

The PILGRIM'S FRIEND

*“So, fare thee well, Lough Dearg,
Shall I ever see thee more?
My heart is filled with sorrow
To leave thy sainted shore;
Till my poor life is passing,
With pleasure shall I dwell
On happy days I spent with thee -
Lough Dearg, fare thee well.”*



Pat Byrne

Inside this edition

- ! P2 - Prior's Post
- ! P3 - Fr Jeremiah's Lough Derg Pilgrimage
- ! P6 - Residential Retreats: A personal reflection
- ! P7 - Lough Derg on TV

From far away on the shores of the Pacific I have read that you are bringing your years on Lough Derg to a close. You have inspired many lives including mine, and how many known only to God. Your memory remains etched in the silent fields within so many. Thank you for everything.

Sister Mary Kiely

PRIOR'S POST

Change and continuity – the journey of the pilgrimage

Another season has come and gone and it is time to say welcome once more, dear friend, to your Pilgrims Friend newsletter. And again it is a story of continuity and of change.

No one more so than Mary McDaid herself could be said to embody this very theme. From her first arrival to the Island as a pilgrim, Mary 'got' Lough Derg. And by God's grace she was inspired – and inspiring – in her determination to share the good news of what awaits the pilgrim who crosses over the water when the time is right for them.

Among the many 'Lough Derg refrains' that I associate with Mary is the one she would intone almost any time that we found ourselves back again considering how to 'sell' the place, either in its traditional Three Day Pilgrimage or in the various new experiences we have been offering since Fr Mohan in 1992 first opened the Island up to welcome a wider clientele. Mary's line was: 'If we can get them here, the Island will sell itself.' And of course she meant not only the physical setting of Station Island, but also its prayer and space, its presence and living tradition. And Mary was very much a part of that to us all.

In the articles that we offer in the pages that follow, you will find several reflections of the Lough Derg which is alive because it changes to engage with the people of our times, people who must find their pilgrim way through a landscape that is ever-changing in cultural terms, but where the deepest values of the Christian Way offer a trustworthy compass.

Thank you, dear pilgrim friend, for continuing to be with us on the journey.

Fr La



Dear Friends of Lough Derg, benefactors, donors and all our pilgrim family, we thank you for your ongoing support...

You are a huge part of Lough Derg and your generosity enables us to keep connected with people like you who are an essential part of our mission to preserve this 'living place of pilgrimage' for future generations. We wish to acknowledge, too, the further generosity of many members who regularly add a donation when their annual renewal comes around.

However, due to various increases in our costs over the five years since we last reviewed the subscription (2018), it is now timely for us to implement a price increase in our Friends of Lough Derg Membership. From January 2024, the annual subscription will be €25/£22.

We hope you will continue your support for us with this much needed financial contribution.

We rely on this vital support and we appreciate any feedback you have to offer us, and in turn we offer you the support of our prayer throughout the year.

Fr La and the Lough Derg Team

MY LOUGH DERG PILGRIMAGE: A SOUL STIRRING JOURNEY

By Fr. Jeremiah Munyoki wa Kalekye

Fr. Jeremiah Munyoki, from the Diocese of Kitui in Kenya, is now serving in the Diocese of Clogher in Magh Ene Parish (Bundoran and Ballyshannon). Fr. Jeremiah spent his first weeks in Ireland on Station Island as part of the Pastoral Team, and undertook the Three Day Pilgrimage. Here he offers us a reflection on his experience.

I first heard of Lough Derg from some priests from my diocese, Kitui in Kenya who had visited Ireland in the early 2000s. But its famous pilgrimage that has been attracting pilgrims for centuries, came to my full knowledge in 2008 when one of our priests was invited by Fr La Flynn, who happens to be the current Prior, to come over there when we were doing our postgraduate studies in Rome.

I had myself been longing to visit and I got a chance to offer priestly services at Lough Derg for the month of June 2023. After two weeks of serving and watching, I made the decision to go through the pilgrimage myself. I was motivated by the serenity of the landscape that surrounds the small island – the water and the low lying green hills. But the intrinsic motivation came from listening to the stories of Lough Derg from the priests who were ministering there and from reading three books, two about Lough Derg (one by Prior La Flynn and the other by Fr. Eamonn Conway), and "St. Patrick in his Own Words" by Bishop Joseph Duffy. These moved me to devotion, reflection, and personal surrender to embrace the solitude and spiritual renewal they talked about.

The walking, kneeling, prayer, fasting and keeping vigil – these all obviously brought physical challenges: sore feet, hurting lower back, sore muscles, cracking knees and toe nails, a starving body and tired eyes. Yet, this weariness seemed insignificant in comparison to the profound sense of purpose that encompassed my being and the great feeling of a spiritual victory.

As I knelt in prayer, I could almost feel the centuries-long devotion reverberating through the ancient stones and holy spaces. It was a truly humbling experience that reminded me of the countless souls who had come before me seeking the solace, guidance, and healing that I had read about and



personally witnessed in the hundreds of pilgrims who had come to Station Island in the previous two weeks.

Prayer, undoubtedly the cornerstone of this pilgrimage, served as a gateway to deeper introspection. As I surrendered myself to the moments of stillness and silence, especially in front of the Blessed Sacrament in St. Mary's Church, my mind became unburdened from worldly distractions. In the absence of external noise, I found solace and inner peace, allowing my thoughts to take on the form of heartfelt prayers, petitions, and conversations with God. I was true to the people I promised to remember in my prayers. I offered the pains, the aches and the fatigue for the souls of the faithful departed.

I saw many pilgrims far older than me; they acted as models and a source of encouragement just by their endurance, dedication, and quite simply by their presence.

I could see the pilgrimage experience unveiling

an inner strength and resilience within the pilgrims by knowing they are not alone. A link between past and present was definitely created. My participation as a priest motivated the pilgrims as well. A good number of them told me this with great joy.

Given another opportunity I will definitely grab it without hesitation. I would highly recommend it to anybody who is looking for an enriching experience that goes far beyond the physical realm, transcends time and space, and connects with the prayers of the very many pilgrims throughout the centuries before us, those who will be there after us, and – more importantly – to God!



LOOKING FORWARD - PILGRIMAGE SEASON 2024

III THREE DAY PILGRIMAGE

Friday 31st May - Thursday 15th August
(13th last day to begin)

III ONE DAY RETREAT

May - 5th, 6th, 12th, 14th, 18th, 25th, 27th.
August - 17th, 20th, 25th, 26th, 31st.
Sept - 4th, 7th, 10th, 14th, 15th, 21st, 22nd.

III QUIET DAYS

May 11th & September 13th

III PILGRIM PATH

April 1st (Easter Monday for Pilgrim Path Week)
May 26th & September 8th

III HERITAGE WEEK @ LOUGH DERG

*NEW for 2024 - 21st & 22nd August

AFTER MANY YEARS OF SERVICE, MARY McDAID RETIRES

Mary McDaid has been a constant at Lough Derg for 36 years. A familiar face to many, and friend to many more. The word dedication does not fully encapsulate Mary's tireless service to the countless pilgrims, members of staff and the very ministry of Lough Derg. On hearing of Mary's coming retirement many people spoke with great warmth of their interactions with her and told stories of their time spent with her. Here is a glimpse into the chapter of the story of Lough Derg where Mary played a key role...

MARY'S LOUGH DERG YEARS IN NUMBERS...

- > 36 Years
- > 4 Priors
- > 87 Staff Priests
- > 38 Deacons
- > 3 Bishops of Clogher
- > 3 Popes
- > 2 Centuries
- > 1 Marian Year, Great Jubilee Year, Eucharistic Congress, Year of Faith, Jubilee Year of Mercy, World Meeting of Families, Global Pandemic.
- > 386,810 Three Day Pilgrims
- > 265,741 One Day Retreatants



Davog McCaffrey, a Doctor from Omagh Co. Tyrone, and longstanding Lough Derg Cantor and Basilica Team member worked closely alongside Mary McDaid for many years in her role as Head of Pastoral Programmes.

From attending the Family Retreat Days and later 'doing' the Three Day Pilgrimage, I was very aware of Mary McDaid and her role at Lough Derg. I first worked on the island as a First Aid Assistant, but Mary somehow managed to poach me for the Basilica Team and the rest is history...

I clicked with Mary from the beginning. We understood each other and shared a similar vision and passion for Lough Derg. This came to the fore during Covid when Mary's creative mind went into overdrive. It was a privilege to work alongside her on projects including the "Do Lough Derg wherever you are" Pilgrimages, Youth Residential Retreats and RTÉ Broadcast Masses.

Mary's retirement marks the end of an era. We will miss hearing her voice across the radio, her prayerful and reflective reading of Night Prayer and her impeccable eye for detail, but Mary McDaid's enormous impact will live on. Mary was once my boss, but I'm glad to say she has become a close friend.

Mary, I'm glad to have journeyed with you during your latter years at Lough Derg and I wish you good health, contentment and plenty of air miles in this next chapter!



Wishing you every God's blessing, Mary, on your retirement. Thank you for all your kindness and encouragement to us pilgrims over the years. You will certainly be missed there. I know of one man above who would also like to wish you well if he was with us but no doubt he is up there looking down on you. God's blessing, Mary.

Danny Clerkin



Monsignor Eoin Thynne, a priest of the Dublin diocese served with Mary on Lough Derg as a member of the Clergy Team from 2003 to 2015.

Lough Derg, a place of prayer, peace and penance. Not a place one associates with fun, devilment and craic – unless of course you are in the company of Mary McDaid. I have had the privilege of serving with Mary and enjoying some of the most memorable summers I can remember. Always in good humour, Mary's dedication and concern for pilgrims are the hallmark of a life lived in true discipleship.

Joyous, cheerful and jolly, Mary was readily available to lead the vigil, organise the liturgy and ease the pain of over-burdened pilgrims. Her positive outlook, her love for Donegal, her respect for the Dubs and rapport with people of all ages, sets Mary apart as one of the truly remarkable people we meet on life's journey.

St Patrick must surely be proud that Mary has continued his mission of teaching and preaching in a spirit of good humour and cheerfulness.

Thank you Mary for the memories.



Mary, please accept my appreciation of the many years you dedicated to Lough Derg. Your commitment was outstanding. You, and especially Monsignor Mohan, helped establish change, change for the better, in all aspects of the island. Wishing you good health to enjoy the next phase.

Vincent Eunan Crawford

Hi Mary it's the end of this chapter in your life... and the beginning of the next! Your presence will be greatly missed by EVERYONE... a wonderful colleague, facilitator and friend to us all. Our lives have been so rewarded on the island by you and your powerful work.

Mary Maguire

Milo Murray - Optometrist, pilgrim & friend of Lough Derg.

Lough Derg has played a pivotal role in my life over the past 42 years.

Every year as I cross over to the Island I think - Who will I meet this year?

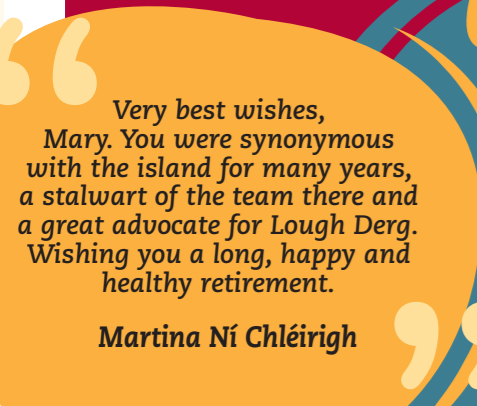
As I have worked alongside three of the last four Priors I have gotten to know the priests quite well, though with days off and small breaks during the season I haven't always met the prior at the time. However, for the past 36 years I have met this same person.

Not long after arriving on the Island I know I will see that bright smile, feel the warm embrace and hear the heartfelt welcome from Mary, and whoever I have persuaded to come with me will receive the same warmth.

On each of the next three days Mary will sit down – those who work with Mary know exactly how busy she is – and we will catch up on the past year, talk about the friends we have in common, share plans and thoughts for the year ahead.

Next year I will miss that welcome; Lough Derg will miss Mary, but thank you Mary for all you have done and I know somewhere someone will be enjoying your warmth and kindness.

Mary, enjoy this next chapter in your life.



Very best wishes, Mary. You were synonymous with the island for many years, a stalwart of the team there and a great advocate for Lough Derg. Wishing you a long, happy and healthy retirement.

Martina Ní Chléirigh



Lough Derg Vocations Camino

In late August the Lough Derg Pilgrim Path hosted a one-day 'Camino' walk as part of the Year of Prayer for Vocations to Diocesan Priesthood. Over 80 pilgrims were joined by Bishop Phonsie Cullinane of Waterford & Lismore and Bishop Alan McGuckian, Diocese

of Raphoe. This was a wonderful and enjoyable event organised in conjunction with the National Vocations Office, and our thanks goes to them for facilitating Lough Derg to be part of the schedule of events as part of this special year.



Father God, we know how much our world needs the witness of good priests who imitate the Good Shepherd and know how to share the love of the Sacred Heart.

We now renew our trust in you who never abandons his flock and promises to be with his people until the end of time. Accompany your people through the ministry of priests, in which Jesus himself sanctifies, embraces, feeds, heals, teaches and leads his people and invites everyone to draw new life from the wellspring of divine grace. Assist young men amid the noise of daily life to hear God speaking to them within their hearts and to generously respond to the call of Christ to share in his sacred ministry.

In this way, sensitive to the particular needs of Irish society in the twenty-first century, a new generation of men will surely be inspired, willing and well-prepared to spend their lives for the sake of the Lord's flock, joyfully preaching the Word of God, faithfully celebrating the sacraments and humbly serving those in need.

Mother Mary, Queen of Priests, pray for us.
St Joseph, faithful servant of God, pray for us.

Adapted from the text of a letter written by Pope Francis for this special year

RESIDENTIAL RETREATS: A NEW OFFERING

Over the last number of years, we have been piloting a new Residential Retreat offering for pilgrims during the summer season. **Clare McMahon** from Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan, has been part of this journey from the early days.

A Personal Reflection on the Lough Derg Residential Retreat:

What a lovely surprise to receive an email from Mary McDaid in 2020 asking if I might be interested in taking part in a retreat on Lough Derg over three days in June. It was something that had come up in discussion previously – the possibility of opening the island to people seeking a different kind of spiritual experience, a guided retreat over a few days in this unique place cut off from the rest of the world and linking back to our ancient Christian heritage. Now a global pandemic, that had shut down society and isolated many of us in our homes, was offering the possibility of a pilot retreat. My reply was not long in coming. Count me in please!

About ten of us attended the first

retreat facilitated by Jim Deeds, who at that time was working with Living Church in the Diocese of Down and Connor. The time was divided between inputs from Jim, some sharing, plenty of personal time, and an optional afternoon on the pilgrim path round the lakeshore. Each day began with Morning Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours in St Mary's Church and we also prayed Midday and Evening Prayer together. Those who wished could do a traditional station in their free time. There was a cross section of ages and a lovely atmosphere throughout. Because of Covid there were strict protocols in place. We each had our designated seats – well spaced out – in Davog House, as also in St Mary's, and in the Dining Room for meals.

In 2021 two further residential retreats were offered, one led by Jim Deeds following the success of the previous year, and a second retreat facilitated by husband and wife team Linda Rainsberry and Patrick Treacy from the Integritas Centre in County Kilkenny, again with limited numbers and

clearly defined Covid protocols.

The challenge now would be how to incorporate the residential retreat within the pilgrimage programme when the island reopened. This took place earlier this year, when former Benedictine Monk, Teacher of Theology and Artist, Eoin Madigan led two very reflective Four Day Retreats, in June and in August. I found that the extra day led to a more relaxed experience. We shared Evening Mass and Night Prayer with the pilgrims, who had been informed of our presence, and we were still able to do an optional station, walk the Pilgrim Path around the lakeshore and attend the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I am so very grateful to Fr La, Mary and all the Lough Derg Team for their graciousness to us over these retreats and their generous support of this new initiative. It will never replace the traditional pilgrimage, which I hope to take on again next year please God, but is a wonderful supplement. To steal an expression from Jim Deeds, the Pilgrimage is indeed a true 'Gym for the Soul'. The Residential Retreat was for me a totally immersive 'Spa for the Spirit'.

A mother and grandmother, Clare describes herself as a 'fairly' regular pilgrim for 20+ years. We greatly appreciate Clare's role as a Pilgrimage Organiser - bringing a group from her parish for a One Day Retreat and for our Faith & Light Day.

DATES FOR RESIDENTIAL RETREATS IN 2024 ARE:
June 9th-13th, June 21st-25th, 21st-25th July and 4th-8th August.



Fr. La and Mary McDaid with the Residential Retreat Pilgrims departing Station Island on June 15th 2023.

MARK McDONNELL JOINS THE LOUGH DERG TEAM

I am keenly aware of the large boots left to be filled by Mary McDaid's departure from Lough Derg. While Mary was an expert practitioner with a great many responsibilities, thankfully, I have inherited responsibility only for our Pastoral Programmes! I am very grateful for my relationship with Lough Derg and the family of staff whom I got to know during my times



making the Three Day Pilgrimage, and in a special way, during two residential retreats which took place during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021. I always knew this was a special place, with grandparents and great-grandparents having made the Pilgrimage in their time – although their journey with South Down was, I'm sure, much more penitential than mine! The idea of crossing over and setting aside all of the distractions of daily life spoke to me as a university student. Providing a space and conditions for pilgrims to this place to encounter God and to notice His presence is all the easier here. I have encountered God and been touched deeply by my experiences on Lough Derg. This is why I worked as a sacristan on the Basilica Team this summer, and partly as a tonic for my experience of postgraduate study which ended this year! That role surprised me by its pastoral nature – I found myself engaging with pilgrims who were so generous in what they shared with me, and having the opportunity to share with them something of my story, especially through delivering Vigil Talks



throughout the season. Laterally, I was invited to look after the role of Director of Pastoral Programmes which was so expertly cared for by Mary, whom many Friends of Lough Derg will know so well. While the learning curve has at times been steep, I thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to share in the mission and ministry of Lough Derg by helping to shape and develop the range of pastoral programmes that we offer here. I am excited for what the role will bring and can be confident of the prayers of the Friends of Lough Derg as I set out.

LOUGH DERG ON TV

A German TV Crew from BlindCat Productions joined us on Station Island for four days in mid-July. They documented the Three Day Pilgrimage experience of Agata and Regina – two ladies from Germany (one a first time pilgrim, and one a returning pilgrim). Their piece was commissioned by the German broadcaster ARD, a joint organisation of Germany's regional public-service broadcasters. It's intended for a programme called Echtes Leben ("Real Life"), which will be broadcast across Germany Easter 2024.

At the end of July we also hosted a production company from Holland who were filming at various locations in Ireland for a documentary about Saint Patrick as part of a four-part historical television series on the history of Christianity in different countries. The other countries that will be highlighted in the series are India, Finland and Tunisia. The crew interviewed Father La and a number of pilgrims. It is hoped that the series will air towards the end of 2024 or early in 2025.



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 CARDS

A pack of six Christmas Cards featuring views of Station Island.

GREETING INSIDE: *Wishing you something of the wonder of Christmas, both at this season and throughout the coming year.*

€5.00



CHRISTMAS DECORATION

Star shaped Tree Decoration, with an etching of Saint Patrick's Basilica.

€10.00



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