



20th March 2020

Dear A&B Lourdes Pilgrim,

Re: Diocese of Arundel & Brighton Pilgrimage 2020 – COVID-19

After consultation with Bishop Richard and the Core Team of our Pilgrimage, I am writing to you today with heartfelt regret and great sadness, to inform you that we have made the decision to cancel our Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage for 2020 in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

For several weeks we have been discussing with our clinicians the issues surrounding the pilgrimage and the virus, and trying to see whether there was a way that, assuming the Foreign & Commonwealth Office advice was supportive, we could plan for a successful week in Lourdes, but unfortunately there were too many issues that we could not resolve with confidence.

The final decision was made for us, in some ways, on the 17th March when our insurer withdrew all cover for pandemics and epidemics from our pilgrimage travel insurance policy. This meant that, should the COVID-19 virus still be a problem in July, we would have travelled with no insurance cover for those who became infected whilst we were in Lourdes. Clearly an untenable position which meant we had to cancel our planned trip.

We know that many of you will be deeply disappointed with this decision, but we hope that, when the COVID-19 storm has subsided, you will join us in planning a wonderful week in Lourdes for 2021.

Many of you have paid something towards the 2020 pilgrimage already. As you can imagine, cancelling the trip now leaves us exposed to some significant financial costs, which would normally be covered from the proceeds collected from pilgrims travelling with us, so please consider the following options carefully when you let us know how you would like your contributions managed by the pilgrimage office. We can offer¹:

1. A Credit Note for the full value of your contributions, which will be applied to the invoice that we issue for your 2021 pilgrimage. (If for some reason that pilgrimage did not happen, then we would offer a full refund then.)
2. A full refund, less a donation of £100 towards the costs incurred by the pilgrimage office already for 2020.
3. A full refund with no deductions, due to the fact that you are facing hardship at the moment, and every penny counts.

¹ Please note, a refund form will only be attached to this letter if you have made a payment towards the 2020 Pilgrimage. If you have not, please simply take this letter as notification of the cancellation, and confirmation that you will not be invoiced for the trip. However, for the avoidance of doubt, a contribution would still be welcome if you felt able to make one.

Please do not feel any pressure to choose either option (1) or (2) on the form attached, but if you felt able to assist us manage this challenging time, we would be very grateful.

As you will see in the form attached there is also a 4th option. We have taken the decision to donate €10,000 to the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, which is broadly in line with the annual levy that the Shrine takes from us for the use of all the facilities in the Domain. We intend to have a fund-raising event, when permitted in the future, to defray the costs of this donation, but if you felt able to make a contribution now, please do so by completing Option 4 in the attached form.

Please pray for each other at this time. Many of our regular pilgrims are isolated through sickness or frailty and scared. If you know of a pilgrim who lives near you and will struggle with the basics of life, ring them to offer support and comfort, and offer to do some shopping for them, and leave it by their front door. Let us all bring the spirit of Lourdes to our Diocesan family as we walk together at this difficult time.

May God bless you all.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Mike Thoms

Mike Thoms
Pilgrimage Director



THE DIOCESE OF
ARUNDEL &
BRIGHTON
LOURDES PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage Refund Form

Booking Reference: [XXXX]

Name: [NAME]

Please tick the option you would like to choose and return this form to the Pilgrimage Office:

Option 1	Credit Note for the full amount	
Option 2	A full refund with a donation of £100 to the costs of the 2020 Pilgrimage.	
Option 3	A full refund of the contributions paid towards the 2020 Pilgrimage.	
Option 4	<p>Please deduct £_____ from my refund or Credit Note and include it in the donation being made to the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes.</p> <p>Please accept an additional donation of £_____ and include it in the donation being made to the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes.</p>	

Ideally, as our office is now all working from home, please scan your completed form and email it to office@ablourdes.org as soon as possible.

If you do not have access to a scanner, please post the form to:

The Pilgrimage Office,
St Philip Howard Centre
4 Southgate Drive
Crawley
RH10 6RP

We will endeavour to process your request as soon as possible.