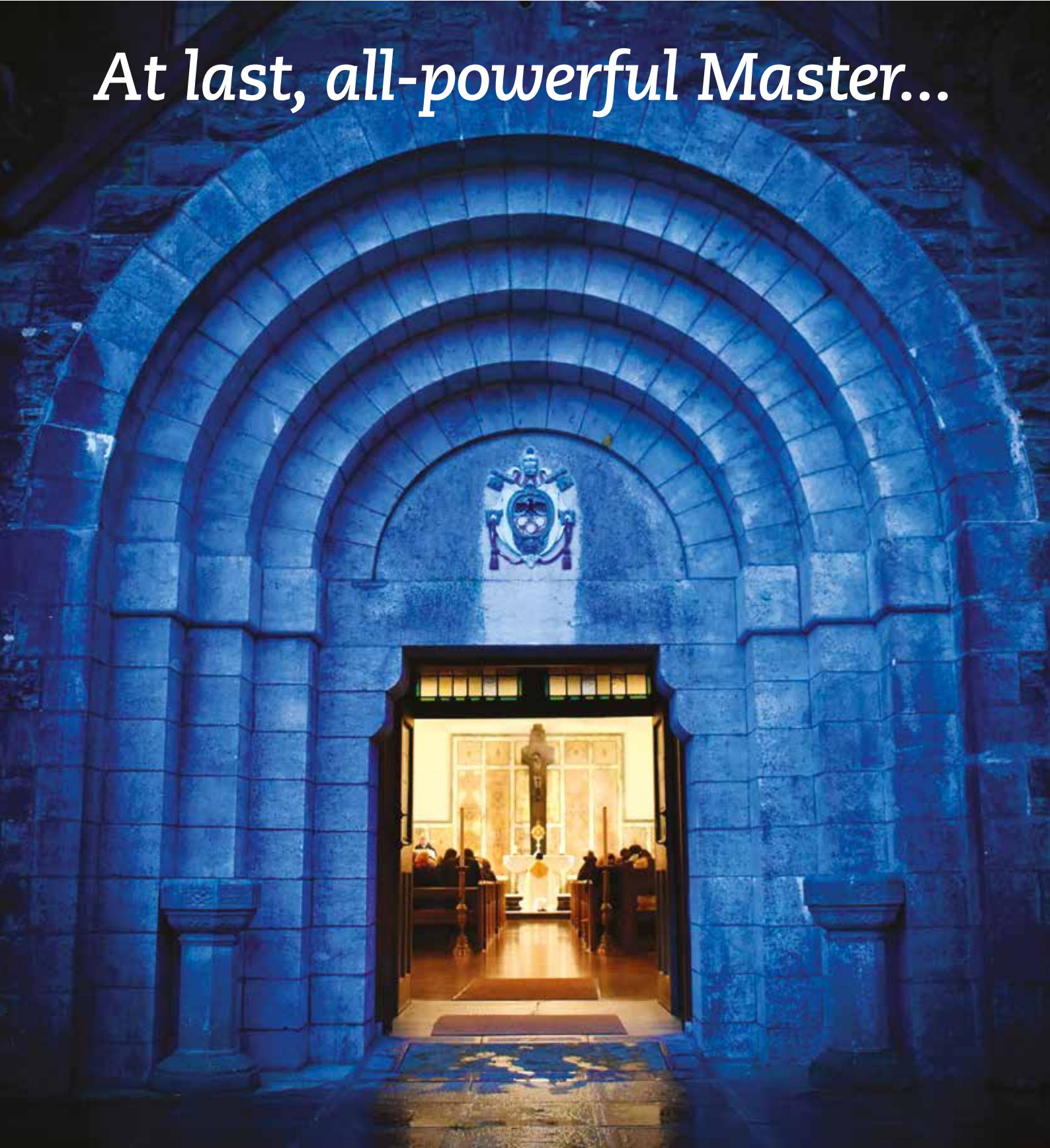


FRIENDS OF LOUGH DERG NEWSLETTER
AUTUMN 2022



The PILGRIM'S FRIEND

At last, all-powerful Master...



PRIOR'S POST

Dear friends,

As the Vigil Candle is extinguished at the end of Night Prayer, second-day pilgrims recite together the Cantic of Simeon: "At last, all-powerful Master, you give leave to your servant to go in peace..." The striking cover photo overleaf offers a view into the Basilica during the final Night Prayer of the 2022 Three Day Pilgrimage. How good it was in 2022 to have a Pilgrimage Season again, and at last to welcome pilgrims back on Station Island.

The boxes on the right present some of the statistics. The articles in the following pages flesh out something of the experience. A strong feature in this edition of The Pilgrim's Friend is the series sharing the voices of some of the younger members of our staff during the Three Day Pilgrimage, as they recall what it was like for them to work on Lough Derg for some weeks of the summer.

I have long since lost count of how often departing pilgrims have voiced words of appreciation for the service our young staff give. But our pilgrims also value deeply the contribution these young people make to the Island by their very presence.

Pope Francis puts great store on young people, not only on the life-giving contribution that they can make in parishes and other Church settings, but also on their essential role in human society as a whole, and the value of hearing their voice.

And the Holy Father invites us to value the conversations we have across the generations. As Prior, it does me good to know that Lough Derg is one setting where those interactions can take place so naturally.

I am always glad to hear from readers of The Pilgrim's Friend who have feedback to offer about anything in relation to Lough Derg. Do be sure to include clear contact details so that I can respond to you!

Beir beannacht.

Fr La



Fr. La welcomes pilgrims beginning their One Day Retreat.

2022 PILGRIMAGE SEASON

LOUGH DERG STATISTICS



Where in the world...

Pilgrims travelled from England, United States, France, Scotland, Australia & New Zealand during 2022.

Three Day Pilgrimage

The 2022 Pilgrimage Season saw 3222 pilgrims travel to Station Island to undertake the traditional 3-day Pilgrimage. This represents 61% of the 2019 (pre-covid) total.

Where in Ireland...

All counties were represented in 2022! With Dublin, Donegal, Tyrone, Derry, Kildare & Cork residents getting their county into the top 6!



One Day Retreat

We welcomed 3364 pilgrims for the One Day Retreat. The average attendance for One Day Retreats was 168.



43,000

Over 43,000 tuned in to our live broadcast Mass from RTÉ Studios in Dublin on Sunday 21st August.



MEETING PATRICK ON LOUGH DERG

by Josh Treacy, a Lough Derg pilgrim and theology undergraduate at Oxford

How well do we know our national apostle? It seems a tired question: Patrick is a truly national symbol whose story is well-known. St. Patrick's Day is celebrated the world over and his shamrock has become synonymous with Ireland. Yet the figure of Patrick contains strands of history and myth, religion and politics, culture and consumerism.

For a week this summer I had an opportunity to disentangle some of these strands, exploring with pilgrims who St. Patrick is for Irish Christians today. The study took the form of group discussion coupled with a questionnaire over five days in August. In all, almost 70 pilgrims took part.

On historical matters, the survey showed that only 40% of respondents knew that Patrick was a Roman citizen, and 36% knew that he wasn't the first Irish bishop. As for Patrick's significance as a saint, most felt Patrick was more relevant as 'a symbol of Irishness', than as a Christian figure.

For many there was a frustrated feeling that St Patrick's Day – and Patrick by extension – has been overly commercialised, with an emphasis on consumerism. Interestingly, 83% of respondents attend mass on St. Patrick's Day, while only half that number said they would attend a parade. So, for our pilgrims the day remains religious rather than just cultural.

Yet oftentimes the Patrick we encounter is barely recognisable as Christian. 40% of respondents felt that we had 'lost sight of Patrick as a Christian figure', while 23% were uncertain. How might we offer clarity about who Patrick is for Irish Christians?

The answer, I believe, lies in the words of Patrick himself: the texts known as his *Confession* and the *Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus*. These remarkable fifth century writings are the earliest surviving texts of any kind written in Ireland. They provide insight into the beginnings of Christianity in Ireland and into the life and faith of St Patrick.



Across 15 centuries, Patrick's voice is strikingly contemporary. In time he was venerated as a supreme kind of saint, yet with genuine humility he writes of himself as 'a sinner, a rustic, and the least of all believers'. We read of how he who 'did not know the true God,' found faith in captivity: 'I was like a stone lying deep in the mud until God lifted me up and placed me on the very top

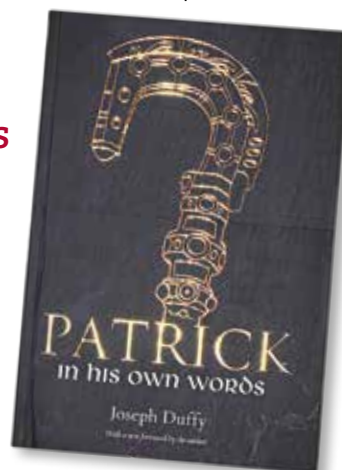
a real human being before. This point is crucial: Patrick's words lay bare his flaws and weaknesses, revealing not the mythical saint but a vulnerable yet courageous human being of profound faith. Through relating to his humanity pilgrims were able to find their own voices in Patrick's voice.

In his slavery and isolation, the young Patrick was forced to grapple with questions of faith, identity, and meaning. The three-day pilgrimage can also offer a kind of isolation, a kind of silence, which evokes these questions for us today. We need

not grapple with them alone; we can turn to Patrick for solace and inspiration. Patrick can be encountered through his words.

Towards the end of his *Confessio*, Patrick prays that he may never 'suffer the loss of [God's] people who have become

"Patrick's words lay bare his flaws and weaknesses, revealing a vulnerable yet courageous human being of profound faith."



of the wall.' He writes out of intense gratitude, to 'shout aloud in return to the Lord for such great deeds of his.'

Patrick's voice in these texts, which was at the heart of the discussion groups, was entirely new to most pilgrims. The survey showed that less than half of pilgrims had even heard of his works. One pilgrim remarked that she had never considered Patrick as

his at the ends of the earth'. That people constituted a young church, founded on Christ 'the true sun, who will never perish'. Much history has unfolded since Patrick's time, but the foundation of the church remains the same. Since with Patrick we acknowledge that eternal Christ, the mission of his ancient church remains ever young.

REFLECTIONS from LOUGH DERG...

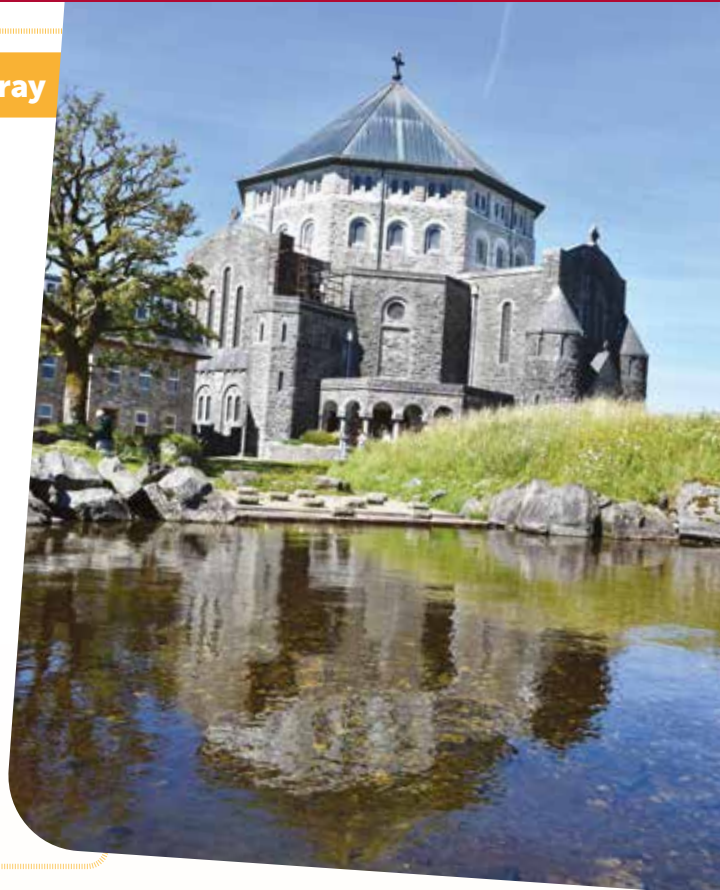
Glad to be back on the organ stool - Bregeen Murray

This year I was thrilled to be back again working on Lough Derg as a member of the Basilica Team. Many people both young and old laughed when it came up in conversation that I, a young care-free student, would be spending my summer working as organist on Lough Derg instead of jet-setting off to some foreign country. To which I would reply 'It's a wonderful place, and I'm very lucky to have the chance to work on such a special and unique island.'

As organist on Lough Derg I was privileged to meet and spend time with pilgrims embarking on their Lough Derg journey. I have seen first-hand the true power of the Holy Spirit healing the worries and struggles that many people bring to Lough Derg in their hearts. From the wide-ranging age profile of pilgrims I have also seen that the Catholic faith is still being passed down the generations through pilgrimage to Lough Derg to give praise and thanks.

At a personal level, I can honestly say that working on Lough Derg for two summers I have met with many wonderful and inspirational people, some of whom I can wholeheartedly say will be lifelong friends - friends that I know will be there with me and for me for years to come. The memories I have made and the life lessons that I have learned on Lough Derg, and hopefully many more that I will make in future seasons, I will treasure and keep close to my heart. I thank God for the opportunities that Lough Derg has given me.

Bregeen



Cantor and Pilgrim - Jordan MacGabhann

As I settle back into seminary life here in Maynooth after the summer, I have been reflecting on my work experience on Lough Derg. I see how much personal growth it brought me in just a few short months.

As cantor, I was involved in the music ministry in the basilica. Irish people tend not to sing wholeheartedly in church and my main contribution was to encourage the congregation to sing. My background is in 'trad' music, and initially I felt a little out of my depth with church music. However, as I grew familiar with the Lough Derg repertoire and came to appreciate what music brought to the pilgrim experience, I

got better at leading people in song.

I developed my own techniques in encouraging people to sing not only generously but also joyfully. With some encouragement, the pilgrims got a lot out of participating in that direct way. I also could bring my traditional music to the liturgy, often playing the pipes as the Gifts were brought to the altar at Mass.

I found that I grew both in my musicianship and also in my leadership abilities, and in confidence at getting up to that microphone and engaging with a group of people on a daily basis. I thank God for that personal growth and I am so appreciative to fellow staff members who supported me.

As cantor I got to work with several organists who were part of the team. There is a tight-knit community of staff on Lough Derg, and I made great memories getting to know people and having fun in the staff room. I'm confident to say that I have made some friends for life.

After my time on staff, I did also spend three days as pilgrim. At the burning bush, God said to Moses "Take off your shoes for this is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5). I've often heard Lough Derg being described as a "holy island." Taking off my shoes as a pilgrim made me realise that I was going to have

an opportunity to become aware of God's presence with me right now.

Some pilgrims get a lot out of the medieval-feeling penitential experience on Lough Derg. However, it wasn't about that for me. Being barefooted (like Moses), fasting, not sleeping, saying all those countless prayers while climbing over and kneeling on those jaggedy rocks (while being eaten alive by midges!), challenging though it was, helped me encounter myself at a really deep level. It felt like my very soul was a well, but somehow I couldn't reach to the bottom of that well. However, the whole process of doing those Lough Derg stations helped me move down through the upper layers to reach the depths of my very self.

For me, the real benefit of Lough Derg came afterwards. I recall myself thinking and praying about certain things on Lough Derg, and now I have to think "What do I do about that now?"

I am really grateful to Lough Derg for enriching my life in many ways, ways that I continue to benefit from. Now that I am in my last year of studies for the priesthood in Maynooth, hopefully I may be able to return to Lough Derg at some point as a priest, to contribute in a different way.

Jordan



...young staff share their thoughts

A view from the Dining Room and the Shop - **Roisin Malcolm**

I first went to Lough Derg on the Clogher Diocesan Day Retreat in 2019. I really enjoyed the day and immediately thought it was a really nice place. I had heard about Lough Derg from people like Lisa who had worked there previously, and from our family friend Fr Seán Mulligan who ministered on Lough Derg as a seminarian; they said what a special place it was.

This year when I saw the summer jobs advertised I was keen to apply and delighted to be selected to be part of the team.

Working on Lough Derg was a great opportunity to meet new people both staff and pilgrims. It was a wonderful experience: from the hard work to the craic, to seeing the hungry faces of pilgrims in the dining room to seeing their smiling faces when they were leaving!

From the very first day at work on Lough Derg I was happily greeted by all the staff and I settled in really quickly. I



had a lovely room looking out on the lake. Soon I was working away either in the shop or in the Pilgrim's Kitchen with everyone else. Another contribution was helping the pilgrims to keep awake, sometimes as they were about to fall off the bench! And of course serving them tea/coffee and toast. Soon it felt like home while being away from home!

On the island we attended night prayer every evening, then back to the staff dining room for tea and a catch up with the rest of the staff. It

was nice to get talking to the different priests who were on the island over the summer, some from abroad, and to have great discussions as well as the craic with them. It was all fun and games until we ran out of chocolate! (Don't tell the pilgrims!)

It was a privilege to work in a place that was so peaceful and prayerful. Seeing many older people walking barefoot on the beds, and how strong their faith was, really helped strengthen my own faith.

It was really nice, too, to meet pilgrims from my home county Monaghan, and especially from Carrickmacross, and I think they liked seeing a familiar face!

In early October, I returned to Lough Derg to attend the Youth 2000 retreat which was held there, along with a friend (a life-long one, I hope!) that I met for the first time while working there this summer. It was such a joy to be on the island again. I hope to return to the staff team in the coming seasons as Lough Derg is truly a great place to work and to develop my own faith.

Roisin

First Aid, Cantor, Reception - **Davog McCaffrey** has played many roles

My name is Davog McCaffrey. I'm a newly qualified Junior Doctor now working in Enniskillen, but for the past number of years I have been a member of the Staff Team on Lough Derg in a number of roles, but mainly as a cantor, based in the Basilica.

When I think of my time working on Lough Derg, I think firstly of the journey. Lough Derg is 'an island apart', and when I set out on that journey and step onto the boat, it is a chance to disconnect from the hustle and bustle of life on the mainland and to reconnect with myself and with God for the few nights I will be staying on the island.

I often think of the similarities between our work on Lough Derg and the island's monastic origins.

Like life in a monastic community, our day is guided by the sound of the bell. We live, eat, work and serve the pilgrim people together. There is a beautiful sense of peace and fulfilment in the daily routine that stays the same yet changes with each group of pilgrims. In the Basilica, we are at the heart of the pilgrimage, and it is a privilege to journey with the hundreds of pilgrims we meet. Having completed the pilgrimage myself on a number of occasions, I know the openness and vulnerability that comes with being on vigil. As staff we get to know many pilgrims, sharing the highs and lows of their pilgrimage and indeed some of their wider life experiences.

On a personal level, I've met some of my closest friends working on 'the Island'. We come from different backgrounds and walks of life, but I believe that there is something that draws people to work in such a special space. 'Behind the scenes', the deep and meaningful conversations about life's big questions, combined with the craic and some late night tea parties in Peggy's Kitchen, have helped to form me as an individual.

I'm grateful that I have had the opportunity to serve the pilgrims who come to Lough Derg, and as I embark on a new chapter in my professional life, I look forward to continuing my connection with the Island as a 'Friend of Lough Derg'.

Davog

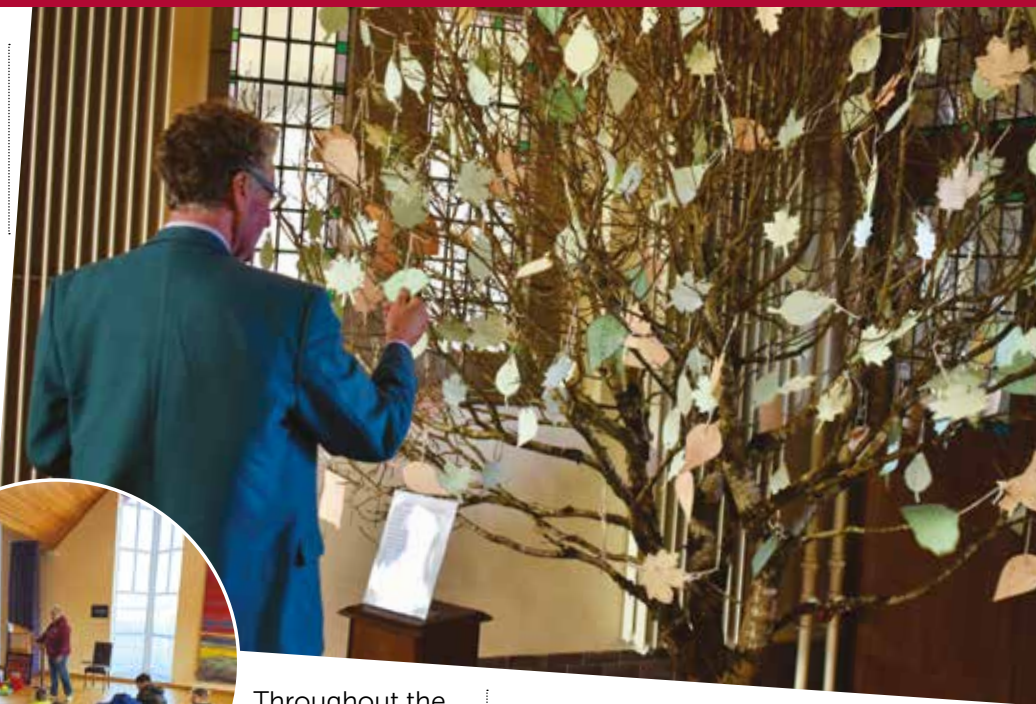


Davog McCaffrey, with other members of the Basilica team, **Grainne Byrne** and **Deacon Martin Donnelly**.

YOUTH RETREATS

This year continued the tradition of children being invited to the Island for Confirmation and School Retreats. It is always a privilege to introduce the ancient history of Lough Derg and include the younger generations in the story of the Island. Together children focused on what Confirmation means to them, and to the Church. And by reflecting on Mary's "yes" to God, we unpacked that every day, before and after our Sacraments, as Christians, we must be ready to say "Yes Lord" to the plans He has for us. An important part of our Confirmation retreats is to remind every single child how special they are, and how much God loves them. We encourage the children to identify foundations of their faith, and how they can nurture their relationship with God through prayer, the Mass and through actively inviting the Holy Spirit into their lives.

As part of this year's community of Lough Derg pilgrims young people were invited to write a prayer on a leaf and hang it up in the Basilica.



Throughout the season, pilgrims on the One Day Retreat and Three Day Pilgrimage have continually brought these intentions to their prayer - what a great witness to our wider church and how we support one another through prayer.

May God bless all those children who have walked on the Island this year, may they feel part of the

great history of our faith that we encounter whilst on Lough Derg.



Faith in the face of adversity



We dedicated our final Day Retreat to prayer for peace in Ukraine. Halyna Tesluk, Associate Professor at the Ukrainian Catholic University, and herself a refugee here along with her two young sons, was the guest speaker. She spoke about 'Faith in the face of adversity' which of course is very relevant for life in general. It was a privilege to have a large group of Ukrainian refugees join our pilgrims for this special day.



LOUGH DERG 2022 - A New Counsellor's Experience

Prayerful rooms, heavenly staff,
Peggy's scones and the great old laugh,
That's what makes Lough Derg.

Empathy, kindness,
A smile and guidance,
That's what makes Lough Derg.

Duty and hymn singing,
Conversation and self-giving.
That's what makes Lough Derg.

Teamwork and encouragement,
Peace and self-achievement,
That's what makes Lough Derg.

It really is a wondrous place!

Mary Cunningham

RTÉ MASS

Fr. La, members of the Lough Derg team and a number of past and present pilgrims travelled to RTÉ Studios in Dublin to celebrate the live broadcast Mass on Sunday 21st August. Viewing figures indicated a viewing audience of more than 40,000! We look forward to another RTÉ Mass in 2023... stay 'tuned' for more information!



D-Day for the draw 2022



Fr. La and the team would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who supported our Friends of Lough Derg Annual Membership Draw in 2022. The Draw took place in our newly opened Pilgrim Shelter Museum on Friday 28th October. The proceeds from the draw are a vital source of income that allow us to continue the mission and ministry of Lough Derg, while preserving the sacred island for the future. A huge thank-you to all our Draw Promoters, Ticket Sellers and all who purchased tickets for the draw this year. Details of the winners can be found on our website.

LOUGH DERG KEY DATES 2023...

THREE DAY PILGRIMAGE

1st June - 15th August (13th last day to begin)

ONE DAY RETREAT

May: 1st, 7th, 9th, 14th, 20th, 27th, 29th

August: 19th, 22nd, 27th

September: 6th, 9th, 16th, 17th, 23rd, 24th

QUIET DAYS

May 12th & Sept 15th

PILGRIM PATH

April 10th Easter Monday, May 21st & Sept 30th

DAY OF FRIENDSHIP AND PRAYER

Wednesday 17th May



Christmas Gifts from Lough Derg



CHRISTMAS CANDLE

Limited Edition

Lovely centrepiece for the Christmas Dinner table or your Christmas prayer time.

15cm in height, with a burn time of approx. 42 hours.

€10.00

MASS BOUQUET CARD

A prayerful remembrance by the Prior of Lough Derg this Christmas for someone you love.

The Prior, Father La, will offer a triduum of Masses this Christmas for all those who receive a Lough Derg Christmas Mass Bouquet..

Donation €5 €7 €10



CHRISTMAS DECORATION

Star Shaped Tree decoration, with a well-known excerpt from Saint Patrick's Breastplate:

"Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me."

€10.00

CHRISTMAS CARDS

A pack of six Christmas Cards featuring three snowy scenes from Station Island. The pack contains two of each design of card.

GREETING INSIDE: *Wishing you the gift of faith, the blessing of hope and the peace of God's love at Christmas and always.*

€5.00

We have a limited number of our "Station Island Through the Centuries" set of Christmas Cards remaining in stock. Pick up a pack if you missed out last year!



NATIVITY SETS

See our range online

A range of Lough Derg gifts and books are available on the online shop.

Visit www.loughderg.live/shop

Mass Bouquet requests and gift orders can be made through our online shop: www.loughderg.live/shop or by phone: 00353 71 986 1518 (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm)
Click and collect service available on selected days