

Dear [Assisted Pilgrim],

Arundel & Brighton Lourdes Pilgrimage 2021

I hope you are all well, and despite this strange CV-19 world we live in, have had a happy Christmas, and are approaching 2021 with renewed optimism, now the vaccine programme is being rolled out in earnest.

Many of you have been phoning the office to ask about plans for our pilgrimage this summer, so I am sorry that today I am writing to you with some disappointing news about our plans for this year.

After a considerable amount of discussion and reflection, we have decided that we will not be able to support Assisted Pilgrims to come to Lourdes in 2021. The main reasons for this are as follows:

1. Whilst many of you will have been vaccinated by July, we do not know how much antibody protection this will give you from the disease, and whether you can be infectious to others, despite being protected yourself.
2. Even once a frail, elderly, sick or disabled person is vaccinated, there is still a small chance that they could be infected by CV-19, and whilst we expect the level of infection to be less in the general French population in the summer, we still cannot expect the French health system to support our Assisted Pilgrims, should you contract CV-19 and become seriously unwell. Which as you know, in certain age groups, is more likely than in others.
3. Many helpers and leaders will not have qualified for the injection by July, and so, should they fall ill just before, or during our pilgrimage, whilst it is unlikely that they will be seriously unwell, they would not be available to help you, and this might make our management of your care very challenging.
4. As we are sure you are aware, our clinical team all work on the front line of this pandemic in their various roles, and at present are working extremely hard either caring for CV-19 patients or doing extra hours for colleagues who are having to be in quarantine due to a positive CV-19 test themselves, or for someone in their household. These clinicians volunteer to help us every year, but we feel that this year, by the time we travel to Lourdes, they will all be exhausted and in need of a well-earned rest. It would therefore not be fair for us to expect them to help in the way that they selflessly do each year, and their time off in 2021 should be a time of rest and recuperation.

Having said all of this, it is not all bad news, as we understand from the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes that they have improved their technology in the Shrine and will now be able to stream more video content from various liturgies onto the internet. With this in mind, we are hoping that a group of healthy fit pilgrims will be able to travel to Lourdes with your prayers and intentions, and you will be able to watch them praying throughout the week for you and your loved ones via an internet link.

Some of you will find this easy, as you will already have a computer or an iPad to access the internet, but for others this may be more difficult, and so we would ask that you let us know if you need some help and support, and nearer the time, should the UK tier

restrictions allow, we will try to arrange for someone to support you through the activities that happen throughout the pilgrimage week (23rd - 29th July) which you wish to see and participate in, from the comfort of your home, or if numbers warrant it and it is permissible, the community of a nearby parish.

For the avoidance of doubt, those who accepted a credit note in 2020 following the cancellation of that year's pilgrimage will be able to redeem it when you join us in 2022, so nothing will be lost.

We know this news will be a significant disappointment in a year of disappointments, but we hope you all understand that our number one priority is your safety, and for 2021, we feel that this is best served at home.

Please be assured of our prayers throughout the year. You will all be in our hearts and minds as we journey through this pandemic.

Yours in Christ,

Rev Michael Thoms