

LOURDES PILGRIMAGE DEPARTS DUBLIN WITH 1,500 PILGRIMS, LED BY ARCHBISHOP FARRELL

The Dublin Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes departed Dublin Airport on three chartered aircraft today, Thursday, September 3, with 122 sick pilgrims from parishes all over the Archdiocese travelling to Our Lady's shrine in Lourdes.

Archbishop Farrell is leading the five-day pilgrimage. Also travelling is Bishop Paul Dempsey for his second time to Lourdes as an Auxiliary Bishop with the Dublin Pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage group includes the **122 sick pilgrims, 14 doctors, 45 nurses, 552 helpers, 31 priests and two deacons. The 552 helpers include 250 young people, with 164 of those being sixth-year students from 30 secondary schools around the Archdiocese, accompanied by 32 school leaders. More than 1,500 pilgrims are travelling.** Those who travelled on the three chartered aircraft are joined by others making their own way via Toulouse, Biarritz, Carcassonne, Bordeaux and other nearby airports and some travelling by train via Paris.

Archbishop Farrell said: "I am looking forward, once again, to leading the annual Dublin Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes. I thank all those who are joining in the pilgrimage who will devote themselves to the care of the sick and all those who are united with us in prayer throughout the Archdiocese. I also welcome all the parish groups who have travelled to Lourdes at this time."

Many of the sick pilgrims who are travelling would not have the opportunity to visit Lourdes if it were not for the fantastic medical backup, care and assistance that the many volunteers offer.

The diocesan pilgrimage has travelled to Lourdes almost every year since 1949. In 1953, a rail strike in France saw the pilgrimage cancelled. And in 2020 and 2021, the Covid-19 restrictions prevented the Dublin group from travelling. During the Covid years, however, a virtual pilgrimage was organised, with ceremonies held in churches in the Archdiocese of Dublin dedicated to Our Lady and to St Bernadette. The pilgrimage family was linked by webcam to these churches when travel to the shrine in Lourdes was not permissible. A smaller pilgrimage travelled in September 2022, but with no assisted sick pilgrims.

Pilgrimage Director Canon John Flaherty said: "The Pilgrimage is continuing to show signs of growth in all sections. We are hoping that over the next few years the numbers will rise again to pre-Covid numbers of more than 150 sick pilgrims. Our number of Volunteer Doctors, Nurses and Helpers this year far exceeds our expectations".

Canon Flaherty pointed out that despite rising costs of air travel and hotel accommodation, the number of general pilgrims is very strong this year, with JWT Travel again operating a waiting list of hotel pilgrims for the past few months.

He also pointed out that **a great debt of gratitude is due to the many parishes across the Archdiocese who support the pilgrimage financially and by their prayers in what is known as the Associate Membership.** He said: "It is because of

these parishioners' generosity, that we are able to part or fully subsidise the fares of sick pilgrims who otherwise would not be able to travel."

Canon John wished to express his sincere thanks to a wonderful Office Administrator, a talented Committee, an energetic and hard-working Helpers Council, a committed Team of Chaplains, Doctors, Nurses and incredibly committed volunteers, who serve so generously throughout the year, in a "labour of love" for the sick pilgrims inspired by Our Blessed Lady and St Bernadette.

The opening Mass of the pilgrimage will be celebrated by Archbishop Farrell tomorrow, Friday, September 4, at the Grotto in Lourdes at 10am (9am Irish time) and [can be followed live on the Lourdes webcam](#). This will be followed by a full programme of liturgies and other events over the five days of the pilgrimage and enhanced by the Pilgrimage Music Groups, Cantors and Organist. Appropriately, the closing Mass of the Pilgrimage on Monday next, September 7, will be celebrated on the Vigil of the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady's Birthday.

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