

### DAY 1: Wednesday September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022

We started off our journey to Lourdes at 10.45 am on Wednesday Sept.7th at Dublin airport. We checked in our bags, went through security, and had a little time to grab something to eat before heading to the gate. We finally arrived in sunny France around 6pm. The flight was delayed a little, so we did not make The Welcome Mass, the opening of the pilgrimage for the Dublin Diocese in Lourdes. We got a bus from the airport straight to the Hotel Eliseo, which was where we were staying. When we arrived at the hotel, we rushed our dinner hoping to get to the SOLITUDE HOTEL for a meeting with the schools group. We arrived at the Solitude and met all the "BLUE SHIRTS." The coordinators told us about our plan for the following days. We then made our way to the domain for prairie. When we were walking on the opposite side of the Grotto for "PRAIRIE" (Prayer and reflection for the "Blue Shirts" each evening), we passed by the start of the torch light ceremony. It was so surreal and excited us about what was to come over the next few days. We then had prairie and there was an exciting, positive atmosphere from the "WHITE SHIRTS" (returning volunteers) who were happy to be back after being unable to go during covid and from the Blueshirts for opportunity that was unfolding over the next few days. We went back to our hotels for an early night, ready to start our journey. (Midnight!)

### DAY 2: Thursday September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Our morning was off to an early start, we woke up at 6am and went down for breakfast at 7am. After breakfast we headed to the grotto with all the Dublin pilgrims for an opening mass. Today was our Lady's birthday which was so special to be in Lourdes for that. We then met the blue shirts at the crown virgin statue, and we made our way to Bartres. This is a village near Lourdes where Bernadette spent time when she was a child. The whole walk up to Bartres was a struggle as it was all uphill, but the views of the Pyrenees mountains and the beautiful French countryside was worth it. On the way up we stopped at a Ukrainian Orthodox church where we prayed for peace and lit candles for those involved in the war in Ukraine. When we arrived at Bartres we visited the church where Bernadette would spend time. We then had a picnic outside with the packed lunches our hotel gave us. This was a wonderful opportunity to bond and get to know all the Blue Shirts better. After our picnic we started our journey back and enjoyed more of the amazing views. In total we walked 9km (21,000 steps) and it was only 2.30pm! We then met at the Accueil (Hospital) where we had training on the safe use of wheelchairs and voitures. At 5pm, we walked in procession with the Dublin diocesan to carry the blessed sacrament to the underground basilica. The four of us were on flag duty for this procession. We held flags for the walk to the basilica and for the duration of the mass. It was such an extraordinary and beautiful experience. The basilica is the

size of several football pitches (It can hold up to 20,000 pilgrims), it was amazing to see everyone working and praying together and the beauty of faith. We returned to the hotel for dinner at 7pm. As we were there, we heard of the passing of Queen Elizabeth. After dinner, we went to the solitude for prairie. We listened to an inspiring and motivating talk by Jim Lucy on well-being. Then it was our turn for prairie, along with Clongowes and Blackrock College, the theme for tonight was about being open to new experiences. We prepared an acting out of the parable of the pencils and finished with Jodie singing Opportunity from Annie. Then we had a quiz which was another great opportunity for us to bond and enjoy the company of the other Blueshirts.

### DAY 3: Friday September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022

We started off this morning by gathering for morning prayer on the other side of the river across from the Grotto. We then gather with the entire Dublin Pilgrimage for a group photo at the basilica. We then went to the baths. It was a different experience this year than previous years that went to the baths. This year, we prayed to Mary and then a woman poured water from a jug into our hands. We washed our hands with the water, washed our face and then drank the water from our hands. (This is known as the Water Ritual). Pilgrims at Lourdes are invited to take part in this ritual as Our Lady requested. We then went on a walking tour where we were guided around Lourdes and taken to places to do with Bernadette's life like the mill, le cachet, and the parish church where she was baptised. This gave us an interesting insight into her life. We returned to the hotel for lunch and headed back to the basilica where we were on water duty for the anointing of the sick mass. This was quite a sad mass, and it was difficult seeing many people upset. However, we enjoyed helping during the mass and giving out the water. After the mass, there was a picnic on the lawn outside the accueil. We talked to all the pilgrims, and it was amazing hearing everyone's different life experiences and their reasons for being at Lourdes. We had to leave the picnic early and rush to folk group practice, we practiced our songs for The Youth Mass which was the following day. We went back to the hotel for dinner at 7. After dinner, we went to the torch light procession. We helped lead the Dublin pilgrims in the procession. It was amazing to see all the pilgrims and volunteers all gathered for this ceremony. A feeling of unity, peace and love came upon everyone during this ceremony. It was so surreal to see, we had seen pictures and videos of this procession, but it is nothing compared to the real-life experience. Later, we had prairie where four schools presented on the theme of "Care of the poor, sick and homeless." Then all the Blueshirts headed to the Solitude Hotel for music night. Collie played the piano, and we all sang and danced to our favourite songs. After a remarkably busy day we went straight back to the hotel and went asleep.

#### DAY 4: Saturday September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022

We had a later start today and woke up at half seven for breakfast. We headed for morning prayer and then had folk group practice. We then had the youth mass. Father Sean and Paul talked about "BEO" and being alive. It was a very inspiring mass. We sang as a part of the folk group for this mass, and everyone complimented our singing, and we loved being a part of the group! After the mass, we met all the Blueshirts to get coaches to Gavarnie. It was a one-hour bus journey, but it flew by as we sang and enjoyed the beautiful views of the Pyrenees and waterfalls. When we arrived, we played a big game of football, walked up a bit of the mountains and took in the scenery. We got an ice cream from one of the local shops and rambled around the other art, crystal, and souvenir shops. We rushed home to get back into our uniform and sang as part of the folk group in the mass for deceased members. People carried up a candle for a deceased member of the pilgrimage. It was hard seeing people so upset as they reflected on loved ones that meant something to the pilgrimage. After the mass we rushed back for dinner. We went to the Medal ceremony (Volunteers are awarded medals for their various lengths of service to the Pilgrimage). This was a motivating, encouraging and joyful ceremony. It was so nice seeing the dedication and commitment people put into this pilgrimage and was inspiring to see the pilgrims getting bronze badges for three years, silver badges for five years and the gold for 25 years. It was amazing seeing the community of people getting their badges they were all so proud of themselves and each other as they know the demanding work and commitment required. After the ceremony, we attended prairie on the theme of "Finding peace with God and being at peace in myself." The schools sang Oceans and Silence by Khalid which reflected the theme nicely. The retired archbishop of Dublin Dermot Martin visited. After prairie, we had an opportunity for confession. Before returning to the hotel, we got a crepe from one of the local shops and returned to the hotel.

#### DAY 5: Sunday September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022

This morning, we had a bit of a lie-in. we had morning prayer and went to the solitude for hotel support at 9.15. It was so nice talking to the pilgrims and hearing their wise advice on life. We brought them in their wheelchairs down to the stations of the cross, where different schools act out each station. We then brought them back to their hotels.

We got a tour of the accueil where we would normally do our work in the hospital, but we could not this year because of covid. It gave us an insight into what it was like working in there and showed us what is in store for next year if we are to return. We returned to the hotel for lunch at 12. We were then on hotel support again with the voitures and had great conversations with the pilgrims. We had a farewell mass with all

the Dublin Pilgrimage and after, we lead voitures in procession to visit the grotto. We returned the pilgrims to their hotel. We then had free time, we bought souvenirs to bring home and returned to the hotel for dinner. We collected our candle to say our prayers and intentions for people back home. We went down for our final gathering with Father Paul, Laura Jane and Aaron (The Youth Chaplain, and Youth Leaders). We listened to motivating stories from the team on how they got to be white shirts and told us what it's like. Father Paul then blessed the candles. We then went to the Grotto as our school group (Ms. Seery and the four of us) lit our special candle. There was a beautiful, silent, peaceful atmosphere as we said our prayers and intentions. We lit candles for loved ones at the grotto and then had our final walk through the grotto, touching the wall. We filled our water bottles with holy water and went to the Solitude Hotel for our final music night. We all sang our hearts out in a spirit of friendship and great fun. We were reminded of all the "BEO" and life in young people. We said goodbye to the Blueshirts that were on the early flight, the following morning. We returned to the hotel and went straight asleep after an amazing day.

#### DAY 6: Monday September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Today we went on a hike up the mountains with the rest of the Blueshirts that were getting the late flight that evening. It was an enjoyable time to see more of the beautiful area we were in and to bond with the Blueshirts. We got the bus back and went for dinner at the hotel. The bus then picked us up to head to the airport, our flight was delayed due to a thunderstorm. There was lightning as we looked out the window of the plane, which was quite scary, but we were all safe and landed safely in Dublin Airport. We all said goodbye to each other which was sad as we had such a magical experience together. We then reunited with our families and returned to our homes. Reflecting on this week, we all describe it as a life-changing opportunity. It is an experience that teaches you so much about yourself and others and we have come back with a new outlook on life. The memories, friendships, and lessons we learned there will stick with us forever.

