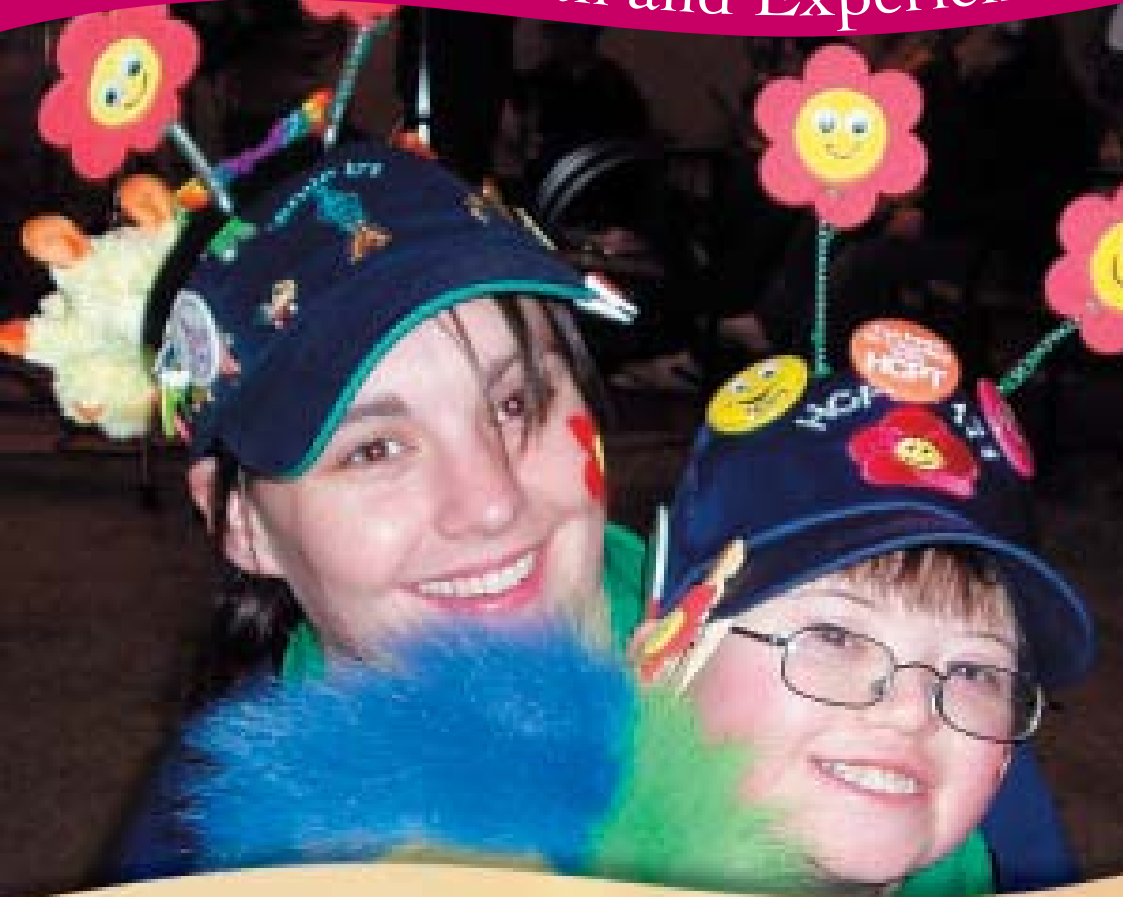




1956 - 2006

50 Years of Growth and Experience



HCPT *The Pilgrimage Trust*

FOREWORD

In our Church in these islands there are certain names that elicit an immediately warm response wherever you are. HCPT is certainly one of that special group.

It has to be because there is the instinctive recognition that what HCPT is about and the way in which it goes about it comes from the Gospel and speaks of the Kingdom.

The HCPT experience is deeply formative and gives great space for the joy that comes with that deepening faith awareness of the presence of God in our lives.

We will all recognise ourselves in this lovely account of HCPT in its first fifty years and I hope that you, like me, will all the more bless the moment we succumbed to a Group Leader's invitation to be part of HCPT in Lourdes at Easter, or at Hosanna House or The Villa during the season.

May God bless us all.

Bishop John Rawsthorne

President HCPT & Bishop of Hallam

FOREWORD

Whenever I have been asked to explain my attraction to my almost annual Easter Pilgrimage to Lourdes, and less frequent adult Pilgrimages to Hosanna House, I have always failed. I just say now, "You must experience these for yourself". But the authors of this booklet have accomplished 'the impossible'. They have put into words 'The Trust' experience with simplicity, clarity and spiritual insight.

As I read eagerly through the booklet, I could only conclude that 'The Trust' is undoubtedly a work of the Holy Spirit.

The core values of 'The Trust' proclaiming the Kingdom of God are unerringly highlighted.

The emphasis on the value of human dignity is so timely where values today are measured in terms of productivity and efficiency. Where the ideals striven after are status, power, beauty, wealth and the survival of the fittest.

Love is the code that unlocks the powerful dynamic of 'The Trust'. The Western World is being suffocated by materialism. The booklet promotes and explains a counter-culture where achievement is measured in terms of love and not of productivity; where the vulnerability, the brokenness, the weakness of every single one of us is recognized; where success is seen in developing a spirit of co-operation and not of competition.

The flood gates of love burst over Lourdes every Easter.

by group leaders and chaplains in talks to their groups, or again by individuals back home when talking to prospective pilgrims and their families, or when attempting to raise funds. We hope also that it may be helpful to people who have never journeyed with HCPT and may never be able to.

This booklet is in two parts. The second part is the Founder Michael Strode's personal reflection on our Mission Statement. Michael has had an enormous influence on the Trust, not only for his dedication to its work for fifty years, and the fact that he founded it in the first place, but by his spiritual example. His inspiration and personal spirituality have played a huge part in the growth and success of the Trust. Directly and indirectly he has helped to transform for the better the lives of so many of those thousands of people, disabled and helpers, who have journeyed as pilgrims with HCPT.

It may be more beneficial to take this booklet slowly, reflecting on a small part at a time. We would particularly recommend this with Part II, which is rich with the Founder's thoughts.

From 1953 to 1988 Michael practised as a medical doctor at Chailey Heritage, a home for children with disabilities. After his retirement and at the age of 68 he joined the Cistercian Community as a brother on Caldey Island off the coast of South West Wales. He remains a Life Trustee of the Trust and follows all our activities closely. We are comforted and sustained by his encouragement and in the knowledge of his prayer. He has been like *"the lamp that has shown us the way"* (2 Peter 1.19).

The following quote from the Founder from our

Group Leader's Handbook is very much at the core of his spirituality:

"When the anxious disciples pointed out to Our Lord that there were 5000 people in need of food his initial response was 'you yourselves give them something to eat' (Matthew 14.16) – and we all know what happened! The efforts we make on behalf of the children and adults – the prayers we say, and the steps we take – are like those few barley loaves and fishes – totally inadequate, when seen against the needs of so many children and Hosanna House pilgrims, and the ideal of the new commandment – 'love one another as I have loved you'! But, like the loaves and fishes, we know for sure that he will take and bless our limited endeavours and give us in return, the Holy Spirit, the power of his love, with whom all things are possible."

The initials HCPT originally stood for **H**andicapped **C**hildren's **P**ilgrimage **T**rust. The title of our charity was created in the 1950's but the use of language has changed over the years. In particular the word 'handicapped' is not considered acceptable. Also, with the development of taking disabled adults to Hosanna House the word 'children' in our original name no longer adequately covered the activities of the Trust. On the other hand our Trust has become so widely known as HCPT, that it would be very difficult to change its name to something else, even if it was thought desirable. The solution was to re-name our charity: **HCPT – The Pilgrimage Trust**.

In everyday conversation friends of HCPT - The Pilgrimage Trust usually refer to the charity as simply 'the Trust', and that is how we call ourselves in this booklet.

The work of the Trust has been richly blessed. However we would not want to give the impression that

PART I - THE TRUST

THE WORK AND A BRIEF HISTORY OF HCPT

SMALL BEGINNINGS

The history of HCPT - The Pilgrimage Trust is an extraordinary story by any standard. At the outset, back in 1954, no one could have predicted the course it would take, nor dreamed of the many wonderful developments that have taken place as a result of its work. Many times, just when it seemed the pilgrimage had reached the limits of its capacity, Providence took a hand, and the Trust found itself moving forwards once again. Many times the Trustees have concluded that Our Lady of Lourdes herself must be the moving force behind the Trust's progress.

In 1954 Dr Michael Strode was working at the Chailey Heritage Craft School in Sussex, an establishment which was both a hospital and school for children with long term disabilities. A Roman Catholic, he observed with interest that the Anglican Chaplain had organised a holiday for some of the children, and wondered if something similar could be arranged for the Catholics. Together with his friend and colleague Peter Keevney he decided to take a small party of children to Lourdes, travelling with the Birmingham diocesan pilgrimage, which went at a convenient time.

The experiment was a great success, and Michael and Peter decided to repeat the venture in 1955. However, a

new possibility presented itself. A suggestion was made that the small party might do better to travel with the National Schools Pilgrimage, in company with some children from a local school, the argument being that it would be better for the Chailey group to be part of a children's pilgrimage rather than a diocesan one. This was agreed, the votes from the Chailey children being solidly behind the proposal, and so a decision was taken that was to influence profoundly the development and growth of the Trust. This is just one example of how the opinions of disabled people were sought and given due weight.

The way in which the little party was organised also had important implications for the future. At that time the practice in Lourdes was for all sick and disabled pilgrims to stay in hospices built mainly in the 19th century, whilst helpers stayed in hotels. This was quite unacceptable to Dr Strode and Peter Keevney, who wanted the children to live as normal a life as possible. They insisted that the whole party be accommodated together in a hotel to share the combined holiday/pilgrimage experience together.

The pilgrimage of 1955 was just as successful as the first one, and in 1956 the small party of eight children and five adults set out once again with the National Schools Pilgrimage. It was on the return journey that the pilgrimage leader, Bishop Bright, suggested to Michael and Peter that their work should be expanded. He was very impressed with the idea of 'normal children' taking disabled children to Lourdes, and his vision was that far more schools and institutions should be involved. Michael and Peter decided to accept this challenge, and, in order to appeal for funds, formed a charitable trust – the

Lourdes at Whitsun, but currently the entire HCPT and IHCPT pilgrimages take place at Easter. However, this may have to change because of alterations to the schools' holiday schedules.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

An interesting aspect of the Trust's work is the way in which it has expanded to other countries. In previous years small parties from Canada and Peru have accompanied the Pilgrimage. Though at present those countries are no longer represented, we have for some years included groups from Slovakia and Romania and, for the first time in 2004, Croatia. From further away, since 1985, HCPT has been delighted to include a large group from the West Indies. In the USA the American Special Children's Pilgrimage Group (ASCPG) was set up in 1995 and sent helpers with HCPT groups as 'observers' over the next two years, before embarking on its first 'family group' in 1998. Their numbers are currently between 60 – 70 but further expansion is seen as only a matter of time.

Another significant development has been the creation of structures whereby, on several levels, HCPT engages with the Lourdes authorities and other large pilgrimages, to our mutual benefit. That was not always the case, but there is now no doubt that HCPT and its ethos are highly respected and sometimes copied.

THE BEST CARE

No history of HCPT would be complete without some mention of the medical care which has always been a central feature of the Trust's work. From the outset Doctor Michael Strode was convinced that only the most dedicated attention to the children's welfare was good enough. This is reflected in the assiduous pre-pilgrimage medical enquiries always undertaken. It is also essential that the Trust provides all the necessary drugs and medical equipment which the children might require. As the Trust has expanded it has been most fortunate to find that there has been no shortage of doctors volunteering to accompany the pilgrimage, so that most specialities are covered, especially paediatrics.

Mention must also be made of the dedicated nurses who accompany every group. From the earliest days the Trust has insisted that ideally every group should have a nurse as a key member of the group both in the planning stage and during the pilgrimage week's activities. Dentists, physiotherapists and many other members of the caring professions also offer their services to the children and contribute to the high standards of care we seek to maintain. In addition a well equipped pharmacy is set up and staffed during the pilgrimage, which can meet most of the day-to-day demands for medication or equipment.

Over the years during which HCPT has been organising pilgrimages there has been a change in the nature of disabilities suffered by those taken to Lourdes. In the early years of the Trust the predominant disabilities were physical, but today advances in medicine have meant that some diseases such as polio are virtually non-existent,

person that an entirely new aspect of the Trust's work has developed. In 1964, a disabled girl, Donna Smith, who had travelled to Lourdes at Easter with HCPT, suggested to her group chaplain that it would be a good idea to organise a retreat for disabled people when they returned to the UK. He accepted the idea, and the first retreat took place at St Elizabeth's Convent in Much Hadham (Hertfordshire) that year. This was followed by others, and in 1967 the venue for the retreat was changed to Lourdes itself. It was in 1970 that this group made the revolutionary suggestion that the Trust should acquire ownership of a place in Lourdes which disabled pilgrims and others could visit throughout the Lourdes season i.e. April to November.

Initially the Trustees were by no means unanimous in their support for this proposal, for to embark on the ownership of a site in Lourdes was a very big step. However, it was decided to at least explore the idea. As luck would have it, a site just outside Lourdes was found to be available, and seemed very suitable for a purpose-built hostel. Negotiations for the purchase of the site were, however, very protracted and by 1974 were still not finalised. Moreover, the cost of building a purpose built hostel had increased dramatically and the Trustees feared they might have to abandon the idea. But they thought they should at least examine alternatives, and, almost on the last day of the pilgrimage, they found themselves considering a small hotel (The Domaine Regina) in Bartrès, a village just outside Lourdes where St Bernadette had spent some of her childhood, which, with minor modifications, would suit their purpose admirably. Indeed

it was almost as though they had designed the place themselves.

Thus was 'Hosanna House' acquired. In Doctor Michael Strode's words "*It is difficult to resist the idea that Our Lady was quietly at work with her own solution to our problems. Did she not prepare St Bernadette for her work in the silence and solitude of Bartrès, and can it be purely chance that a property so well sited for our purpose should bear the name 'Domaine Regina'?*" The legalities of purchasing the site were soon completed and in September 1974 the first party, which included Donna Smith, arrived, the house being officially opened by the Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes in 1975. In the early Hosanna House handbook *To Carry On Living* Donna wrote "*I think that we all need, whether we are able-bodied or handicapped, to discover or re-discover God's holy will for each one of us individually – but most of all to receive the special graces, help and encouragement from God, Our Lord, and his and our Mother to carry on living our lives with courage and conviction. Lourdes and Hosanna House have given me all this, and much, much more.*"

Situated in the most beautiful surroundings, with superb views overlooking the Pyrenees, Hosanna House is indeed a wonderful place to spend a pilgrimage or retreat. When HCPT acquired it about 50 people could be accommodated, but some of the rooms had to be occupied by the small group of nuns who were appointed to manage the House, and so in the early days a 'Hosanna House group' would include some 30 – 35 people.

The make-up of such groups is very flexible. The Trustees' original idea was that groups should be made up primarily of people who had in earlier years come to