



SUMMER LOURDES PILGRIMAGE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Thank you for trusting us with the care of your children on the BCYS Pilgrimage to Lourdes. We know that travelling abroad, especially on a pilgrimage, can raise lots of questions for both young people and parents. The FAQs below are designed to help answer some of the most common queries and to reassure you about what to expect.

If you have any further questions, please get in touch at gabriellaskinner@brcdt.org



WHO ARE WE?

BCYS (Brentwood Catholic Youth Service) is the youth ministry organisation of the Diocese of Brentwood, supporting young people in growing in faith, confidence, and leadership through events, retreats, and pilgrimages throughout the year.

The Lourdes pilgrimage is led by our Director for Youth Ministry, alongside the Events and Pilgrimages Coordinator and the Chaplain to the Youth Service. They are supported by a dedicated and experienced team of trained leaders, medical professionals, chaplains, and small group leaders. Together, this team ensures that young people are cared for, supported, and accompanied throughout the pilgrimage, with their safety, wellbeing, and spiritual experience as the highest priorities.

@brentwoodcys



www.bcys.net

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

• WHO WILL I SPEND MY WEEK WITH?

For most activities during the week, participants will be in a small group of approximately 8-10 young people with 2-3 small group leaders, joining together with the entire group for all Masses, services, meals and social activities.

The rooms in the hotel will be shared by 2-3 people, allocated as much as possible according to the preferences on your booking form, who will also be in your small group.

• WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW ANYONE?

If you do not know anyone, we will aim to pair you with someone of a similar age. (Every year we have people who join us without knowing anyone else on the trip, so you certainly won't be alone!)

• WHAT WILL I ACTUALLY BE DOING EACH DAY?

Days usually include:

- Helping assisted pilgrims to and from their hotels
- Daily Mass
- Processions
- Free time to enjoy cafes, ice-cream, crepes or souvenir shopping
- Retreat, reconciliation and times of prayer
- Group and social activities

The whole week is a mix of service, prayer, and fun, but please be aware that it is a busy week with early starts and late nights. Due to the location of hotels and geography of Lourdes, there will be a large amount of walking throughout the week, as well as pushing wheelchairs. You must be physically up to this task.

• IS IT ALL SERIOUS?

Not at all. Lourdes is deeply meaningful, and there are times to show respect and devotion, but there is also laughter, friendship, silliness, games and challenges!

• WHAT IF I FEEL HOMESICK OR OVERWHELMED?

That's completely normal. As well as our small group leaders, we are accompanied by trained health professionals, chaplains, "wise people" (our senior experienced leaders) and a counsellor. There's always someone to talk to, and you're never expected to cope alone.

FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

• IS MY CHILD SAFE?

Yes. Safeguarding is a top priority. All leaders and volunteers are DBS-checked and required to attend a training weekend prior to our pilgrimage. Young people are always part of a group, and asked to remain together in groups of 3 or more during free times.

We are accompanied by trained health professionals and, due to the nature of Lourdes, we are never far from medical assistance if needed!

Our Risk Assessments, Safety Policies and Emergency Procedures are all available on request.

• WHO LOOKS AFTER MY CHILD?

Your child will be part of a small group, led by 2-3 trained group leaders, who are responsible for their care, wellbeing, and supervision throughout the pilgrimage. They are also supported by the wider leadership team, consisting of our BCYS staff, trained health professionals, chaplains, “wise people” (our senior experienced leaders) and a counsellor.

• WHAT ABOUT MEDICAL NEEDS?

We ask that all physical and mental health needs are shared with us in advance so that our medical team are aware and best prepared to support those in our care. We have experienced plenty over the years, so nothing will be a shock and we would rather know all information upfront.

We ask that all young people bring a simple “first aid kit” with useful items such as painkillers and plasters, and if anything else is required, please let the group leaders know, and seek attention from one of our medical team.

If medications need to be stored or administered in a particular way, please speak to one of our medical team at the pre-trip meeting.

• CAN I CONTACT MY CHILD WHILE THEY'RE AWAY?

Yes. Young people have access to their phones. There is Wi-Fi in the hotels, but please do just check any data roaming charges before travelling. In addition, we will share emergency contact details for the Pilgrimage leaders and the hotel we will be staying in.

• WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE CONCERNS WHILE MY CHILD IS AWAY?

Parents and guardians will be provided with clear contact details before departure, including emergency contact numbers for the pilgrimage and a contact number for the hotel.

Group leaders and the BCYS team are available throughout the week to respond to any concerns and to ensure the wellbeing of all young people.

TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION

• WHAT ARE THE TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS FOR LOURDES?

Travel to Lourdes will be by coach, including a ferry crossing between Dover and Calais. The journey time is approximately 20 hours, but may vary depending on traffic, number and length of stops or road conditions. There will be regular meal and comfort stops at service stations along the route. Exact times will be shared with the group once we have confirmation of ferry crossings.

You can select to meet the coach at Colchester, Stratford or Brentwood, however on our return, all coaches will conclude at Brentwood, where attendees will need to be collected from Brentwood Cathedral after our final Mass.

• WHAT DO I NEED FOR TRAVEL?

Every person travelling will require:

- A current passport, valid for at least six months *beyond* our planned return date.
- A valid GHIC or EHIC. This gives you the right to access state-provided healthcare during your trip in another European Economic Area. This is free to apply for online, via the NHS website.

NB: Certain passport holders may require a Visa for travel. Please verify and have confirmation of your visa by 31st May. UK passport holders will not need a Visa.

• WHAT DO I NEED TO BRING?

A full packing list will be provided, but essentials include comfortable shoes, a reusable water bottle, sun protection and a small backpack. No expensive items are needed.

You will be provided with a BCYS branded polo shirt (2 if it is your first year with us), which the group will be asked to wear whilst working with the Diocese.

• WHAT ABOUT FOOD?

A selection of breakfast items, a 3 course lunch and 3 course dinner are provided by hotels, and any dietary requirements can be catered for (please ensure these are declared in advance). You will need to bring or purchase food for the coach journeys.

• WHERE DO THE GROUP STAY?

The BCYS group will all be staying together in the Hôtel Esplanade Eden, a short walk from the main Domaine.

FAITH AND EXPERIENCE

• WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT LOURDES?

Lourdes is special because of its history. In 1858, St Bernadette Soubirous experienced apparitions of the Virgin Mary at the grotto. Since then, millions of pilgrims have visited Lourdes to pray, seek healing, and experience a strong sense of peace, faith, and community, with care for the sick and vulnerable at its heart.

• WHAT IF I DON'T GO TO MASS REGULARLY?

That's absolutely fine. You are still very welcome on the pilgrimage. Many people who travel to Lourdes don't attend Mass regularly, and there is no judgement or pressure. We simply ask that you respect the prayerful nature of Mass and the faith of others, and take part in ways that feel comfortable for you. Leaders will support you wherever you are on your faith journey.

• WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT MY FAITH?

That's completely normal. Lourdes is a place where people often come with questions, doubts, or curiosity about faith. You don't need to have everything figured out. There will be leaders, chaplains, and other young people you can talk to, and you're always free to explore at your own pace in a supportive and welcoming environment.

• WHY DO PEOPLE SAY LOURDES IS LIFE-CHANGING?

Many people experience:

- New confidence
- Deeper friendships
- A stronger sense of purpose
- A renewed or newly discovered faith

Even those unsure about religion often describe Lourdes as transformational.

• WILL MY CHILD BE EXPECTED TO TAKE PART IN EVERYTHING?

In line with safeguarding policies, no young person will be left alone, and for that reason the entire group will be expected to attend all Masses, services and activities together. Young people are encouraged to participate, but no one is forced and leaders support each individual's journey. There will be opportunities to take part in Masses by reading, altar serving, joining the choir or musicians, or helping with the offertory.

In the case that a young person is unable to join in due to illness or safety concerns, we will follow our safeguarding protocols.

OTHER FAQs

• WHAT IS COVERED IN THE COST?

The cost includes coach travel, accommodation, insurance, fees, excursions, 3 meals a day at our hotel, a Lourdes polo shirt for each participant, and an additional shirt and hoody for anyone travelling with us for the first time.

You will need to bring spending for any food and drink you wish to purchase during the journey, and any drinks, snacks, ice-creams or souvenirs throughout the week.

• IS THERE ANY FINANCIAL SUPPORT AVAILABLE?

Bursary and grant funding is available from the Catenians, Jack Petchey and BCYS, among others. We would be happy to share any more information on these, as well as fundraising ideas within your parishes or schools. Please do not be put off attending this trip due to cost. You can find more information on Funding for Lourdes on the resources page of our website.

• WILL MY CHILD NEED TRAVEL INSURANCE?

Travel insurance is included as part of the pilgrimage package, with details shared before departure. If you wish to insure higher-value personal items, you are welcome to take out additional personal insurance.

