

The Pilgrimage to Lourdes 2017

A Report on the Order of Malta American Association Thirty-second Annual Pilgrimage to Lourdes, France May 3–9, 2017



ORDER OF MALTA
American Association

Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta

Our Mother Mary, Full of Grace



2017 Order of Malta American Association Lourdes Pilgrims

“Each day when I turned the corner and entered the Domain, there was this breathtaking site that made me immediately know that I was in a special, holy place.” —Malade Brian Muscarella

Letter from the Co-Chairs

Dear Confrere,

Some experiences have to be lived to be truly felt. The Order of Malta American Association 2017 Pilgrimage to Lourdes is one. With that as a caveat, and with the help of our fellow 2017 pilgrims, we will do our best in this report to describe the spiritual and transformative journey we were honored to lead in 2017.

It is impossible not to be struck by the beauty of Lourdes. This old, European town has winding streets and ancient buildings. During our visit, our American Association pilgrims rejoiced in the spirituality of the liturgies, the communal sharing of the Reflection Groups and the power of the Closing Ceremony. We visited the Baths and the Grotto, followed the Way of the Cross and joined in daily processions and the Marian Candlelight Procession at dusk. While these incredible events filled the days and evenings of our stay, and while we were blessed to share them with one another, the central purpose of the pilgrimage was to serve our Malades and Caregivers.

Our pilgrims were there for these courageous men, women and children who made this journey in spite of the health challenges they face. Their very presence on this pilgrimage was a powerful demonstration of faith—faith that, through the grace of our Mother Mary, they would find healing, perhaps physically, or emotionally or spiritually. Many of them would not have been able to visit Lourdes without the support of top-notch medical professionals and the selfless Knights, Dames, Auxiliary and volunteers and the ever-present clergy. These committed individuals traveled to Lourdes so that our Malades and Caregivers could experience the many graces of this journey. In such service, we strive to fulfill our mission of serving the sick.

The pages that follow detail the planning, logistics, communications and activities that made the 2017 Pilgrimage to Lourdes a once-in-a-lifetime experience for all pilgrims.

Blessings and Peace,
Craig and Nancy Gibson
2017 Lourdes Pilgrimage Co-Chairs

The Journey Begins—Planning

An Extraordinary Collaboration

The 2017 Pilgrimage began in the summer of 2016 with the planning process. While the chairs serve as hosts of the pilgrimage, the planning, which goes on for nearly a year, and execution are part of an extraordinary collaboration. Co-Presidents Ken Craig and FJ McCarthy traveled to Lourdes in advance to make the American Association's needs understood and, during the week of the pilgrimage, led us through all activities. Lourdes Committee Chair Dick Milone oversaw the entire effort from start to finish. The American Association Office Staff in NYC deserves oversized credit for the extraordinary work they did throughout the year. They were prompt and responsive, and they handled everything with joy and grace. Our Association President, Jack Pohrer, was with us every step of the way with a smile on his face and love in his heart.



American Association Office Staff

The Big Picture—The Lourdes Committee

The Lourdes Committee, chaired by Dick Milone with tremendous assistance from his wife, Dede Milone, thoughtfully put together the overall list of pilgrims and the team assignments. They organized the seating on the plane, handled the challenging tasks of hotel-room assignments and meal planning and dealt with the endless special requests and sensitive issues that arise in any group effort with 400-plus people on pilgrimage in a foreign country. Dick and Dede also worked closely with the Core Team for the overall success of the Pilgrimage. This year's group was divided into seven teams of approximately 55 members each. Each team was assigned a color and two Team Captains. Assisting were doctors, nurses, auxiliary, volunteers and clergy. Within each team were seven pods, each consisting of a Malade, Caregiver, Host, Charioteer and other volunteers.



Dede Milone, Dick Milone and Patti Vara Hickey

Dick's lengthy experience with the pilgrimage has been critical to its effectiveness. He sees the roles of the American Association Staff, the Chancellor, Co-Presidents and Co-Chairs as all-important pieces of the process. "While the Staff, Chancellor and Co-Presidents bring continuity and history to the process, the Co-Chairs bring the personal touch, the spirit of the pilgrimage," he said. "Each year, different Co-Chairs put their own imprint on the event, making each pilgrimage unique."

A First—Attending the Order's International Planning Meeting in Lourdes

Early in the planning process, Co-Presidents Ken Craig and FJ McCarthy traveled to Lourdes for the Order's International Planning Meeting. This was the first time representatives from the American Association had done that. The visit provided an opportunity for the American Association to present to the organizers the particular needs of our group, traveling so far with people who needed medical assistance. It gave us a voice in the choice of venues and strengthened our relationships with the international organizers. "I firmly believe that the advance trip to Lourdes that Ken Craig and I took last February was critical and productive from a planning and logistics perspective," FJ said.

"Dr. Milone has been graced with the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, and the courage of Daniel—he is a modern example of an Old Testament figure, doing God's work at his kitchen table. His judgment has been built based on years of experience and multitudes of situations. He sees issues and challenges in three dimensions, enabling him to come to conclusions that make sense and stand the test of intense scrutiny because they take into account all aspects of a situation. His guiding role in the Lourdes Pilgrimage has been a major factor in its continued success and improvement over the years." —Ray LaRose, Assistant Executive Director

The Advance Team

Before our arrival and during our stay in Lourdes, there were a tremendous number of administrative and operational details that had to be attended to. The 2017 Advance Team, led by Rev. Dr. Jeffrey R. Trexler, Executive Director of the American Association, met the challenge superbly. From paying bills in advance, meeting with city officials and working with the security team; to



Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Trexler with
Co-Presidents Ken Craig and FJ McCarthy



FJ McCarthy leads one of the processions from the hotels



Co-President Ken Craig (r.) with
Grand Chancellor H.E. Albrecht Freiherr von Boeselager

setting up the TV stations on the hotel TV networks and preparing the voitures; to obtaining the myriad of critical materials, such as medical equipment and battery chargers and the small and seemingly innocuous items like balloons, helium, a cake, snacks for movie night, extra blankets for some Malades—you name it; they were on top of it. Complex discussions were simplified by a key member of the Advance Team who speaks fluent French.

The Airport Team

The Airport Team consisted of more than 60 American Association staff and volunteers, and the team was supported by many, including the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), Customs, XL Airways Charter and Port Authority. All worked together to make the Malades' and Caregivers' trip better. Malades were never left alone. The team focused on welcoming them and escorting them from curbside arrivals or distance terminals. Any special needs were addressed, such as handling electric wheelchairs or serving a special lunch at the Café Bernadette, a temporary cafe at the airport set up by our Airport Team. Volunteers offered lunch and water, and Eucharistic Adoration provided spiritual food for our pilgrims waiting to depart JFK. "Whatever had to be done was done with enthusiasm," said Bill Knowles, head of the Airport Team. Bill and his enthusiastic group of volunteers once again did an exceptional job.



Nancy Gibson and Bill Knowles welcome pilgrims
upon arrival at JFK International Airport

Security

Security, under the dedicated leadership of Chris Pilalas, was well handled with no problems or issues that we were ever aware of. From securing the procession routes to preparing for evacuation in case of fire, to staying in touch via walkie-talkie, the security team was on top of every contingency. Chris worked in close collaboration with the Co-Presidents as well as with the leaders of the Auxiliary group.



Co-President Ken Craig with Head of Security Chris Pilalas and Jeff Luff of the Auxiliary

“We were able to identify Malades who, although significantly advanced in their disease, were stable enough for travel,”

—Dr. Gagliardi.

Choosing the Malades—The Reason We Travel

Under the leadership of Dr. Tony Gagliardi, the Malade Selection Committee chose the Malades who traveled with us. As always, this was a significant undertaking that required discretion. The committee had to find a balance between those who were in most dire need but who were also able to make the trip. “We were able to identify Malades who, although significantly advanced in their disease, were stable enough for travel,” said Dr. Gagliardi. “The expertise on the committee (both medical and lay) was invaluable in achieving our success.” The hard-working Malade Selection Committee members deserve praise and applause for their success.

Pilgrims await departure at JFK International Airport





“Our Malades and Caregiver were so happy to have them [the Baths brochures]. They were well prepared... definitely alleviated their anxiety in preparing for this daunting but breathtaking experience!”

—Survey Respondent

Charter flight ready for boarding at JFK International Airport

Raising the Funds—Grateful to Our Benefactors

There was a remarkably generous response to the series of outreach efforts to our members, inviting them to support the pilgrimage and the foundation. Letters went out in March and April, and we were delighted to receive contributions from more than 300 members and friends who provided close-to \$400,000 in donations. This outpouring of support is a testament to the extraordinary generosity of the many cheerful givers among our members and friends. We are truly grateful for their generosity. The Order of Malta Pilgrimage Foundation has the goal, over time, of raising enough money to cover the total cost of our Malades and Caregivers in the future. Donations were fully tax deductible, and donors had the option of making a gift in memory or in honor of someone special.

As is customary, the Malades and their Caregivers traveled as our guests. Expenses included the chartered plane, living accommodations and food. We ended up with a small surplus.

Getting the Word Out—The Communications Process

Following a process that has been in place for years and refined through the work of the many talented Co-Chairs who preceded us, we began communications planning in the summer of 2016. The first task was to consider and discern an appropriate theme. After much thought, prayer

and discussion with members of the Core Committee, we chose *Our Mother Mary, Full of Grace*, not simply because it was at the Grotto in Lourdes where the Blessed Virgin appeared to Bernadette Soubirous, revealing the healing waters, but also because of the graces we as pilgrims receive through the pilgrimage. We know from experience that those graces include a sense of community; peace in our spiritual and emotional lives; and the joy of being able to bond with our Malades, their Caregivers and all the pilgrims. Our 2017 theme was a preview of what was to come. Pilgrims journeyed to Lourdes with faith and hope; they returned full of the graces of our Mother Mary.

The first launch letter went out in September. That was followed by the first Hospitaller article, *Lourdes Pilgrimage Changes Lives of All Who Make the Journey*. Over the next few months, there were three additional Hospitaller articles, Christmas and Easter messages and a series of articles and reminder letters for our local area. The NYC staff did a spectacular job updating the Black Book. Enhancements this year included names and photos of all pilgrims and the Malade-in-Spirit prayers. Another addition this year, was a brochure focused on the experience of the Baths. Survey participants described the brochure as very helpful in setting expectations, guiding the process and easing anxiety. Thanks go out to those who worked on the brochure, including Dick Milone, FJ McCarthy, Ken Craig, Ray LaRose, Peggy Lyons, Joe Metz and Mary Doyle.

A Week in May— Planning Becomes Action

Participation—From Newcomers to Long-time Pilgrims

The participation for the 2017 pilgrimage was extraordinary. A total of 399 pilgrims made the journey, including 50 Malades; 47 Caregivers; 20 volunteers, 20 Auxiliary; and 21 members of the clergy, including Cardinal Dolan, four bishops, 12 priests and four deacons. We had a committed team of 35 medical professionals; a large community of Knights and Dames, including many Knights and Dames making the pilgrimage for the first time; as well as 25 candidates in their Year of Preparation.



Purple Team members with Malade John Aversa, MD, KM

The 2017 Pilgrimage was graced with the presence of long-time pilgrims who have traveled to Lourdes many times. Des and Pat McCarthy as well as Cissie Ix have each made the trip 31 of the 32 times the Association has been organizing the pilgrimage. Past Co-chairs from 14 of the 31 prior years were in attendance. And 21 of 25 members the Board of Councillors made the journey this year. The participation and involvement of so many past Co-Chairs, as well as the remarkable turnout from members of the Board of Councillors, speak volumes about their unwavering dedication and selfless commitment to this heartfelt pilgrimage.



Two Malades, hand in hand, at the Opening Mass in the Rosary Basilica



The Medical Team

Caring for Our Malades—The Medical Committee

Under the leadership of Dr. Tony Gagliardi and Patti Vara Hickey, RN, the Medical Committee met each morning and kept a close eye on many special situations right up until, and even after, we landed at Kennedy Airport. Despite travelling with a number of very sick Malades, there were few major health issues during the week. Of the total of 35 medical professionals who made the trip, there were 20 doctors and 15 nurses. Each team had two-to-three physicians and two nurses. There were also nine student nurses on the trip this year, two each from Villanova, Fairfield and Labouré and three from Boston College. “The student nurses are a wonderful addition to the nursing team,” Patti said. “For the Order, the students provide us with extra sets of hands. For the students, it gives them a unique opportunity to merge their profession and their faith, mentored by the volunteers of the Order.”



Patti Vara Hickey, RN, with Bill Knowles and John O'Rourke

Medical Doctors: John Murphy, Tony Gagliardi, Tom Forlenza and Mike Dunne



Providing Spiritual Guidance—The Clergy

The role of the clergy is to provide spiritual guidance throughout the week. They were led by Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, and Assistant Principal Chaplain Msgr. Robert Ritchie, who worked with his team to plan the many liturgies and spiritual events. The members of the clergy were at our side in full force, from the opening prayer on the plane to the final blessings of the sacred articles brought home from Lourdes. The liturgies were wonderful; the reflection groups were well organized and facilitated; and the liturgical processions were a joy to watch. “In addition to the various liturgies that the priests and deacons were involved in, the members of the clergy also benefitted from the outstanding witness of faith that the Knights, Dames and Malades showed throughout the pilgrimage,” said Msgr. Ritchie.



Msgr. Ritchie with Music Director Mac Cooney (l.) and Co-President Ken Craig

The Team Captains

The Team Captains are the backbone of the pilgrimage. This year we were blessed to have a highly experienced group, all of whom had served as Team Captains in the past. This breadth and depth of experience brought a richness to the pilgrimage and allowed team members to have great confidence in the process. From organizing the processions each morning, to sharing the many meals together and making sure that each pod was well tended to from start to finish each day, the captains guided their teams throughout the week with deep love, care and compassion. “I think this year’s trip went extremely well because everyone from the Team Captains to the Malades and Caregivers was so well informed,” said Team Captain Beth Keesal.

One of the things the Team Captains did this year, in preparation for the Closing Ceremony, was to ask for a phrase or a word from the Malades and Caregivers to describe their experiences on the pilgrimage. “‘Interviewing’ each Malade and Caregiver was a very powerful experience to me in receiving their thoughtful reflections,” said Charlotte Williams, a Team Captain, member of the Board of Councillors and former Co-Chair of the Pilgrimage. “To a person, each reflection was so powerful and humbling.”

The Auxiliary Group

Under the leadership of Francois de Brantes and Chris Weldon, this group was very well organized and ever ready to assist as needed all along the way. We worked with a small group of efficient, veteran Auxiliary. “Having a smaller and more veteran group of Auxiliary was helpful at every moment,” Francois said.



Francois de Brantes and Christopher Weldon, Auxiliary Co-Chairs

Hospitality

Feeding 400-plus pilgrims for lunch and dinner, as well as making sure Malades and Caregivers received the attention they needed, was an important part of the pilgrimage. As a long-time pilgrim, Carole Less has organized the hosts and hostesses for the past 14 years. Traditionally, she has worked with a handful of Knights and Dames, who met and welcomed the pilgrims into the dining rooms. This year, in addition to participating herself, she asked 39 Knights and Dames to tend to both dining rooms, dividing up the tasks.

“They were happy to help and said they enjoyed the time as they were able to meet the new members of the Order as well as the Malades at the doors,” Carole said.

Music Ministry

The talented team of Debbie Brunel and Mac Cooney led the Music Ministry. Debbie pointed to the cooperation among all three United States Order of Malta associations as a significant factor in the program’s success. “This was beneficial, not only in choosing music, but also in preparing and printing the various music programs that were handed out,” Debbie said. Mac agreed and said of the collaboration among the associations, “We worked well together and took care of most of the logistics before we even stepped foot in Lourdes.” They also agreed that the change in venue for the Anointing Mass to the Bernadette Chapel and of the Closing Mass to the Rosary Basilica contributed to the beauty and the solemnity of the Masses.

The Emeritus Group

This year, there were 13 participants in the Emeritus Program. The Emeritus Program provides transportation in Lourdes for older Knights and Dames, (generally age 75 or above), who have been on the pilgrimage a number of times but are no longer able to withstand its physical rigors. Coordinated on the ground in Lourdes by Michael and Maureen Gibbons, the program was well received. By providing a van to transport the group to and from the Domain, the program allowed the Emeritus members to avoid the strain of the long walks and the standing and waiting that are a part of the normal processions of the pilgrimage. Participants could, and many did, attend every event in the Domain, sharing their experience and perspective with their fellow pilgrims.



The wonderful 2017 Lourdes Music Ministry team at the St. Bernadette Chapel on Friday morning



The Emeritus Group



2017 Co-Presidents Ken Craig (front l.) and FJ McCarthy (back r.) hosted dinner with the Order of Malta Delegation from the Dominican Republic

Highlights of the Week

A committed team, detailed planning, hard work and the unexpected blessing of beautiful weather throughout week, contributed to the wonderful memories that all who participated will cherish. Here are a few highlights:



Clergy in procession for the Grotto Mass



Kevin Cronk, Karen Deane, Dede and Dick Milone prepare for the Marian Candlelight Procession



Co-Presidents Ken Craig (l.) and FJ McCarthy with Cardinal Dolan

“A pilgrimage to Lourdes is always an occasion of great grace and a spiritual ‘shot in the arm,’ and the 2017 pilgrimage was no exception. There are many moments when one feels the presence of Our Lord in a special way, as we are brought close to Him by His Blessed Mother: the celebration of the Masses, of course, especially the Mass in the Grotto; walking in Procession to the Shrine, particularly going to the Baths, and witnessing the strong faith of our beloved Malades and the tender attention they receive from their Caregivers; the moments of fellowship and relaxation at the end of each day.”

—Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan,
Archbishop of New York

The **Anointing Mass** was movingly celebrated by Bishop Dennis J. Sullivan, Bishop of Camden, New Jersey. “The most inspiring and moving Mass for me is often the Anointing Mass on Friday. There is a sacred bonding that unites us all through our desire to receive the sacrament.”

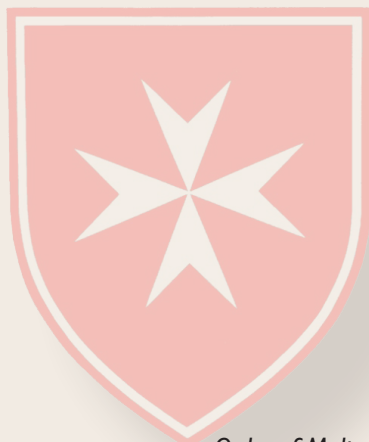
—Msgr. Frank Caldwell, Magistral Chaplain.



Malades pray together during Anointing of the Sick Liturgy

“I always find the liturgies and prayers lovely. They are beautiful, dignified, but they are pastoral in the sense that both the Malades and Caregivers are kept in mind.”

—Fr. Dave Caron, Magistral Chaplain



Bishop Sullivan and Fr. Joe Cavoto at the Anointing Mass

“The Friday **Morning of Recollection** provides a kind of keynote for the whole pilgrimage experience and a spiritual orientation for the coming days,” said Msgr. James P. Moroney, who gave the keynote talk that morning. “Pilgrims were generous in their comments that the talks were effective precisely because they articulated the reason for the Order’s pilgrimage to Lourdes and the broad outlines of a Catholic Theology of care for the sick.” Team Captain Charlotte Williams said: “Msgr. Moroney gave a powerful reflection on Mary at the Annunciation talking about God’s will. It was not only the homily itself that made such an impact, but the fact that we were hearing this homily in such a sacred space.”



Msgr. James Moroney speaks at the Morning of Recollection on Friday in the St. Bernadette Chapel



Children and young adults visit the fort

The **Children's/Young Adults' Program** is organized by Kristy Snyder. This year Father Ian Jeremiah, Ch.M., an Area chaplain from Connecticut, stepped in to fill the very large shoes of Father Robert Dunn. Father Dunn is a Magistral Chaplain from New York who worked on the Children's program for many years. This year, Kristy modified the icebreaker so that the children who are nonverbal could participate. From a picnic, to a special balloon release to the Stations of the Cross, activities engaged and delighted the youngest members of the pilgrimage. "Our group had an amazing pilgrimage this year," Kristy said. "The children formed a special bond with one another and truly enjoyed their time with us!"

"I loved the Stations of the Cross experience because for the first time probably ever it made me realize that Jesus accepted help to carry his cross and it was okay for me to as well."

—Ann O'Keefe-Bave, Pilgrimage Volunteer 2017



Stations of the Cross



Msgr. Ritchie leads prayers for our beloved malades-in-spirit

The **Malade-in-Spirit Program**, created in 2015, allows those who are not able to travel to Lourdes, often because they are too sick, to join us in spirit on the pilgrimage journey. We ask our Malades-in-Spirit to participate in the pilgrimage from home by praying for all pilgrims in Lourdes while those of us in Lourdes pray for them and their intentions. More than 200 people were enrolled in the program in 2017. One elderly patient being prayed for was in kidney failure and close to needing dialysis. She has completely recovered and said she is convinced that the Blessed Mother answered the prayers of the Malades-in-Spirit. "It deeply touches and profoundly affects our pilgrims at home and in Lourdes, bringing the miracle of Lourdes to many more loved and deserving Malades," said Kimberly Gillespie who oversaw the program.

"The Baths are so healing and an extraordinary opportunity to pray and do penance as Our Lady requests! This year we had outstanding volunteers and brought a priest with us who prayed the rosary as the Malades waited."

—Peggy Lyons, DM



Peggy Lyons, Bishop John O'Hara and the nurses are ready to work the Baths

The **Spiritual Reflection Groups**, which met twice during the week, provided an opportunity for pilgrims to share experiences and reflect upon the pilgrimage. Previously reserved for Malades and Caregivers, who met in separate groups, the opportunity was extended to all pilgrims in 2016, and that process continued in 2017. The program was facilitated by Donna and Tom O'Brien. Magistral Chaplain Fr. Joseph Cavoto, OFM, oriented the group leaders. For the second year, the sessions were led both by clergy and lay members of the Order.



Fr. Joe Cavoto prepares the Spiritual Reflection Group team members



Donna O'Brien (l.) waits with Orange Team members for a procession to begin. Also pictured are Malade Ian Malesiewski, Hugh Carey, Hallie Sue Reid and Kate Carey

“We were fortunate to have wonderful support from Assistant Principal Chaplain Msgr. Ritchie and the chaplains for this important role,” said Donna. Fr. Cavoto said the participation of our Knights and Dames is critical. “Making the reflection group a “clergy only” task limits the true mission and charisma of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, witnessing, extending the faith in service to the sick and the poor,” he said.

Some of the enhancements to the program in 2017 included: earlier assignment of facilitators, a more structured format that included outlines and opening readings for each session prepared by Fr. Cavoto, a meeting of the facilitators in Lourdes convened by Fr. Cavoto, increased promotion and education about the groups and escorts for Malades and Caregivers to and from the sessions. We are all grateful to Fr. Cavoto and the O'Briens for their heartfelt efforts.

“The prayers for the Malades-in-Spirit were effective in encouraging each group to remember those who could not be with us in person at the beginning of each day.”

—Msgr. James P. Moroney, Deputy Chaplain

Highlights continued



Malade Johnny Nee is confirmed by Bishop Bootkoski

One of the highlights of the pilgrimage was the **Confirmation** of two of our Malades, which took place at the Closing Mass on the final day of the pilgrimage and was administered by Bishop Paul G. Bootkoski, Bishop Emeritus of Diocese of Metuchen, New Jersey. Johnny Nee, 16, who is nonverbal with moderate to severe autism, beamed as the bishop anointed him. "He is so intuitive and open to God," his mother, Gayle White, said.

Joseph Johnston was born with spina bifida, paralyzing him from the waist down. "Confirmation is the sacrament of Christian witness, especially in our sufferings," said Joseph's father, Eric Johnston, a Theology professor. "We were blessed to receive this grace in a place where Mary, full of grace, makes known her presence to our suffering."



Malade Joe Johnston is confirmed by Bishop Bootkoski



After the dismissal of the Closing Mass, Altar Server and Malade Xavier Adkins, leads the priests, deacons, and Bishop Bootkoski in the recession towards the entrance of the Basilica



Malade Brian Muscarella, seated, with Caregiver Kevin Scanlon, both Villanova alumni, and Villanova Student Nurses Sarah Hannan and Kelsey Goldstoff

The **Closing Ceremony** was an expression of sheer joy. We were deeply moved by the reflections of three of our pilgrims who talked about their experiences during the week. They included Brian Muscarella, who, after suffering a rare spinal stroke became a quadriplegic. He talked about going into the baths and how, because he doesn't feel the cold on 90 percent of his body, he had to trust his wellbeing to strangers. "It was a leap of faith to surrender and embrace the experience," he said. Ian Malesiewski, 17, came to Lourdes with his mother and Caregiver, Hallie Sue Reid. Ian is recovering from a fractured C4 and C5 vertebrae he sustained in June 2016. Not only did his lack of mobility not deter Ian from seeking healing in Lourdes, but the family said the journey fortified the bond of mother and son. During the Closing Ceremony, Ian gave a shout-out to Hallie, saying, "Thank you and love you, Mom." Annamarie Adkins made the journey as a Caregiver to her two children, Xavier, 10, who is managing a variety of issues including asthma and food allergies, and Mary Frances, 7, who has Chronic Kidney Disease after suffering from kidney failure. "I have never experienced such love and perfect charity," Annamarie said of the week.



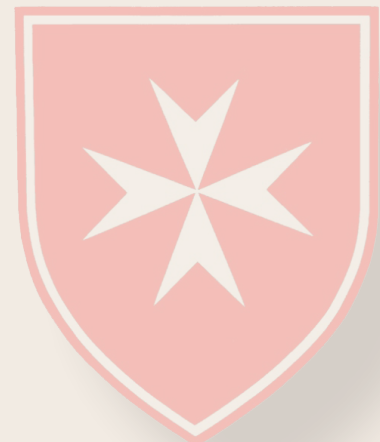
Malade Ian Malesiewski speaks during the Closing Ceremony



Pilgrims at the Closing Ceremony



Dick Milone recognizes many past Lourdes Co-Chairs, including Tom & Donna O'Brien



After the Pilgrimage

Lourdes is, of course, associated with healing. Sometimes there is a healing of the body. Sometimes the healing is of the spirit: acceptance, reconciliation, reconnecting with God. We do not have to determine that these moments of healing are miraculous to appreciate the joy they bring.

While most of this report has been dedicated to the planning and execution of a week in May, we would like to share with you stories of three of our pilgrims after they returned home. We present them to you simply as wonderful moments.

John Heubusch

John Heubusch made the pilgrimage as a Malade. Diagnosed in 2013 with esophageal cancer, for which there is no cure, John has spent the past four years undergoing a series of chemotherapy, radiation and immunotherapy treatments as well as surgery. He has an imaging scan every few months to detect where the cancer has spread. The latest scan he underwent before he left for Lourdes showed cancer in his lower spine, and he underwent radiation treatment to address the tumor before the trip. Upon his return, John's next scan showed no trace of

cancer whatsoever. John said that, more than likely, the radiation treatment killed the cancer cells. However, this was the first time a "clean" scan had occurred in two years. He was cancer free. John is a realist and recognizes that future scans might show something different, but he's also a fighter and said he is hoping and praying the cancer doesn't return. "When you are fighting a battle like this over many years, there isn't a lot of room for a respite," John said. "To have a diagnosis that you are free of cancer is a very good thing."

Oscar Wilkens

At 18 months old, Oscar Wilkens was our youngest Malade in 2017. He made the Pilgrimage with his parents, Christy and Todd. It has been difficult for the Wilkens family, which includes Todd, Christy, Oscar and five other children, to obtain a complete diagnosis for Oscar. He has refractory (difficult to treat) epilepsy and developmental delays. However, his presentation doesn't fit any known syndromes. There is a list of basic, childhood tasks Oscar was not able to do, such as responding to his name, turning to look at someone speaking to him, sitting up with a straight back and playing that childhood favorite Peek-a-boo—until he went to Lourdes. The Saturday after



White Team members with baby Oscar and his mother, Christy Wilkens

they returned from Lourdes, Todd was driving the family home in their van when Oscar began to fuss. To ward off a full-scale breakdown, Christy tried to amuse him with Peek-a-boo. For the first time in his life, Oscar responded. Since May, he has continued to make rapid progress: exploring toys, standing with support, even attempting his first words. “Everyone who knows Oscar says he is like a different child, including his doctors,” said Christy. “Todd and I both came home with great peace and a fervent devotion to Our Lady! The incredible gift of the pilgrimage changed our family forever.”

Maryann Hobbie

*“Once, I was dying, but this memory comes through:
 “Lord, I don't want to go home yet. I don't want to leave
 my husband, my daughter, my brand new grand baby,
 my Seton Hall students, or my church kids,
 but if you want me to come home, I will.”
 “And the voice answered:
 I'm not ready for you yet. I have work for you to do.”*

That was the prayer of Maryann Hobbie as she lay dying of complications of an illness in a hospital in 2013. After eight months, Maryann left the hospital, no longer a vent-dependent, incomplete tetraplegic, but a standard wheelchair user, eventually able to walk with no mobility device. Maryann attributes this to grace, abundant, pure grace.

When some fellow parishioners asked Maryann if she would like to go to Lourdes, she respectfully declined, feeling there were other souls who would benefit. She'd already received so many graces. However her sponsors, citing thanksgiving for what she had already received as a reason to make the pilgrimage, turned Maryann's “no” to a “yes.”

Maryann went to Lourdes with three requests of our Mother Mary, to help two other severely injured people and their families and to give her the strength to do whatever Mary's Son asked her to do. “She has done all three,” Maryann said. “And then we came home. To this day, people say, ‘What happened to you? Your walking is so much better! Your face,’—and then they pause and lock their eyes into mine—‘You look soooo good!’ After the first two weeks, I caught on. My husband started to call it, the LF—the Lourdes Factor. And then I stopped hiding it. ‘We went to Lourdes with the Knights and Dames of Malta.’”

Maryann started her fourth and final unit toward certification in Chaplaincy in September and is now working in the Oncology unit at Overlook Hospital in Summit, NJ. “I am here



Candlelight Procession



The Candlelight Procession with the Rosary Basilica in the distance



The Grotto after dark

to do God's will. God saved my life, and Mary's graces, through her Son at Lourdes, have given me an extraordinary life.”

Grace, abundant grace.

The XXXII Lourdes Pilgrimage 2017 Survey

At the conclusion of the pilgrimage, all were invited to participate in a survey. The feedback was invaluable, providing the Core Team an understanding of what worked and what requires improvement, creating a foundation for future planning. The overwhelming response to the pilgrimage was positive. Phrases from the survey that stand out include: spiritually moving, bonding experience, civilization of love, community coming together and selfless in their concern for others.



Malade Marion Dellanno with her daughter and Caregiver, Donna Long, and members of the Yellow Team



White Team members at the candles: Jeanne Last, RN; Malade Johnny Nee with his mother and Caregiver, Gayle White; and Katie Ridge, AUX

“At the end of each service I make announcements, mainly about logistics. But, as a result, I have the opportunity to see the entire congregation, and, over the week, I see the changes the pilgrims have gone through written on their faces. In the beginning, there is trepidation of the unknown. By the end of the week, that trepidation is gone. Instead, on the faces in front of me I see peace and serenity. For me, that means the pilgrimage has worked.”

—Ken Craig, Co-President

Transformation

If we were to sum up the 2017 Pilgrimage in one word, it would be transformation. Whatever we bring to Lourdes, a desire for physical healing, a need for reconciliation with God or one another, a thirst for spiritual growth, we are all transformed by the experience. We return home renewed in faith, basking in the love of God and our Mother Mary. Lourdes bestows upon us the gifts of connection to our fellow pilgrims; of understanding of the varied ways each of us is challenged in this life as preparation for the next; and of peace, comforted to know the journey is a worthy one.



2017 Lourdes Core Team



2017 Lourdes Clergy Team



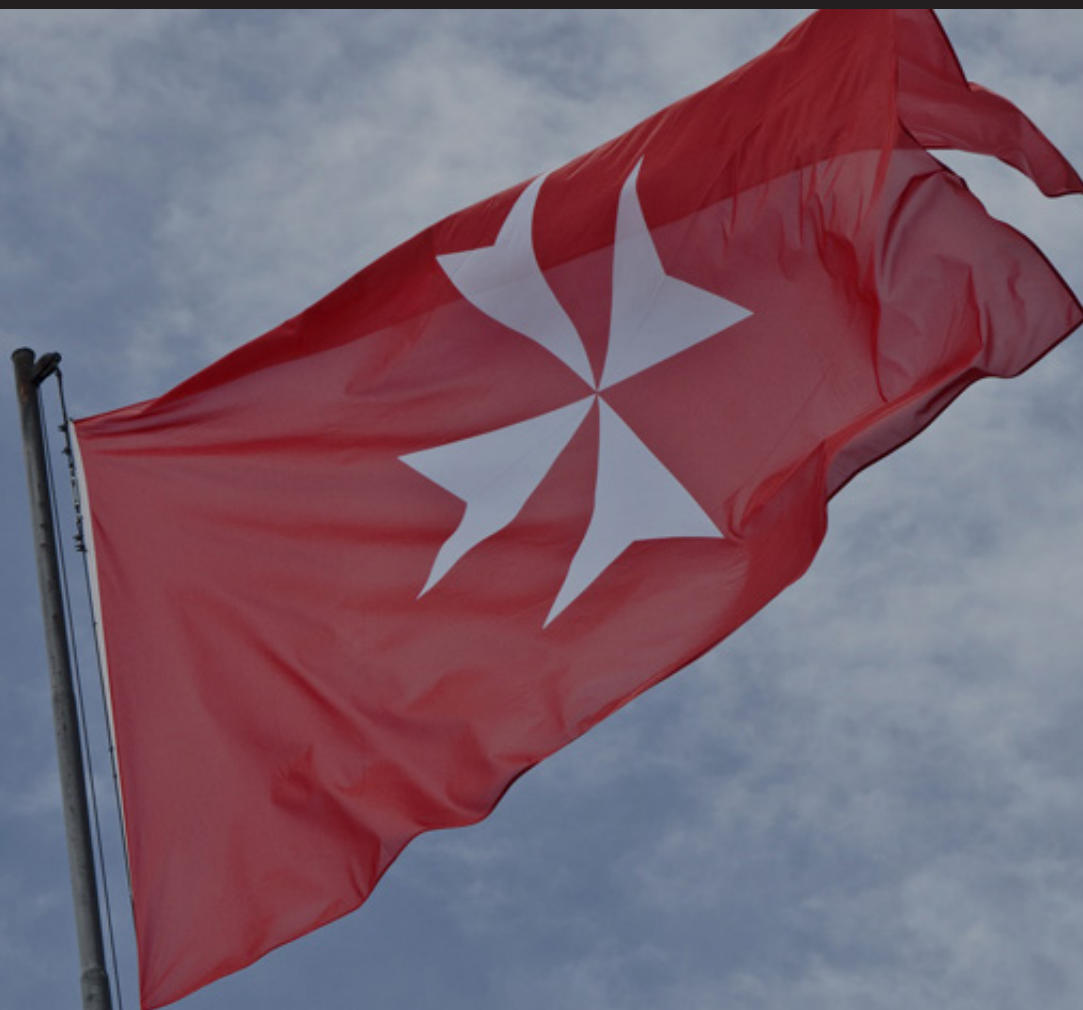
Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, Joe and Gail Berardino and Fr. Ian Jeremiah



Craig and Nancy Gibson (l.) make the Presentation of the Candle in the Grotto to 2018 Lourdes Co-Chairs Mike and Cece Donoghue



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Loving God,
we thank you for the gift of faith,
the gift of community, and
the gift of our beloved Malades and Caregivers.

God bless you one and all!