

Arundel & Brighton Lourdes Pilgrimage 2021

Today I would like to bring you all up to date on the plan for our pilgrimage this summer. As some of you will have heard, some Diocesan pilgrimages have already decided to cancel for a second year due to the significant challenges that are involved with planning anything during this pandemic, but after consultation we have decided to try and create the opportunity for some in the Diocese to travel with us to Lourdes in July.

Hopefully, as happened in the summer of 2020, and aided by the roll out of the vaccine, international travel will be possible again by July. Many got away in 2020 and had a very enjoyable holiday, so it is possible, even in these challenging circumstances. However, a number of things will need to fall into place between now and the summer, so I will start by asking for all of your prayers.

The first disappointment to report is that for many reasons we will not be planning to take Assisted Pilgrims with us to Lourdes this year. Even though it is likely that many of them will have received both of their CV-19 vaccinations by the summer, we currently have no data whether the antibody response will last for any significant period of time and so that, together with a number of other challenging factors, makes it hard for us to include this group, and anyone else with a significant health condition, when planning a week in Lourdes.

With this in mind, the pilgrimage we are hoping to arrange will be a pilgrimage of mission: we carry the prayers and intentions of many parishioners in our Diocese to Lourdes, including our regular APs, and will pray for them and their families at the Grotto. It will also be a pilgrimage of healing: we walk with those who have had a traumatic pandemic through loss of a loved one, loss of a job, or loss of status, and those who have been at the forefront of the pandemic, e.g. doctors, nurses, care support workers, teachers, who need time to process and reflect on their experiences over the past year. We also want our week to be a time of renewal: for those who have suffered by the closure of churches, where they may not yet have been able to re-engage, and see our Lourdes week as a way to recharge their spiritual batteries and return refreshed and ready to re-join their spiritual parish family in earnest.

To do this, we need you to apply to join us in Lourdes when applications open in March, assuming you do not have a condition that makes you susceptible to CV-19, to carry the prayers and intentions from those at home, and to provide companionship to those who have had a hard year on the front line of the pandemic, or through loss as a result of the pandemic, during a prayerful and hopefully enjoyable pilgrimage week.

We also hope that families will join us in the usual way, and we have been encouraged to invite Redshirts and young pilgrims from Years 12 and 13 too, so these groups will hopefully join us, although we are anticipating that, for obvious reasons, the numbers will be lower than usual.

Inevitably there will be some changes to the way we normally operate. For example, we envisage there being hotel bubbles, so that socialising will be carried out in hotel groups, rather than as a whole pilgrimage. We will all be flying, to limit the time each of us has to spend travelling and transferring into our hotels in Lourdes, and we do not expect the usual number of pilgrims, so our week will inevitably feel different.

We will need leaders for each of the hotel groups and the Redshirts, choir members (assuming we can plan for CV-19 safe singing) and helpers to help in the family group, but

all these requirements will be lighter than normal, so please do not be disappointed if you are not asked to help in some way. To have you with us in our journey of devotion to Our Lady will be wonderful, and for many, this will be the opportunity to have a week in Lourdes to reflect, re-energise, and give thanks for the gifts that we have all been blessed with.

If everything goes to plan, we will open applications at the end of March and will ask everyone to apply as quickly as possible so we can book the appropriate accommodation in Lourdes. Financial support will be available to those of you who will struggle to fund the week away, so this should not be an impediment to joining us.

The pilgrimage dates are **23rd July to the 29th July** (although some people may be asked to travel on the 22nd and return on the 30th), so please put these dates in your diary.

If, assuming the CV-19 environment is favourable, you would like to join us, please email office@ablourdes.org to express your wish to be notified when applications open in March.

Those of you who accepted Credit Notes from us last year when the pilgrimage was cancelled will be able to use them to come to Lourdes this year. Fear not though, if you decide to stay at home, your credit note can be redeemed in 2022, when we will hopefully be arranging a normal pilgrimage. Prayers please for that too!

Lastly, for the avoidance of doubt, our week in Lourdes is not certain, and we will not make a final decision on whether to go as a group until May. When applications open, you will only be asked for a £50 deposit to secure your place, and you will not be invoiced for any other payments until May, when the situation for July should be clearer. We will plan for success, but would ask that you be prepared for disappointment. Your prayers over the coming weeks will be much appreciated.

May God bless you all.

Mike Thoms and the Pilgrimage team