of our pilgrimage was enjoyable from beginning to end. It was wonderful getting to know VIPs and other schools who were also on the pilgrimage. Overall it was a very positive experience and I'll more than likely be back next year as a 'white shirt'.

-Seán Bridson

This week, I had the opportunity to travel to Lourdes with four of my classmates and our school chaplain, Ms. Dolan. Our days were very busy and filled with meaningful activities such as visiting the grotto, participating in the Anointing of the Sick and helping out at masses and ceremonies.

However, the highlight of the trip for me was working with the pilgrims. Many of them were older and facing health challenges. Helping them out, whether by transporting them through Lourdes, aiding with their meals, listening to their stories, or simply providing them company, was extremely eye-opening. It was very rewarding to see the impact we had on

their experience and how much it meant to them. Thanks to Ms. Dolan's planning and support, the trip ran smoothly and is an experience I will never forget.

-Cillian Garvey

On the 5th of September myself and 4 classmates travelled to assist pilgrims in the Dublin Dioceses Pilgrimage to Lourdes, and it was one of the most humbling and inspiring experiences of my life. During the 5 days we provided a helping hand on the Refectory and Ward duties we were assigned, as well as listening to the Pilgrims and their amazing stories. We collaborated with the other schools at the time of reflection and prairie and created a strong bond between all of us blue shirts.

Each morning, we worked in the Refectory and had our own assigned table, this allowed me to be close to the three pilgrims on the table. They each shared their stories, and they were inspiring to say the least. We had Ward duty in the afternoon allowing us to assist and chat to the pilgrims about their day or even take them to a service or mass happening outside of the accueil. Overall, it was very humbling and something I am so grateful to have experienced.

-Luke Reaney

I wouldn't consider myself a particularly spiritual or religious person however it would be ignorant of me to deny that there is a special energy in Lourdes. Each morning we arose early and enthusiastically, ready to be of any help we could to the 100 or so pilgrims that had travelled to Lourdes. We began the day at eight o'clock in the morning at the refectory, where we would set tables and prepare to serve breakfast to the pilgrims (or VIPs as we called them). Once they arrived we would bring them their cornflakes and porridge and ask them how they slept. Many great stories and anecdotes were shared over slices of toast those mornings. After breakfast service we accompanied the pilgrims down for mass at one of the many architecturally stunning churches. After mass had ended and appetites were regained, we set up for lunch and much the same as breakfast, sat with the VIPs as they ate and exchanged stories and details of our lives. In the afternoons we were assigned to ward duty. This mainly consisted of hanging around with the pilgrims, bringing them up to town to buy their souvenirs or simply chatting in their rooms. Some of my favourite memories of Lourdes have come from simply sitting and talking with the VIPs while they sipped on their tea. Evenings were typically made up of sing-songs, dances and walks around the town. I especially remember a sing-song on the first day when an old woman named Carmel sang 'oh Danny boy' which my own grandmother used to sing. It ignited my own memories of her, and it was at that moment that I knew Lourdes was a special place. Many of the pilgrims go to Lourdes with hopes of being cured of their illnesses and have said that though they aren't physically healed, they gain a new found peace over the five days of pilgrimage. That is what makes Lourdes such an extraordinary place. Whether it be due to the new friends that I made there or the memories and emotions it inspired I will without a doubt return to Lourdes next year and I can honestly envisage myself returning every year then after. Though the days are long and the work is tiring, it is extremely rewarding and inspiring. If the

opportunity arises to go to Lourdes, I urge you to take it as there is no way to understand the magic of Lourdes until you've felt it.

- Carlos De La Isla Tiernan

Lourdes

An indescribable place -

The memories and experiences I have gained from the pilgrimage will last me a lifetime.

However, what amazed me the most was the pure joy I gained from the simplest conversations with the pilgrims, or just listening to the everlasting stories these people had to tell inspired me to be the best version of myself in all that I do.

I will be forever grateful to the pilgrims, Ms. Dolan and all that were involved in the Dublin Diocesan pilgrimage.

*Because as much as the pilgrims needed it
I did too...*

-Alex Tilly

In other chaplaincy related news, our programme of retreats kicked off yesterday with 1st years. St. Catherine's class were brought to the glorious surrounds of the Phoenix Park and Farmleigh, adjacent to the College. The students were brought through some reflective journaling including expectations for the day, a letter to their future selves, concluding with some mediation under the sun. The remaining first year classes will have their retreat / reflection days over the coming weeks. Other year groups will also have their Day of Reflection in the coming weeks and months. We are very excited about our retreat programme for the coming year (see below table). We wish the very best of to all the students and staff who travelled west to Mayo for the Vincentian Pilgrimage to Knock and there climb on the Holy Mountain.



Until next week's bulletin, may Our lady of Lourdes keep you all safe and well.

Anne-Marie