

Service St Joseph

Ceremonies: Thorough out the season the HNDL has gradually taken on a greater role in all of the Ceremonies working closely with Père Jean-Xavier Salefran and his team. It has been a year of great joy to see out Hospitalier and Stagiaire working collaboratively with the team from the Sanctuary. I want to thank all of the British Hospitaliers who have contributed to this important reconstruction of our role. As councillors of St Joseph we asked for patience and humility from those working on the Ceremonies this has been rewarded with a growing confidence in our role and contribution. The Sanctuary has many challenges during this year and 2017 not least its financial position. For this reason it is likely that St Joseph will take on an even greater role next season.

The Piscine: There have been many challenges at the Baths this year including the crowds of thousands queuing early in the day for the great feast days, 3000 Tamouls on Easter Sunday and similar numbers for Pentecost and others feasts. This has required careful management to avoid potential accidents with the crowds and diplomacy in turning away those who had no chance of bathing on those days. Thanks to those who helped during those difficult days.

As you know the Bishop had planned that the baths would close from 17 October 2016 until 19 May 2017. Unfortunately, due to a worsening financial position it has not been possible to start this work and the baths will remain open for the rest of the year and during 2017. Because of the work to relocate the Brûloirs for the candles to the other side of the Gave and the construction of the new sacristy the passage to the piscine via the Grotto is closed until further notice. Access to the baths is only possible via the new bridge and this will be managed to facilitate entry and exit of pilgrims!

Gare/Airport: Overall, it seems that the numbers of pilgrims arriving with pilgrimages is down across the board, the continuing financial difficulties in Europe and increasing costs of transport are primarily responsible for this. At the station we said goodbye to the last Dutch pilgrimages using the train in 2016 this is due to the Belgian overnight train now being life expired and the difficulty for the Dutch in using TGV. SNCF continues to do little if anything to support pilgrimages and it can only be hoped that following the French national elections and retirement of Guillaume Pepi Head of SNCF that some change might happen.

I would remind all of those serving at the station or airport that they are now required to have an affectation to a 2nd service - ceremonies, baths or grotto. Given that during many weeks of the season there are trains and planes only on a couple of days in the week this is entirely reasonable. Some have suggested that they were unaware of this requirement but given that it has been an informal requirement for the best part of a decade I find this hard to accept. As many of you will know I have been in Lourdes for a large part of the season and the rule has been and was applied to all and there is no special dispensation for July or August when many of the British Hospitalier are present. Those working at the airport should also remember that if there is no service there that they are normally expected to serve at the station in the first instance if there are trains.

Dress code: The "Tenue Correct", has been published on the HNDL website (in all languages) since the beginning of the season. There is no reason why any Hospitalier or stagiaire should not be aware of the requirements in the code.

Finally, many thanks to all of you who have served with St Joseph throughout this long season.

Paul Whitbourn