

Thinking of applying to join  
the **Lourdes Pilgrimage** as a

# Purpleshirt?

Over the years thousands of young people from across the Diocese have experienced what it means to be a young catholic by joining the Lourdes Pilgrimage as a Helper.

The primary purpose of the Pilgrimage is to enable pilgrims who require additional support to travel safely to Lourdes to visit the very place where Our Lady appeared to St Bernadette in 1858. For the pilgrimage to achieve this there has to be a range of volunteers to offer their services; Doctors and Nurses to look after the medical needs of pilgrims, Priests and Deacons to meet their spiritual needs and Helpers (aged 17 to 75) to offer their service of support and care to the Assisted Pilgrims – also referred to as APs.

In 2022, for the first time, a group dedicated specifically to 17 year-old helpers was created and named **Purpleshirts**, because they wear purple polo-shirts!

## A Purpleshirt is a 17 year-old who is:

- wishing to join the **Diocesan Pilgrimage** to Lourdes as a Helper
- prepared to **offer their service** by supporting pilgrims who require assistance
- willing and able to attend pre-pilgrimage **preparation days**
- seeking to deepen or explore their **faith**
- ready to experience **'a week with a difference'** on Pilgrimage in Lourdes



*I think it was truly the most wonderful experience that I have had in a long time - potentially ever.*

## What do some previous Purpleshirts say of their experience?

*I enjoyed helping other people...it was just amazing. Everyone was so lovely and I was always walking around with a smile on my face.*

*All of the leaders were amazing. They looked after us, answered our questions and were always there to support us! Thank you :)*

## If you decide to apply to join the Purpleshirts what would be expected of you?

That you attend the following pre-pilgrimage preparation days:

New Helpers Day: **Sunday 14 June**  
Briefing Day: **Sunday 19 July**

That you complete the **online training** sessions (links will be sent to you)

That you apply for a **free DBS** (relevant forms will be sent to you)

**That you read, understand, sign and abide by the Code of Conduct – particularly the section about alcohol.** In France it is illegal to sell alcohol to anyone under the age of 18, just as it is in the UK. You will be expected neither to attempt to buy alcohol nor to consume any alcohol. While no-one wants to spoil anyone's fun it needs to be clear that while on Pilgrimage this rule must apply.

## Practical Information

Purpleshirts travel to Lourdes by coach and ferry, which takes around 22 hours. Travel within France is mainly overnight, with an early arrival in Lourdes the following day. There are frequent comfort stops and plenty of opportunity to purchase food both on the ferry and at the service areas. You will need a picnic for the outward journey (the pilgrimage will provide one for the return).

The Purpleshirt group stays in one hotel – your Home Hotel. You will be assigned to another hotel as a Helper for the working day – your Helper Hotel.

In your Home Hotel rooms are ensuite and you will be sharing with at least one other Purpleshirt of the same sex.

You will have 3 meals a day – breakfast and supper will be in your Home hotel, but you will have lunch in the hotel you are assigned to as a Helper, along with the pilgrim you are assisting that day.

You will be given two uniform polo-shirts and a hoodie. You will only need spending money for gifts, sweets, soft drinks and ice-creams.



## What does a day in Lourdes look like for Purpleshirts?

Following breakfast you will walk in groups to your Helper hotel, where you will **meet with the Pilgrim** you will be assisting (AP) and the other Helper you will be working with that day. The Hotel Leaders will have prepared a programme for each of the days in Lourdes. This will include at least one whole pilgrimage event, such as **Mass** or some other liturgical event and other activities such as the **Stations of the Cross** or a **Tour of the Town in the Footsteps of Saint Bernadette**. There will also be time for visiting other places of interest, shopping and maybe a visit to a café for an ice cream! You will have **lunch at 12 noon** in your Helper hotel, along with the AP you are spending the day with. Around **6.30pm** you will walk back to your Home hotel where you will have **supper** and then take part in whatever **activities** your Purpleshirt Leaders have arranged for that evening, this may be with the whole pilgrimage, your helper hotel or your home hotel. Your Purpleshirt Leaders are all volunteers who have experience of working with young people and sharing the joy of their faith and their love of Lourdes, with those in their care.

Considering applying to join the Pilgrimage as a Helper is quite a daunting prospect, a bit of a leap of faith, especially if you don't know anyone else who is thinking of going. However, experience shows that the Preparation Days are time for Purpleshirts and their team leaders to begin to get to know each other, so by the time you get on the coach on day of departure you are already building relationships with new friends.

Something to bear in mind – the number of Assisted Pilgrims that can travel with the pilgrimage is entirely dependent on the number of people offering to travel as Helpers. By applying to be a **Purpleshirt** Helper you will be enabling someone to travel to Lourdes for what could be a wonderful 'Holy Holiday' for them and an amazing experience for you.



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