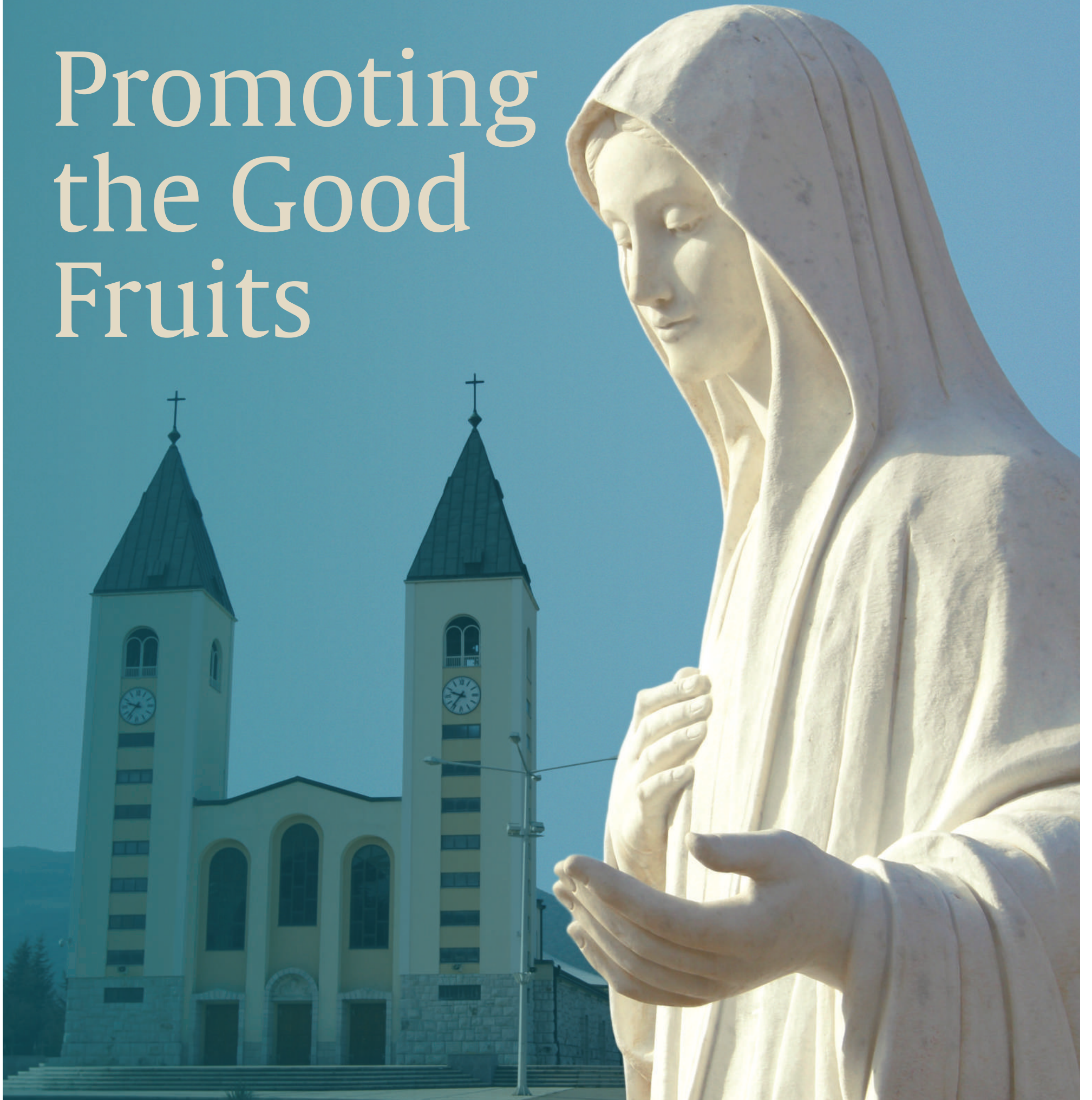


— The Irish Catholic —

# MEDJUGORJE

Promoting  
the Good  
Fruits





# An Overview of Medjugorje:



**Louise Hall**

On June 24, 1981, six young children claimed to have seen a vision of Our Lady on a small hill called Podbrdo in the poor Catholic farming village of Medjugorje. Although they ran away terrified at the sight of the apparition, they returned to the same spot at the same time the following day and came face to face with the mother of God, who has continued to appear to them every day since then. When the children asked Our Lady why she had appeared she answered, “I have come to let you know that God does exist.”

Over thirty years later, in what is said by some to be a continuation of Lourdes and Fatima, more than 40 million curious pilgrims have descended on the quaint village of Medjugorje in Bosnia and Herzegovina, eager to hear what the ‘Queen of Peace’ has to say. On the 25th of each month, the ‘Gospa’, as the visionaries fondly call her, gives a message to the world. The messages are of peace, love, reconciliation, fasting and prayer; and always begin with “Dear Children” and end with, “Thank you for having responded to my call.”

Many people, including journalists, have tried to discredit the allegations but most come home converted and eager to spread the messages they receive. The village of Medjugorje has now adapted to cope with the influx of tourists and continues to attract people of all religions from all over the world. When the church of St James (patron saint of pilgrims) was built in 1933 everyone thought it was far too big for the small village; little did they know that millions of pilgrims would pass through its doors many years later. The large white cross on Mount Križevac is the first thing pilgrims see when they come to Medjugorje. It was also built in 1933 and contains a piece of the true cross of Christ. The six visionaries, who are now grown adults with children of their own, still claim to see the Virgin Mary, albeit some less frequently

than others. When people ask the six seers to describe the woman who appears they explain as best they can the incomparable beauty before their eyes.

## The apparition

According to the visionaries, the Madonna appears in a greyish-blue dress with a long white veil. Her hair is black and her eyes are blue and she floats on a white cloud; a crown of 12 gold stars sits comfortably on her head. On feast days and special occasions she dresses in gold, sometimes holding the baby Jesus in her arms. Other times, he is said to appear standing beside her with the crown of thorns torturing his bleeding head. The visionaries say that when Our Lady appears a little piece of heaven comes with her and that if we knew how much Our Lady loved us, we would cry tears of joy.

## Meeting Medjugorje

Travelling out to Medjugorje for the 30th anniversary of the apparitions in 2011 brought me face to face with many Irish pilgrims. Each person was there for different reasons; some in thanksgiving for the good in their lives; others to pray for a sick relative or friend; more who were simply searching and hoping to awaken and reinstate the spirituality they were born with but may have lost along their journey through life. Each and every person I met had an intriguing story to tell about how they were introduced to Medjugorje and why they felt drawn to travel there.

**“The visionaries say that when Our Lady appears a little piece of heaven comes with her and that if we knew how much Our Lady loved us, we would cry tears of joy”**

My mother brought the first group of Irish pilgrims out to the village back in the 80s and each one of her five children always accompanied her on the trips, including me. As a curious and naïve child, I can remember Medjugorje as the poor farming village it was many years ago and have fond memories of

feeling pure peace and love in the hospitality of the local people who eagerly opened their homes to the masses of visitors. The food and wine they placed on our table each night was fresh from the earth and, although they had little in terms of wealth or material goods, they willingly gave us everything they possibly could.

The lack of wealth in the village was evident and, even though this was at a time when Ireland was going through its own tough economic recession, I can still remember the generosity of the Irish pilgrims who dug deep into their pockets on the last day of their stay, eagerly making up a collection of coins and notes of both dollars and local currency to give to the host families as a token of appreciation for their hospitality.

**“Medjugorje was a place where everyone was invited and accepted, regardless of one’s failings and imperfections”**

I remember going back as a teenager to the Youth Festivals where a young and newly-ordained Fr Liam Lawton, along with Fr Slavko, who was spiritual advisor to the visionaries, were present, as were hundreds of young people from all over the world who were housed in 20-man tents on the outskirts of the village where they engaged in a week of folk music, song and prayer. For me, it was like a spiritual and social uprising drenched in enthusiasm, faith and love. Here, I met many likeminded young people and I could leave behind all that was expected of me by my peers and detach myself from the, sometimes extreme, pressures and expectations which were associated with the turbulent teenage years. Medjugorje was a place where everyone was invited and accepted, regardless of one’s failings and imperfections.

It is very true that once you visit Medjugorje you will undoubtedly return. People rarely travel there only once and the place possesses a strange, compelling magnetic effect. As I got older, I journeyed on through life, entered adulthood, fell in love and started a family and, though I always said I



would return to Medjugorje, it never seemed to be the right time in my life to do so.

In 2008 my sister died very suddenly at the young age of 26. She had accompanied my mother on her first trip to Medjugorje many years ago when she was only two years old. Nicky was born with Down Syndrome. She was the light of our life and our family was stricken with an indescribable and heart-wrenching grief when she passed away. Suddenly, I became very aware of my own mortality and made a conscious decision to stop putting off things in my life that I always wanted to do.

## The ‘smiling visionary’

When I heard that Vicka was appearing on The Late Late Show in February 2011, I was fortunate enough to be a guest in the green room.

My mother was also there and we all chatted amiably with Vicka, who I can only describe as the ‘smiling visionary’ who seems to have this constant light emanating from her. Later on, Vicka and my mother shared a private moment together and my mother openly expressed her grief at the loss of my sister. Vicka listened on sympathetically, pure empathy evident in her eyes, and my mother listened attentively as the kind-hearted visionary told her how children with special needs are sent down as a gift from heaven. She said they are sent down to teach us and bring love. However, they are also called back, up to where they belong, to live in eternal happiness.

I made my decision that night to go back to Medjugorje for the 30th anniversary of the apparitions. I didn’t know

the real reason why I was going back. I just knew that I was giving in to that strong pull and desire to once again visit this holy place. Arriving at the village after more than 20 years, I was both surprised and encouraged to see that the authenticity of the village had remained intact despite the inevitable arrival of commercialism. I inhaled and soaked up the reverential and venerable ambiance and allowed myself to get lost amidst the undeniable sense of peace and love.

On my second day, I was lucky to get an interview with Ivan, one of the visionaries, as his schedule was consumed with radio and television interviews that week. Nevertheless, he agreed to meet me under the shade of a tree in the grounds of St James Church the morning after I arrived. He spoke through an



# the visionary village



interpreter called Daniela. The married man reflected on the past 30 years by saying, “These days, I really go back to the first date and I want to renew those first beginnings which are so profound in my memory. I want to filter all that was so amazing and so beautiful. For me and my wife, this truly has been a great gift.”

**“When Our Lady speaks, she speaks to us all. She is our mother, she loves us all and we are all important to her; there are no rejected ones”**

When I asked Ivan about the messages Our Lady had for the people, he

was confident in his reply. “When Our Lady speaks, she speaks to us all. She is our mother, she loves us all and we are all important to her; there are no rejected ones. She needs us to spread her message. That is why it is paramount that we realise the importance of her coming and of her messages during this moment and time we are living in.” I asked him what the most important messages were. “In a special way, I would like to emphasise the most important message which in my opinion is the message of peace and prayer. If we don’t listen to those two, then we cannot accept all of the messages that Our Lady is sending. It is hard and difficult to forgive if you do not have peace in your heart. Without forgiveness there is no healing. If there is no spiritual healing, then there is no physical healing.”

Ivan finished off by saying that we must be free and open to the Holy Spirit and in that way we can accept what Our Lady desires for us. The rest of my week was filled with stories and testimonies from different people from all walks of life and I absorbed the universal message of love and peace that emanated from every pilgrim in the village. It was almost indescribable and that familiar and welcoming feeling of enthusiasm, faith and love began to burn once again inside me. I also listened intently to various stories of events that have happened in the village in recent times.

When I ventured up to the Blue Cross one sun-filled morning, passing through the picturesque vineyards with the ever-present impressive mountains nestled comfortably in the backdrop, I sat on a rock

Apparition Hill in Medjugorje



**“Medjugorje is a place where everyone is embraced, regardless of creed. The messages are simply urging us to lead better lives so we can embrace and be fulfilled with the happiness God intended for us in this sometimes difficult journey through life”**

at the foot of the cross and listened to a mesmerising story. Our guide for the week explained how during the Bosnian War the soldiers wouldn’t let the visionaries go to Apparition Hill. For the six children, it was torture not to see the Blessed Virgin and so Ivan decided to disobey the commands as he sneaked out of his home one evening.

When he came to the foot of Podbrdo there was an old stone house over to the right and Ivan ventured over trying to be as quiet as he could. Suddenly, he heard Our Lady’s voice and she told him that the soldiers were nearby and that he must stay exactly where he was. The guide continued to tell us that Ivan stood very still but within seconds, the sniffer dogs and soldiers were by his side. However, after a few moments they moved on past him. It is said that the Gospa made him invisible for those few moments.

\*\*\*

It is true that we, as humans, are naturally curious about the afterlife and for me I feel that even the toughest of sceptics would find it difficult to ignore what has been going on in Medjugorje over the past 30 years. What Medjugorje means to me can be summed up in the effortless love and goodness I have in my life today. I am eternally grateful to my mother for her natural

curiosity which spurred her to travel to the village many years ago. Little did she know the grounding it would give me as a child for my journey through life and the impact it would have on me when I returned as a grown and mature adult over 20 years later.

Everyone takes their own meaning and understanding when visiting the village and, for me personally, I came to appreciate that man creates divides, not God. The visionaries once asked Our Lady who was the holiest person in the village? She named a local Muslim woman, explaining that she was the closest to God. Medjugorje is a place where everyone is embraced, regardless of creed. The messages are simply urging us to lead better lives so we can embrace and be fulfilled with the happiness God intended for us in this sometimes difficult journey through life. A lady put it

very simply to me one day as we drove home from a mutual friend’s funeral. I asked her why she thought Our Lady was appearing in Medjugorje. Her reply was poignant and heartwarming. She told me that if she died and went to heaven and there was some way that she could come back and tell her children how best to live their lives, then she would do it. This is what she thinks Our Lady is doing and has been doing in Medjugorje for over 30 years: she is advising her children on how to live their lives. Just as Ivan said, ‘When Our Lady speaks, she speaks to us all. She is our mother.’ We are all her children – and here are just some of our testimonies.

*Louise Hall, Editor, Medjugorje and Me, Columba Press, 2014: Abridged Introduction*

**Editorial Note:** *The Irish Catholic* acknowledges that the final determination of the authenticity of the apparitions at Medjugorje rests with the Roman Catholic Church and submits entirely to its formal conclusion. Since authentication investigations are still ongoing, final judgement has yet to be rendered. But Pope Francis is keen to be “encouraging and promoting the fruits of good”, and as such, has allowed official pilgrimages to now be organised to Medjugorje. It is in this spirit of encouraging good fruits that this following supplement addresses the apparitions as authentic.



# The six original visionaries

On June 24, 1981, Our Lady first appeared in Medjugorje to two young women, Mirjana Dragičević and Ivanka Ivanković. The next day she appeared again to the girls and four other young people. These six visionaries, aged 10 to 16, had no relation to one another. Three of the six still report daily apparitions, while the others, who have received all 10 promised secrets, experience an annual apparition.



## Mirjana Dragičević

Mirjana Dragičević was born in Sarajevo on March 18, 1965. Growing up, Mirjana would spend her summers in Medjugorje with her grandparents and on June 24, 1981, when she was 16 years old, she reported seeing Our Lady. Mirjana was the first of the group to be entrusted with all 10 secrets and was advised to choose a priest to whom, when the time came, she could reveal the secrets. When she became

afraid she wouldn't be able to remember the secrets, Mirjana was given a parchment by Our Lady which has all the secrets listed. Only Mirjana is able to read what is transcribed there. Mirjana is the only one of the visionaries to pursue university and completed a degree in Sarajevo. She later married Marco Soldo and they have two daughters together.

## Ivanka Ivanković

Ivanka Ivanković, born on June 21, 1966, was 15 years old when she saw the first of the apparitions on June 24, 1981. Ivanka's mother had passed away a month before the apparition and the first time she spoke to Our Lady she enquired about her mother. Our Lady replied: "She is happy. She is with me." After being told the 10th secret on May 7, 1985, Ivanka ceased receiving daily apparitions. She was the second visionary to experience all 10 secrets and she is graced with an annual apparition from Our Lady on June 25 – the anniversary of the first apparition. Ivanka married Raiko Elez on the Feast of the Holy Family, December 28, 1986, and as such was the first visionary to marry. The couple has three children.



## Vicka Ivanković

Vicka Ivanković, the oldest visionary, was born on September 3, 1964, in Bijakovici. Vicka was 16 years old at the time of the first apparition and is said to be the most expressive of the visionaries during apparitions. In September 1981, Vicka planned on leaving Medjugorje to attend school, but Our Lady dissuaded her given that many of the other visionaries were leaving. Vicka agreed to stay back and it proved to be a worthwhile decision as much of her time was taken with the tens of thousands of pilgrims descending on Medjugorje. Vicka is also the only visionary who Our Lady chose to



reveal her life story. She married in January 2002 at the age of 37. She, her husband and their two children now live in Gruda, a small village a few miles north of Medjugorje.

**“Our Lady's message has spread all over the world, to its farthest corner. Judging by the messages I receive, by the letters from all over the world, people are delighted. This has become an oasis of peace; nowhere can a man find such a peace as here under Our Lady's shelter, in her presence, covered with her mantle.”**

– From interview with Visionary Vicka Ivanković. Excerpts taken from book: Krešimir Šego, *Time of Grace*.

## Marija Pavlović

Marija Pavlović was born on April 1, 1965, and grew up at the foot of Apparition Mountain. She was 16 years old when the apparitions began. In March of 1984, given the role that Medjugorje would play in the coming years for the conversion of sinners, Our Lady began entrusting Marija with a weekly message for the city's parish. These messages, given every Thursday evening, were designed to spiritually guide the congregation. In January of 1987, three years after the first message, this weekly occurrence evolved to a monthly event which takes place on the 25th of each month. Marija is the only visionary who receives this message and it stays in her memory until she writes it down. After it is written, she can no longer repeat the mes-



sage word for word. Marija initially had a calling to religious life, but after realising she would no longer be free to spread Our Lady's messages, she opted instead to follow a vocation to family life. She married Paolo Lunetti in September 1993 and together they have four sons. The family resides primarily in Italy, but visit Medjugorje often.

## Jakov Colo

Jakov Colo, the youngest Medjugorje visionary, was born on March 16, 1971. At just 10 years old when the apparitions began, Jakov convinced many people of the validity of the apparitions. These people couldn't believe a boy of that age would endure three hours of prayer on his knees every night without missing a night. They suspect had the original apparition been a lie, there was no way he would have been able to keep up the lie. The daily apparitions of Our Lady brought solace to Jakov when his mother passed away, leaving him an orphan. He was 12 years old at the time. To Vicka,



who was closest to Jakov, he appeared to have a special relationship with Our Lady beyond what the others had. After receiving the 10th secret in September of 1998, Jakov stopped receiving daily apparitions and began experiencing an annual occurrence on Christmas day. Today, Jakov lives in Medjugorje with his wife, Annalisa Barozzi and their three children. Of the six visionaries, he is the only one who would not say whether he would be alive when the permanent sign on Apparition Hill comes, saying instead it is a secret.

## Ivan Dragičević



Ivan Dragičević was born on May 25, 1965 and was 16 years old when the apparitions began. Though he wasn't initially pious, upon seeing Our Lady, Ivan turned around his life and began to pray daily. He is one of the three visionaries who continue to have apparitions every day and has been given nine of the 10 secrets. Another secret Ivan received which is unique to him is that of his

life story until his death. Our Lady has given instruction to Ivan about families and youth today and what hurts and affects them. When he speaks to crowds he refutes having any anxiety, believing instead that each person has a choice whether or not to believe what he's saying as all will eventually be revealed. Ivan has stated that Our Lady asked him to write a book with her help about the disease of materialism, which he says is destroying the beauty of God's people and the world he created. Ivan married American, Laureen Murphy, who experienced her own conversion in Medjugorje. Ivan and his family live half of the year in America and the other half in Medjugorje.



# The call to make peace

Finbar O' Leary

**I**t was the Feast of St John the Baptist on the June 24, 1981, when the young visionaries had their first encounter with Our Lady or Gospa in Croatian. Frightened and bewildered they ran away. Returning the following evening Vicka still only 16 years of age and the eldest of the six carried a jar of holy water given to her by her grandmother. In her enthusiasm, Vicka splashed the contents over Our Lady, saying at the same time; "if you are from Heaven stay with us and if you are from Hell go away."

Our Lady smiling introduced Herself saying "I am the Blessed Virgin Mary" and that she wished to be known here under the title 'Queen of Peace'. Our Lady continued "I have come to remind the world that God exists and man must return to God or face the consequences."

**“Our Lady smiling introduced Herself saying ‘I am the Blessed Virgin Mary’ and that she wished to be known here under the title ‘Queen of Peace’”**

The Franciscan Order called Fr Slavko Barbaric a trained psychologist, home from his work in Switzerland, to examine the children, on the order's behalf. He remained as their Spiritual Director until his death on November 24, 2000. Our Lady's words during the apparition to Marija the following evening were; "Today your brother Slavko has been born into heaven."

During this period the many religious and ethnic groups who made up the former Yugoslavia had been living in a tenuous peace and no one could understand Our Lady's constant appeal for prayers for peace. Then on the tenth anniversary of the apparitions as the visionary Marija made her way down the hillside and was surrounded by huge crowds of pilgrims Marija unexpectedly had a second apparition with Our Lady during which she made her strongest appeal yet again for peace. The following day the evil carnage of



war was unleashed in Bosnia.

Extraordinary phenomena became a regular occurrence for the visionaries, local people and pilgrims alike. The Croatian word "MIR" which means peace appeared in huge gold letters in the beautiful clear sky and could be seen in towns and villages far and wide. Pilgrims were now coming in their thousands from all over the world.

Then began the great phenomenon of the sun, similar to that experienced by the people of Fatima all those years ago. Every evening before the time of the apparition, the sun still high in the sky would begin to spin and pulsate from the heavens down towards the earth. This became a daily occurrence. Amazingly those watching would have their own personal experiences. Some would see a cross in the centre of the sun, others might see the Host and others would see Jesus or perhaps Our Lady. This particular miracle occurred for many years and was experienced by all present regardless of gender or age.

In Medjugorje healings of one kind or another seem to occur on a daily basis for yourself or those around you. To be whole, mentally, physically, and most importantly spiritually was the old English term used. The great miracle of Confession occurred following Marija's apparition on the hillside. Marija was making her way home through a communal trashing field and was followed, as always by some of the crowd. Our Lady suddenly appeared to her. One woman among the crowd was a local doctor, very much in the communist mould. This woman asked if she could touch Our Lady. Our Lady consented saying there were always some doubt-

ing Thomases. Marija guided the doctor's hand to where Our Lady was. As she as she touched Our Lady a strong tingling something similar to an electric shock ran through her body. With that everyone wanted to touch Our Lady. One by one Marija guided them to where Our Lady stood. After a short while Marija began to sob uncontrollably and when asked why she said as each person touched Our Lady's beautiful white gown they left a filthy black stain upon it, the mark of their sinfulness. Ashamed by the event a young neighbour of Marija's said let us all go to the parish and ask the priest to hear our Confessions.

**“That weekend thousands of people who had not been to Confession for 10 or 20 or 30 years poured their hearts out in contrition”**

That weekend thousands of people who had not been to Confession for 10 or 20 or 30 years poured their hearts out in contrition. The handful of parish priests phoned for help to their brother priests in Bosnia and Croatia till finally almost 200 priests came to help with their Confessions. These good men were astonished by the depth and sincerity of the people. This call, this feeling of wanting to make peace continues to this day.

The Communist government fearful of the huge crowds gathering arrested the parish priest Fr Jozo. Fr Jozo had refused the communist demands to close the church. He was most cruelly



mentally and physically tortured in prison in Mostar. His jailers to their annoyance discovered their failure to restrain him despite being shackled to the wall at night, his cell door would be open in the morning and the shackles lying useless on the ground. The Spirit of the Lord could not be confined. Our Lady has said that Fr Jozo would be a saint in heaven long before he would be recognised as a saint on earth.

Our Lady's requests to the visionaries for all of us were becoming more precise. She asked that we fast on bread and water every Wednesday and Friday. Then Our Lady said that we should pray for at least four hours a day. The priests when they heard this put the question to Our Lady through the visionaries; "Blessed Mother, if we say this surely all the people will run away?" The Gospa replied very seriously. "No. No. After all it is only 1/6th of the day." Our Lady is asking from us every day that we pray the seven Our Fathers, Hail Mary's and Glory Be's for peace, three full rosaries and if at all possible we should

attend Holy Mass. She has also asked that we pray at the beginning of our prayer The Profession of Faith - "The I believe in God" - and she has asked that we go back to the good habits of wearing a blessed object and the use of Holy Water for the warding off of evil. The Gospa is telling us how enraged Satan the devil is at Her great plan in Medjugorje for the saving of souls and he is trying his best to destroy it. Gospa also said that we should read from the Bible everyday, especially every Thursday to read Matthew 6:24-34.

**“On this night with a huge crowd on the hillside, the visionaries were shown every star in the night sky come crashing down and exploding on the hill”**

Sadly for want of space I must confine so many

extraordinary events to sharing with you an event simultaneously experienced by the visionaries and the good people of Medjugorje on the feast of the Holy Angels in the 80s. On this night with a huge crowd on the hillside, the visionaries were shown every star in the night sky come crashing down and exploding on the hill, with each individual spark becoming a heavenly angel. The visionary Marija described to me this extraordinary event. Simultaneously all the crowd present experienced the stars crashing and exploding until it seemed that the very hillside itself became a ball of flame, they huddled together terrified thinking that this is surely the end of the world.

Our Lady has told the visionaries that Medjugorje will be the last apparition of this kind and when she stops coming God will leave a permanent sign on the hillside and all will understand that it is a sign from heaven. The sign will be visible to everyone but then it will be too late for many.



## Approval Process



More than 1,500 visions of Mary have been reported around the world, but in the past century, fewer than 20 cases have received Church approval as worthy of belief. The Vatican's 'Norms regarding the manner of proceedings in the discernment of presumed apparitions or revelations' were approved by Pope Paul VI in 1978. An official English translation was released in 2011. Responsibility for determining an apparition's veracity lies with the local bishop, according to the norms established by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

### Fruits of the apparitions

The process is never brief, with some cases taking hundreds of years. Visionaries and witnesses must be questioned and the fruits of the apparitions, such as conversions, miracles and healings, must be examined. According to the norms, the local bishop should set up a commission of experts, including theologians, canonists, psychologists and doctors to help him determine the facts, the mental, moral and spiritual wholeness and seriousness of the visionary, and whether the messages and testimony are free from theological and doctrinal error.

### Conclusions

A bishop can come to one of three conclusions:

He can determine the apparition to be true and worthy of belief;

He can say it is not true, which leaves open the possibility for an appeal;

Or he can say that at the moment, he doesn't know and needs more help.

In the last scenario, the investigation is brought to the country's bishops' conference. If that body cannot come to a conclusion, the matter is turned over to the Pope, who delegates the doctrinal congregation to step in and give advice or appoint others to investigate.

### Church recognition

Still, the Catholic Church does not require the faithful to believe in apparitions, even those recognised by the Church. Church recognition of a private revelation, in essence, is just the Church's way of saying the message is not contrary to the Faith or morality, it is licit to make the message public "and the faithful are authorised to give to it their prudent adhesion", the then Pope Benedict XVI said in his 2010 apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini* ('The Word of the Lord').

*Abridged article by Junno Arocho Esteves which originally appeared in Crux.*



Pope Paul VI is pictured next to Carmelite Sister Lucia dos Santos, one of the three Fatima visionaries, during a visit to the Marian shrine in Fatima, Portugal, May 13, 1967.

# Confirmed Marian Apparitions

While Medjugorje has received the green light for organised pilgrimages, it hasn't yet received Church approval. Major Marian sites that have received such approval include:

## Our Lady of Guadalupe

**Apparition Date – 1531, Mexico City, Mexico**

In 1531, little more than a dozen years after Martin Luther set in motion events that split the Catholic Church, Mary appeared four times to Juan Diego at Tepeyac Hill near Mexico City, proclaiming herself the spiritual mother of all mankind and leaving her miraculous image on Juan Diego's outer garment, his tilma. As is a common occurrence in Marian apparitions, the Virgin used Juan Diego's native language, Nahuatl. She asked for a church to be built in her honour at the

apparition site, but when Juan Diego brought the request to the bishop he was met with denial. The bishop didn't initially believe the story, but upon seeing the tilma with the image of the Virgin he consented. The apparitions were formally approved by the second Archbishop of Mexico in 1555 and later the Holy See in 1895. Juan Diego was canonised in 2002 and today his tilma is one of Mexico's most popular cultural symbols.



## Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

**Apparition Date – 1830, Paris, France**

In 1830, the year of the 'July Revolution', which saw the last of France's Bourbon monarchs overthrown, Mary appeared three times to Catherine Labouré in the chapel of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, at Rue du Bac. Here she told Catherine that God would charge her with a mission and while she would face contradiction, she shouldn't fear because God would grant her special graces to succeed. During the apparition, Our Lady also showed Catherine the

design of the 'miraculous medal' of the Immaculate Conception which helped to renew devotion to Our Lady in France and eventually worldwide. In 1836, the Archbishop of Paris began a canonical investigation which ruled that the medal was of supernatural origin and the miracles linked with it were genuine. Catherine Labouré was canonised in 1947 and her incorrupt body is interred in the same chapel where she experienced the apparitions.

## Our Lady of La Salette

**Apparition Date – 1846, La Salette-Fallavaux, France**

Mary appealed for penance and an end to Sabbath-breaking and blasphemy when in 1846 she appeared to two children, Maximin Giraud (11) and Mélanie Calvat (14) while they were looking after herds high in the mountains by La Salette-Fallavaux one afternoon. When the two children first saw Our Lady she held her face in her hands and was crying due to the blasphemy and disregard for God in the area. This disrespect she foretold would result in punishment unless prayer, conversion and commitment were undertaken. The children were also

given one secret each. However, these secrets are assumed to be of personal nature and not for the general public. Five years after the apparition, the Bishop of Grenoble said he believed the occurrence was genuine, with Pope Pius IX formally approving the devotion that year. Maximin Giraud reportedly had a difficult, wandering life, while Mélanie Calvat became a nun. Neither of the two visionaries have been beatified, but this apparition has been credited with reviving Catholicism in the La Salette-Fallavaux region.





## Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception

### Apparition Date – 1858, Lourdes, France

In 1858, Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous (14), 18 times at Lourdes in southern France, describing herself as the “the Immaculate Conception”, and asking for penance and prayer for the conversion of sinners. Unlike the apparition at La Salette, Our Lady of Lourdes appeared petite and gentle instead of tall and maternal. Initially, Bernadette received much ridicule for recounting the apparition but she did eventually receive the support of the Church. In 1862 the Bishop of Tarbes declared, “what Soubirous saw was the Most Blessed Virgin”,

continuing, “our convictions are based on the testimony of Soubirous, but above all on the things that have happened, things which can be nothing other than divine intervention”. Lourdes today still receives hundreds of thousands of pilgrims a year from around the world, due largely to the healing water from a stream Bernadette uncovered at the Our Lady’s instruction. Bernadette joined the Sisters of Charity in Nevers until her death at the age of 35. She was canonised in 1933 by Pope Pius XI.



## Our Lady of Knock

### Apparition Date – 1879, Knock, Ireland

Mary appeared at Knock, Co. Mayo, in 1879 when on an August evening a group of villagers saw a silent apparition, lasting for about three hours, by the gable end of the local church, with Mary, accompanied by St Joseph and St John the Evangelist, gazing upon a lamb that was standing upon an altar, surrounded by angels. During the apparition, a group of people which varied from anywhere between two and 25 at a time stood and knelt, gazing at the figures. Despite the rain and changing light, witnesses remarked that the figures remained visible and bright throughout. This apparition of the Virgin is rare in that she appears in a group and is silent for the entire duration. This silence has been attributed to the cultural shift in Ireland, specifically in terms of language. The eldest witness spoke no English, while the youngest witness spoke no Irish. A Church commission summoned in 1879 found that the witness statements were trustworthy and that no natural explanation for what happened could be offered. The original documents of the commission were lost, so in 1936 a second inquiry was called. This commission relied heavily on interviews



with surviving witnesses and their children, press reports and devotional works from the time of the apparition. It also resulted in positive affirmation. A hundred years after the apparition, St John Paul II celebrated Mass in Knock and knelt in prayer at the apparition wall. Four other Popes have visited Knock, including Pope Francis who visited last year during the World Meeting of Families. Numerous cures and favours have been associated with a visit to Our Lady of Knock Shrine.



## Our Lady of Hope

### Apparition Date – 1871, Pontmain, France

The last of the approved 19th-Century French apparitions occurred at the height of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, when a group of young children in the small town of Pontmain in northwestern France saw Mary appear in the sky for about three hours, with her message – encouraging prayer while emphasising Jesus’ love and concern – appeared on a banner under her feet. During this apparition the children’s parents and the local school teacher were called over, but were unable to see the apparition. One of the visionaries later described the

Virgin as tall and young with tender eyes. Despite not being able to see the Virgin, a number of town members gathered around to pray. This same evening the nearby Prussian forces ceased their advance towards Pontmain and the nearby town of Laval for no known reason. The Bishop of Laval gave formal recognition of the vision the following year. Three of the four visionaries in Pontmain entered religious life. Today, the shrine receives around 200,000 people annually from the region and some international pilgrims, mainly from Germany.

## Our Lady of the Rosary

### Apparition Date – 1917, Fátima, Portugal

From May to October 1917, Our Lady appeared monthly to three shepherd children, Lúcia dos Santos (9) and her cousins Francisco (8) and Jacinta Marto (7), in the Cova da Iria. During these visits, Mary entrusted the children with three secrets, encouraged devotion to her Immaculate Heart and requested the consecration of Russia.

The final apparition was accompanied by the famed ‘Miracle of the Sun’ which was witnessed by thousands of pilgrims. Francisco and Jacinta both passed away during the flu pandemic that began in 1918. Bishop José Alves Correia da Silva declared the events worthy of belief on October 13, 1930. Lúcia, lived a long life as a Discalced Carmelite and passed away at the age of 97 in February 2005. In 2017, as part of the centenary celebrations, Francisco and Jacinta Marto were canonised and as such are the youngest saints in the Catholic Church to not die as martyrs. The apparitions and Miracle of the Sun resulted in international interest in the small Portuguese Village, which today is visited by millions of pilgrims every year.



#### Three Secrets of Fatima

- The vision and reality of Hell.
- The ending of World War I, along with prediction of another war. The consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was also included in this secret.
- The persecution of Christians.

## Our Lady of Beauraing

### Apparition Date – 1932, Beauraing, Belgium

During the winter of 1932-33 Mary appeared 33 times to a group of children in a convent garden in the small town of Beauraing in Belgium. Describing herself as “the Immaculate Virgin” and “Mother of God, Queen of Heaven”, she called for prayer for the conversion of sinners. The group of children, aged between nine and 15, reported that she requested a chapel be built at the site in the hope that

pilgrims would come to the city and pray. During one of the last apparitions she revealed her Golden Heart to the seers. In 1943, the Bishop of Namur authorised public devotions to Our Lady of Beauraing and in 1949, the Holy See granted final approval. All five of the children grew up and lived quiet lives with their families. St John Paul II visited the city in May of 1985.



## Our Lady of the Poor

### Apparition Date – 1933, Banneux, Belgium

In early 1933, Mary appeared eight times to Mariette Beco (11) outside Mariette’s family home at the small Belgian village of Banneux. Describing herself as the “Virgin of the Poor”, she promised to intercede for the poor, the sick and the suffering. Similar to Lourdes, Our Lady asked Mariette to push her hands into a small spring which she said would be healing ‘for all nations’. Incidentally, when she first told people of the apparitions, Mariette was derided and mockingly

called ‘Bernadette’. Following consultations with the Holy See, in 1942 the Bishop of Liege approved the veneration of Our Lady of the Poor. After the apparitions, Mariette lived a quiet family life. She died at the age of 90 in 2011. The site and small chapel dedicated to the Virgin of Poor still draws in pilgrims today and the spring, of which healings have been attributed, produces on average 2,000 gallons of water a day.





# A small promise with a big impact

Carmel Kelly

**W**ith the boys both married and after my mother's death in 1994, my husband Bill and I were free agents and enjoyed the following few years having no one to really worry about and going wherever we wanted to. A regular thing with myself and some friends was a biannual visit to Lourdes. This did not interest Bill, pilgrimage did not appeal to him. Little did I know how this was to change.

At that time I knew nothing about Medjugorje, but someone gave me a copy of Heather Parsons' *A Light between the Hills*, which is a series of stories of people whose lives have been changed by Medjugorje. I did not read it at that time, wasn't interested, just left it lying around. I thought no more about it until one day in January 1997. After he read the book, Bill expressed a wish to go there. I could not know then how Bill's desire to go to Medjugorje would change my life, but I was so pleased he wanted to go. I read the book, booked for us to travel on the May 22 and we looked forward to our trip.

In March, Bill was diagnosed with a bad chest infection which, after two lots of antibiotics and steroids showed no signs of improving. On the April 15 the doctor sent him to Beaumont for an x-ray, after which he was kept in for further investigation. After 10 days of extensive tests, we were informed that Bill had extensive cancer in both lungs. Explaining our plans to the consultant, he made it clear all travel was out of the question. Believing at that time that Bill could be treated, I explained the situation to Marian Pilgrimages, our organiser, and they gave us a credit note for two years. We could go when Bill was better. Telling Bill this the following day in the hospital he asked me to promise that if he could not go to Medjugorje, I would go anyway and bring my friend on his ticket. Trying to explain to him that I had no interest in Medjugorje and was only going because of him was no use. He insisted I promise to go and because he was getting agitated I made the promise, still hoping he would recover and we could go together. However, this was not to be as on the May 12,

10 days before our expected trip, Bill died.

Five weeks after Bill's death, and only to "fulfil" a promise I explained everything to Tom Field in Marian Pilgrimages who had no problem with my friend Agnes going to Medjugorje on Bill's ticket. So on June 17, 1997, knowing nothing about the place I set off with my friend on what was to be "once off pilgrimage to Medjugorje".

**“I went to Medjugorje to fulfil a promise, and returned from that first visit having made another promise”**

However, being invited to be present at an apparition with Ivan the Visionary at 10pm on apparition Hill, changed everything for me. In the presence of over 3,000 people and being very close to Ivan I had an unforgettable experience. Once the apparition started, the silence, despite the crowd was total. I cried a lot, missing Bill yet feeling he was there in spirit and in my heart I had no doubt of the presence of our Blessed Lady at that time. I felt an incredible urge to bring others to Medjugorje. I remember saying "Blessed Mother, I cannot see you, I cannot hear you but I know you are here and I promise I will bring others here." Coming down the hill that night, Agnes could hardly believe when



I told her what I planned, but she too has been a constant returnee with me. I went to Medjugorje to fulfil a promise, and returned from that first visit having made another promise.

With the help of Marian Pilgrimages in May 1998 I brought my first group and two further groups in October 1998. Medjugorje took over my life and in October 2017 I brought my 106th group. I now benefit from and am blessed by friendships made and the experiences of Medjugorje. There is no way to explain the satisfaction and joy I derive just being with the people in my groups. Every group brings something new and every first timer is a special blessing.

I could not have foreseen as Bill was dying, the change my life would undergo as a result of the promise made to him. This happened when all commitments were done. Family married and gone, mother and husband gone. I was a free agent and into this place came the Blessed Mother and the rest is history. At this stage in my life it is good to be useful and God willing, I hope to continue to be useful for some time to come.



Ivan Dragičević,  
one of the six  
visionaries

## About Marian Pilgrimages

Marian Pilgrimages, a Dublin-based pilgrimage company, is Ireland's first and foremost Medjugorje Specialist. For more than 25 years their experience in organising pilgrimages to this religious shrine has been unsurpassed. In 2009, Marian Pilgrimages extended its expertise and ethos to offer pilgrimages to the major Marian Shrines including Lourdes, Fatima, the Holy Land, Poland, Shrines of France and Italy and Camino De Santiago.

Medjugorje, Marian Pilgrimages' specialist region, begins for Holy Week and continues with a couple of flights weekly until the end of October. With departures from Dublin, Cork, Belfast, Shannon and Knock, the Dublin team can put you in contact with group leaders across the country that may be suitable to where you live. Pilgrims, either part of a group or travelling by themselves, will experience from the extensive program, professional guides and services both on the ground and here in Ireland.

For the last 17 years, David Parkes, Marian Pilgrimages' pilgrim director has led the Marian Pilgrimages' program in Medjugorje. David has in this time successfully organised, coordinated and helped over 100,000 pilgrims. He has a special connection to Medjugorje and can indeed relate to many people who have been touched by Medjugorje. This connection allows him to be entirely involved with any aspect of a trip and does so with great reverence and understanding. He is responsible for all aspects of the pilgrimage experience, he is joined by the assistance of five full-time staff. Each of them has numerous years of experience working with pilgrims and group leaders. The guides have built up a strong relationship with pilgrims and group leaders creating a sense of family and an atmosphere of a home away from home. The support received from the staff on the ground is unmatched and is invaluable in times of need.

Sunday, May 12, has marked a triumphant day for those lucky enough to have Medjugorje in their lives. The announcement to allow dioceses to pilgrimage to Medjugorje was made at Mass by the Apostolic Nuncio Luigi Pezzuto in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Archbishop Henryk Hoser, the Holy See's Special Apostolic Visitor.

The fruits of Medjugorje are undeniable and it is heard first hand from pilgrims and group leaders. The Marian Pilgrimages' guides continue to speak of Medjugorje with true love in their hearts which is testament to the power of peace and renewal there.

With the vast amount of tours Marian Pilgrimages is offering, there is just too much to see and explore in one trip. This year sees the usual destinations combine to offer a two-centre trip. We are offering the superb opportunity of combining the holy shrine of Medjugorje and the idyllic coast of Croatia. Travel to the small religious village in Bosnia and Herzegovina known as Medjugorje, where Our Lady has been appearing since 1981. From there you can take a relaxing holiday along the beautiful coast of Croatia. If you wish to combine two religious programs, you can combine Medjugorje and San Giovanni, the second most visited Catholic site in the world. It was here that St Padre Pio received the stigmata.

With a loyalty in providing successful pilgrimages and a belief in the messages and meaning of the Shrines, Marian Pilgrimages offers not only a spiritual pilgrimage but an extensive and professional program.

**For further information on any of the above, please contact Marian Pilgrimages on 01-8788159 or visit their website [www.marian.ie](http://www.marian.ie)**



**MARIAN PILGRIMAGES**  
RENEW OUR SPIRIT OF LOVE, FORGIVENESS & PEACE





# MARIAN PILGRIMAGES

RENEW OUR SPIRIT OF LOVE, FORGIVENESS & PEACE

## MEDJUGORJE & GROUP PILGRIMAGE SPECIALISTS

*Our Lady's mission is one of peace and love*

Marian Pilgrimages is the first and foremost tour operator to Medjugorje. Being Ireland's longest tour operator to Medjugorje and has allowed us to develop strong and meaningful relationships in the region allowing us to provide the best of accommodation, transport links and an established professional service second to none.

### FULLY ESCORTED GROUP PILGRIMAGES IN 2019

June 7 nights  
from € 695

July 7 nights  
from € 675

August 7 nights  
from € 715

September 7 nights  
from € 725

October 7 nights  
from € 645

Departures available throughout June to October from Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Knock and Shannon, for a full list of dates please visit [www.marian.ie](http://www.marian.ie) or contact our office.

### BRINGING A GROUP TO MEDJUGORJE IN 2020

If you or your parish are thinking of bringing a group to Medjugorje in 2020 or beyond then please do not hesitate to contact our office to discuss your requirements with our dedicated Medjugorje Group Manager.

#### BENEFIT FROM

- ✓ Special group Rates
- ✓ Professional and experienced staff
- ✓ Security of a fully Licensed and bonded tour operator
- ✓ Promotional Material to inform your group
- ✓ Exceptional service right from your first call to when you return

#### WHAT WE INCLUDE

- ✓ Return flights
- ✓ Air Conditioned Accommodation exclusive to Marian Pilgrimage close to St. James Church
- ✓ Breakfast and evening meal each day
- ✓ Return transfers to Medjugorje with guide
- ✓ 24hrs assistance of Marian Pilgrimages team throughout
- ✓ Full religious programme
- ✓ Comprehensive travel insurance up to 85years
- ✓ All airport & local taxes

(€15 reduction on cost for those holding their own or wishing to purchase alternative Travel Insurance)



*Professional Staff on the Ground*



*Air-conditioned en-suite accommodation exclusive to Marian Pilgrimages*

WWW.MARIAN.IE

tel: (01) 8788159 - 19 Eden Quay, Dublin 1 - [info@marian.ie](mailto:info@marian.ie)

FULLY LICENSED TOUR OPERATOR T0142



MEDJUGORJE MIRACLE FROM THE ARCHIVE  
September 27, 2018 issue

An Irish family who met the Pope in Croke Park are a testimony to God's transforming power, writes **Greg Daly**



If few images caught Ireland's imagination as much during the papal visit as much as Alison Nevin's selfie with Pope Francis at the Festival of Families, few stories will have caught hearts as much as that of Damien and Mary Richardson that evening.

Drug addicts in their teens, the couple are now long-settled and parents to a lively family of 10 children, a living example, they told the Pope, of how with God's help they had travelled from "the darkness of addiction to the joy of family".

Brought up in north Dublin and the inner city, Damien left school at 15.

"I'd a lot going on in my head at that time, you know that way," he says. "I'd a few small jobs and nothing really serious, and I just started dabbling in drugs – in drinking a bit and smoking cannabis. This escalated over the years."

Ecstasy tablets were the norm in the rave culture of the early 90s, but Damien went further. "I was doing that for a few months and then I went back to a party and there was a lad smoking heroin out of tin foil. I said 'what's that?' and he said 'this is heroin, do you want a go?' and I said 'yeah, go on, give us a go of that'. And I started smoking heroin then."

Within a few months he was a serious abuser. "I came from a good family, and my life had totally changed," he says, adding that as he "got into crime" he ended up in prison several times.

Drugs just seemed the 'in thing' to do, he says: "I thought that was what life was about, to have this feeling, this stimulation, this drug inside you."

### Corner

He was 23, in 1996, when he first turned a corner.

"My father was a holy man, he was always praying for me," he says, describing how whenever his father would meet a priest he would ask him to say a Mass for Damien. "He was in a prayer group, and someone showed him a video cassette, and on the video was two American girls speaking about how they'd been to Medjugorje on a pilgrimage, and had stopped taking drugs – it completely changed their lives," he says. "My Da said 'right, I have to get Damien to Medjugorje'."

Damien wasn't living at home at the time, but used to arrange to meet his father for tea. Though he would regularly let him down by not showing up, he did meet him when his father asked him to come to Medjugorje

with him. "I'd let him down so many times, so I really felt I owed it to him to go to this place," he says, adding that brochures his father showed him, filled with pictures of beaches, waterfalls and beautiful women, may well have swayed him more than the prospect of a week or more at a Marian shrine.

Even on his way to the flight he was wavering, but ultimately felt that after his father had booked and paid for the trip, he couldn't let him down again. "It's only a week – it won't kill me," he thought.

"I remember waking up on the bus to the sound of all these people praying the rosary, and I thought to myself 'Jeany Mack, what am I after getting myself into?'" he says.

"So I got to Medjugorje, it was August 1996, the sun was shining, it was nice, and I hated the place for the first three days, I hated myself, I hated me Da, and for three days and nights I couldn't sleep for the effects of the drugs and the heat," he says, describing how despite this he felt God in his heart one morning when he fell asleep briefly on a bench by a statue of Mary.

In the end he spent two weeks there, with something happening to him that he describes now as "like an illumination of conscience".

"I came home and still struggled with addiction, but I never stole after that. Something happened to me inside," he says.

**“You just imagine being in flats, there's guys outside the door selling drugs...”**

He and Mary started going out, initially in an off-and-on way, shortly after he returned to Ireland.

"We met through a mutual friend," he says. "She also was a heroin addict – she's from the north inner city. There was seven siblings in

# From addiction's darkness to family's joy



her family, including herself, and six of them went on the heroin. The whole family was destroyed."

Growing up in the inner city, Mary had been raised in a world where drugs were the norm.

"You just imagine being in flats, there's guys outside the door selling drugs, there's the conversation of the day," Damien explains. "If you're immersed in that, if you grew up in that environment 24-7, where police are chasing lads through the streets and police kicking doors in looking for drugs, it's all people talk about how to get drugs, how to be ruthless, how to be

deceitful..."

During that time the two had their first child, Tammie, and went on a methadone programme until 2002, when things reached a tipping point for Damien.

### Breakdown

"I had a breakdown, I was sick of the drugs and very suicidal – I just wanted to end my life, I just couldn't keep taking drugs and something had to give," he says. "So in 2002, a sister of mine once again brought me to Medjugorje, and after being there about three days I kind of recuperated and got my strength back."

He'd been there several times since 1996 with Mary and Tammie, and though he was familiar with the Cenacolo community there, a community of young men, all recovering addicts of one sort or another, he had never taken it seriously. This time would be different.

"I went up to one of the lads and told him that I was from Dublin, I'd been on drugs for 14 years, I was very suicidal, and lost the will to live," he says. "So he looked me in the eye and said a sentence I'll never forget. He said 'Damien, the drugs will always be there – you have to change your life and come back to God.'"

Did Damien know, the man asked, that a Cenacolo house had recently opened in Knock? No, he hadn't known that. "He gave me the number of Knock, and I came back then to Ireland," Damien says. "I had to detox off the methadone and drugs, and I went to about four assessment meetings, and I entered the community shortly after that in 2002."

### Italian nun

Community life at Cenacolo was to transform Damien. Cenacolo, named after the Upper Room or Cenacle of the Gospels, was founded in 1993 by an Italian nun, Mother







Elvira Petrozzi.

Based around the idea of recovery through prayer, work and friendship, there are now about 70 Cenacolo houses around the world, each with the same template: days starting around 6am with adoration, communal prayer, scripture reading, communal meals and work ranging from cutting firewood and preparing food to tending animals and cleaning.

There is time for recreation like football, but television, newspapers, radio, internet or mobile phones are all forbidden.

Describing it as "tough going", Damien says he was nonetheless willing to try anything. "I'd tried it my way and it didn't work, so whatever these people suggested I would do."

He'd been struck, after all, by the young men he'd met in the Medjugorje community.

"When I went to Medjugorje, I'd look into the lads eyes and could see peace, and I was jealous and envious of what they had," he says. "They didn't look like drug addicts – they looked like lads who were confident, hard-working men, and I wanted that. That's all I ever wanted."

\*\*\*\*\*

Lamenting how destructive addiction can be, not least to confidence, Damien is effusive with praise for Cenacolo.

"The way it works is it's residential – you can't leave. I was down in Knock for a year, then I was transferred to the Cenacolo house in Medjugorje, and I was over there for five months," he says.

"There's a big emphasis on friendship, and friendship is not just about tapping you

on the back and saying you're a great fella. It may be about saying stuff to you that you find uncomfortable," he says. "It's quite challenging, Cenacolo is."

While Damien was in Knock and Medjugorje, he says, Mary had been staying with his father and was taking methadone, but did a detox course at a HSE centre just before he came out of Cenacolo.

"When I came out, I was after living a lifestyle of prayer and we started praying together, and during that time I started my own little business," he says.

"The first thing I wanted to do was get good with God and get married to Mary. We had a wonderful wedding, and got married in 2005," he continues, adding that they went to Medjugorje on their honeymoon to thank Our Lady for her help.

### Adoration

The couple's Faith has been central to their lives together for years, Damien says.

"Adoration is huge, and prayer for me is a big part of my life. The holy rosary – I've prayed the rosary the last 16 years, and I'm off heroin the last 16 years. That would be a big part of our prayer life," he says, wryly adding that with 10 children they hardly ever manage to all go to Mass at the same time. "Confession is a big thing for me: the healing I feel when I go to a priest," he adds.

A knee injury five years ago prevented him from driving or working for a year, and at a local employment agency he was advised to upskill, so he has done certificate and

diploma courses in counselling and addiction.

"For the last year I've been doing voluntary work up in Newry, up in Cuan Mhuire. I did my placement there, and am hoping to start back in the classroom in a few weeks time and finish off the degree," he says.

Meantime, as those present during the Festival of Families in Croke Park or who watched it online will have realised, Mary and he have had a series of children – aside from the 20-year-old Tammie, who now volunteers with NET Ministries, they have nine children under 14 years of age.

"We're open to life," Damien says. "We came back to the Faith, and me and Mary have a lot of lived experience that most people haven't got. We've been in the darkness of addiction that not many people experience, and when we did get a second chance we grabbed it with both hands."

\*\*\*\*\*

With their links to Knock kept up over the years, they were invited there in 2017 to speak and help launch the World Meeting of Families, sharing their testimony and meeting other families.

Fr Timothy Bartlett, Secretary General of WMOF2018, was present when they spoke telling them afterwards how impressed he'd been by their story, and a few months later iCatholic came to film the family for part of series on *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis' exhortation on marriage and family life.

About three months ago, he continues, Fr Bartlett rang him up and asked whether the Richardsons would be

going to the World Meeting. "I wonder would you do me a favour," he began, and Damien said of course, thinking they would be perhaps asked to give a brief testimony at the Pastoral Congress in the RDS.

"The favour I want you to do is I want you to meet the Holy Father," Fr Bartlett had continued – Damien says that he almost fainted with shock.

"He said we'd like you to represent the people of Europe – it wasn't even Ireland. He said have a chat with Mary and ring me back, tonight or tomorrow or whenever. I think we rang him back in about 60 seconds," he says.

### Preparation

A camera crew came out from Tyrone Productions not long afterwards, making their video over two days, all in preparation for the Festival of Families on Saturday, August 25.

"It was a beautiful day, and we'll never forget that night," Damien says. "It was an unreal night, to be sitting there and watching all the stars perform and then for the Holy Father to come in and to be sitting with him for an hour."

"When we got up there and were talking to the Holy Father, it was like as if the whole crowd was gone," Mary interjects, having joined us during the interview, "and then after he addressed us we looked around and they were all still there."

"83,000 of them," Damien adds.

"There's something Pope Francis said to us that was very profound," he continues. "He said: 'Thank you Mary and Damien. Thank you for your openness to life. It's great to have 10 children. Thank you for your testimony of love and Faith. You experienced the power of God's love to change your life completely and to bless you with the joy of a beautiful family.'"

"And he came off script, and the interpreter was sitting beside him, and Pope Francis said: 'Do they make you angry?'"

Mary laughs: "Sure they do!"

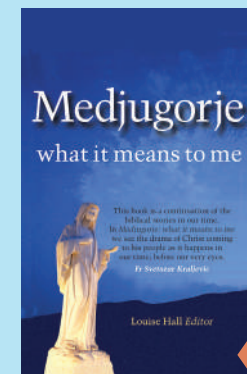
"And I said 'There's moments when they do, if we're being honest,'" continues Damien. "And he said 'This is *la vita*, this is normal'. And he laughed."

"That moment when he said it, he looked us in the eye, and that was just unreal. That was a real special moment."

For information on Cenacolo Community, which provides free residential treatment for alcohol, drug, and other addictions, visit [communitycenacolo.ie](http://communitycenacolo.ie) or call the community at 094 938 8286 or Jean on 087 268 7040.

# RELIVE THE APPARITION THROUGH THEIR VOICES

bundle offer  
ALL FOR €40  
+€4.50 P&P (ROI)



## Medjugorje: What It Means to Me

EDITOR LOUISE HALL

A collection of testimonies from Irish people – some well known, some not so well known – about how they found themselves visiting the holy place, their experiences and encounters with God whilst there and the impact it has had on their lives today

RRP: €11.99

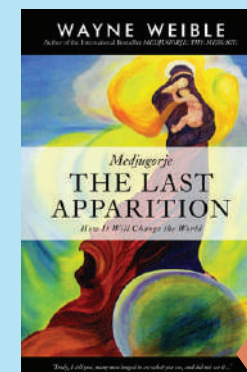


## Medjugorje and Me

EDITOR LOUISE HALL

Medjugorje and Me is the second book of testimonies from people from all over the world, about their experiences of Medjugorje. Contributors to the book come from all walks of life, including a paralysed Dublin man, ex-priest and an ex-IRA member among others inspirational stories.

RRP: €11.99

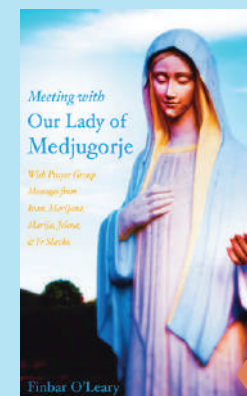


## Medjugorje: The Last Apparition

WAYNE WEIBLE

This book takes you beyond the supernatural apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a remote mountain village in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It presents a close examination of what will be the last apparition of the Mother of Jesus and how it will change the world forever.

RRP: €14.99



## Meeting with Our Lady of Medjugorje

FINBAR O'LEARY

A deep insight into the messages and the happenings in Medjugorje through in-depth interviews with the visionaries and the two locutionaries. Through them, Our Lady continues to communicate to the world her loving messages of peace, prayer, fasting, the sacraments and urgent conversion.

RRP: €9.99

**“We’re open to life...we’ve been in the darkness of addiction that not many people experience, and when we did get a second chance we grabbed it with both hands”**

To order call 01 687 4096 or email [sales@columba.ie](mailto:sales@columba.ie)

[www.columbabooks.com](http://www.columbabooks.com)

**columbaBOOKS**  
23 Merrion Sq. N., Dublin 2



# What Medjugorje means to me: Stories of Conversion

Ann Corrigan



This is our experience of a trip to Medjugorje in a little village in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Counting down the days to April 22, 2019, I would join a group parish pilgrimage to Medjugorje.

One day out of the blue the husband of my sister Margaret said that he would be on holidays from his employment from April 22, and suggested she could travel then if she wished. Their son has special needs and so they have been unable to holiday together. She decided to change her travel dates and so was now booked to travel. Her original plan was to meet me the following week in Split. I was a bit apprehensive as I was not sure what my sister would think of Medjugorje. She asked what we would do while there. I explained that pilgrims go there and it is place of peace and tranquility. She suggested she might do her own thing some of the time. I also added rather quickly that there might also be a few hills to climb! Mount Podbrdo and Krizevac.

The day arrived and our bus full of adults, teenagers and children left Zadar airport for Medjugorje. We were with a great bunch of people. We laughed as Fr Jaimie entertained everyone with a story and funny impersonations along the way. Following a short break on arrival we walked a few kilometres to the base of Blue Cross Mountain. Margaret spoke immediately of the sense of calm and inner peace she felt. The peace emanated from everywhere and everything. It is almost difficult to put into words. I was relieved as I now knew she would be happy there.

The second evening my sister was tired and I headed off to the group prayer meeting. On my return she said she could hear the prayer and music from the church all evening from her open room



© CNS

window and it was beautiful. There was a change in her the next day as she was touched by the experience. From then on she participated in the pilgrimage itinerary every day. I no longer planned our day. I followed her lead and was happy to do so. Margaret especially loved going to daily Mass and the outdoor evening Blessed Sacrament Adoration. Individuals were free to take part in whatever interested them each day. The group used WhatsApp message service for communication. We also were free to make our own plans and we took a day trip to Mostar. I had a feeling though that my sister's heart was in Medjugorje and we joined the group for the afternoon to climb Mount Podbrdo.

On the evening of a healing service Margaret purchased beautiful rosary beads which she now carries with her. By now there was a real sense of letting go of everyday struggles which gave way to inner peace. My sister truly embraced the spirit and peace of Medjugorje and we were inspired by the outstanding show of faith, devotion and warmth we saw there. The Masses and adoration were packed to capacity every day. We were also truly inspired by Fr Jaimie and Fr John, our spiritual directors and the level of witness they gave. My sister attends Mass again and visits the church often on our return home. The amaz-

**“The peace emanated from everywhere and everything. It is almost difficult to put into words” – Ann Corrigan**

ing fruits of Medjugorje is the gentle and beautiful time of grace it gives. The sense of inner peace that came over us stayed with us on our return home. Our faith was awakened and rekindled and we left Medjugorje greatly touched by the experience and the desire to return again.

Fr Jaimie Twohig



I first went to Medjugorje when I was 16 years old in the year 2005. Up until this point my faith was very lukewarm. I always went to Mass, but I was going through the motions more than anything. At that point in my life I was unhappy. There was a deep emptiness inside that I tried to fill with all the wrong things. My mother went to Medjugorje a year earlier in 2004 and she loved it. There

was a difference in her after the trip. So, when she asked me to go with her the following year I was happy to go mainly because the trip was in mid-May which meant I got a week off school! But what I received in Medjugorje was much more than that

**“Whenever I was struggling to discern my vocation a trip to Medjugorje always gave me the clarity I needed” – Fr Jaimie Twohig**

Immediately I was struck by the peace of the place and I enjoyed the group that we travelled with. One night our group had a prayer meeting. During the prayer meeting I had a great experience of a motherly love that surrounded me. To be honest I had felt Our Lady's love around me for the week, but I don't think I was in a place within myself where I was able to accept it. But at the prayer meeting this night I opened my heart to the love that Our Lady had for me. It felt like I was walking on air because in that moment I knew that Our Lady was real

and that she loved me personally as her child.

A few nights later I was still walking on air after my experience and one thought suddenly struck me; if I was going to follow this path of the love of God that Our Lady so beautifully revealed to me in Medjugorje then I am going to have to change my life. In my search for happiness I had allowed sin and selfishness to rule me. Jesus says “a tree is known by its fruits” (Luke 6:45). Sin and selfishness had made me miserable. Then I would look around at the people we travelled with and could clearly see the fruits of their lives in trying to follow God in their love, joy, peace and laughter which was such a contrast to my misery. I wanted what they had. So it may look like the miracle happened at the prayer meeting when I opened my heart to Our Lady's love but I think the real miracle happened two nights later because in that moment I saw my old life and the life God was offering, and by His Grace, I chose God. That is not to say I never struggled with sin again, I did and still do but I thank God for the Sacrament of Confession and the beauty of it that is so clearly on display in Medjugorje. In Medjugorje so many lives have been transformed by the grace of the Sacrament of Confession.

I have been a priest for nearly three years and ever since that first trip to Med-

jugorje in 2005 I have been there nearly every year since. Whenever I was struggling to discern my vocation a trip to Medjugorje always gave me the clarity I needed. There are so many conflicting voices in the world we're in. Going to Medjugorje is like going home to your mother's and allowing her voice to direct you. In Medjugorje she says to each of us in a different way what she said to the servants at the wedding feast of Cana “Do whatever He tells you” (John 2:5).



Grace O'Shea

Medjugorje is a small town in the country of Bosnia. Our Lady began to appear to the children in 1981, when Bosnia was still a communist country. The children that Our Lady appeared to were in grave danger by declaring that they had seen the Blessed Mother. However, Our Lady protected them and she





Michael Collins

is still appearing to this day in Medjugorje.

Our Lady's first message to the children was "Peace, Peace, and only Peace."

**“I had heard people describe it as an anointed and peaceful place, but I had never really believed it until I went there myself” – Grace O’Shea**

Medjugorje is the most peaceful place I have ever been to. I first went there in 2017 with my family. I had heard people describe it as an anointed and peaceful place, but I had never really believed it until I went there myself. The whole feeling of Medjugorje is peaceful; the people are peaceful and the atmosphere is peaceful. However, there is also an inner peace that ascends upon anyone who visits Medjugorje. It is a peace that cannot be described, understood, or imagined. Even if there is suffering or pain in one's life they can still experience this peace. The unexplainable peace in Medjugorje is also a proof of Our Lady's true presence there.

My family had always wished to go to Medjugorje. We tried saving for the trip many times but something would always happen to drain

the money. In December of 2016, we decided to start the Five First Saturday devotion to Our Lady to ask her to bring us to Medjugorje. The Five First Saturday devotion requires that, for five consecutive first Saturdays of each month, you attend Mass, receive Confession (within eight days) and say the rosary with a 15 minute meditation on the mysteries of the rosary. Although we hadn't told anyone about our intention, on the second Saturday we were anonymously given a donation that paid for the trip to Medjugorje. We were elated! Our Lady is so generous. We finished our fifth First Saturday devotion on April 1 and headed off to Medjugorje on April 2. Our Lady was paving the way for our family to go to Medjugorje and receive the peace and graces she had waiting for us over there.

Our Lady knows that we would never be able to grow closer to her and to Jesus on our own. So, she has given us five stones to follow in order that we can get to Heaven. These five stones are: praying with the heart, fasting, Confession, the Eucharist, and Scripture. By following these five stones, we are immersed in the love and protection of Our Lady and Christ. The Five First Saturdays is an amazing gift from Our Lady. During this devotion, we are given the opportunity to put into practice the five stones of Medjugorje and Our Lady

never leaves our prayers and intentions unanswered.

Medjugorje is a very special place to go. In the past three years, I have been to Medjugorje four times. Our Lady has always called me back to visit her and to receive the peace she has waiting for me over there. I highly recommend for anyone who wants to experience Our Lady or come closer to her to visit Medjugorje, and receive the peace and graces she has waiting for you.

### Michael Collins

Medjugorje for me is where I got a taste of the internal peace that God wants all of his children to experience in this lifetime. I had visited this beautiful place twice in my early teens but it wasn't until I landed in this small town in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 2014 at the age of 26 that I realised how special a place it was. It was the place where I finally listened to what God was telling me all my life, which as St Augustine preaches "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord; and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee." In other words, until you come to know God and live through God you will be restless and the peace and happiness that every human being longs for will be absent.

This peace which many people talk about experiencing in Medjugorje is something which is difficult to find in our world today. Through my visit I regained a sense of who I was and what God created me for and that I am greatly loved by God, all through Mary. Our Lady constantly points the way to her son and this is exactly what she does in Medjugorje. She calls for daily conversion and an encounter with Christ through the Sacraments. She is always looking out for her 'little children' guiding us and leading us back to the right path. One of my highlights of Medjugorje is the outdoor adoration at night, where thousands of people of all ages worship Jesus and regain that peace which we all yearn for.

**“This peace which many people talk about experiencing in Medjugorje, is something which is difficult to find in our world today” – Michael Collins**

There are many other beautiful parts of Medjugorje from Cross Mountain, to Apparition Hill, Blue Cross, to the Risen Christ the list goes on. But each time I go back a different place becomes my favourite spot, each one where I experience a different encounter with Christ on

this journey of faith. Medjugorje is really something to be experienced, no words can ever explain or capture it fully. To anyone reading this I say go and experience the peace of Medjugorje, you will not regret it! Our Lady Queen of Peace, pray for us!



### Roisin Daly

My first encounter with Medjugorje began back in 1989, when my dad took me on a holiday to Medjugorje along with my two Aunts. Wow was it different then. My memories were of a beautiful church resting at the base of a mountain which at the top had a white cross. The time we were out coincided with one of the first 'Youth Weeks' which Fr Liam Lawton took part in. The group was small enough to all sit under the trees in the park close to the school. If you wanted a cold drink or ice-cream, a young local boy had a cool box on his bike and you got it there. I remember being prayed with in one of the meetings and that was my first experience of the Holy Spirit, which at the age of 16 years old, left a lasting impression on me.

It took me a further 18 years to come back, due to the busyness of life! However, as soon as I landed in Medjugorje, I felt the presence of a beautiful peace and the feeling of not wanting to leave. As it happened due to overbooked flights and my boss at the time giving me an extra week off, I managed to stay two weeks in Medjugorje. This was truly a life changing experience. I was fully living in the world, I had the great job, plenty of money however I still wasn't truly happy and always had a feeling of a hole in my heart. I managed to attend some prayer meetings at that time out in Medjugorje and I was beginning to fully give myself over to Our Lady, to understand Confession, adoration and fully take part in Mass and not just attend 'out of duty'. On one occasion as I went into the little Adoration Chapel, and knelt down and began to pray, in my heart I felt Jesus was using a power hose and filled it with so much love, I thought I was going to burst. That was the first time I truly felt His unconditional love, and when I went outside the tears began to flow, even though what I felt was so much happiness, in those

moments Jesus became alive for me, Our Lady had brought me back to Medjugorje and her son had healed my broken heart.

On coming back to reality, my life had changed, I felt very uneasy in the old life and slowly my world was beginning to change. I became fully immersed in Youth 2000, and then onto Pure In Heart, where I met my husband. We were lucky enough to attend World Youth Day in Cologne – 2005. We were with Pure In Heart and from Cologne we headed to Medjugorje for a week, this was truly a piece of heaven on earth.

Now going forward another 11 years, we were lucky enough to bring our children back with us for a week, when they were aged five, six and seven. What a wonderful way for them to see people freely expressing their faith. We also had those wonderful moments, I really wanted to stay in adoration a little longer, and my prayer was answered when my youngest child fell asleep in my arms!

On the 30th Anniversary of my first visit to Medjugorje, as a family we joined Fr Jamie and Fr John along with the other 120 people or so for yet another amazing week in Medjugorje. This time as the children have gotten older to the age of 10, nine and eight, they were delighted to spend a week with their friends, going to Mass, climbing the mountain and sharing meal times with them. The friendships have grown as we continue to live out our lives in the arms of Our Blessed Mother as she not only teaches us but also our children how to become 'Children of God'! I look forward to continuing our journey together.



### Stuart McGovern

The first time I went to Medjugorje was in 1985 when I was 12 years old. On our first night I found myself kneeling beside the six visionaries on apparition hill. I knew it was a solemn moment, and I knew that Our Lady was appearing, but I was too young to really grasp what was happening. I looked at Ivan's face as he spoke, but I didn't know what he was saying. Then it was all over.

My mother had gone to Medjugorje a year earlier. She had witnessed a miracle

while she was there, as had the rest of her small group, and she had come home a different person. They were all convinced that Medjugorje was a place of special graces. Her real wish was to get the whole family back there and 12 months later she got her wish. It took us two days to get there and we only stayed for three days, but for me, they were to prove to be three very important days.

A few years later when I was 15 years old my father died and I was so angry with God that I pretty much gave up my faith. I went through the motions here and there but I was far removed from what it was to be a Catholic. I spent the next 10 years searching the world for happiness. Life was a party and was great fun but deep down there was always something missing, a deep longing for something more. For a long time I thought it was just the grief of losing my father, and to some extent it was. At the same time I knew that I was running from the only one who could help me and heal me and give me back the joy I once had. My initial experience in Medjugorje was always in the back of my mind so I decided to go back again.

**“The atmosphere is quite unique and difficult to describe except to say that there is a feeling of heaven's presence” – Stuart McGovern**

I returned in 2007 and as soon as I arrived I felt a great peace. As the days went by I realised that Medjugorje really was a place of special graces. Being there is not really something that can be expressed to others. The atmosphere is quite unique and difficult to describe except to say that there is a feeling of heaven's presence. At the same time it's a very social place and a place where I've made some very close friends. Since that trip 12 years ago I've gone annually and each time it has been like a shot in the arm for my spiritual life. I immediately recognise the benefits of going in my life and always look forward to my next trip. When people ask what it's like and why I go each year I find it difficult to answer because it's a personal experience between me and the Queen of Peace, between me and my God. That kind of thing is too difficult to explain. The only answer I can give is the same answer Jesus gave to Andrew and John when they wanted to know where He lived, 'Come and See'.



# Encountering heaven on earth

**Gabriela Zarzycka  
& Aleksandra  
Januszevska**

**A** couple of weeks ago, we had a very spontaneous idea to go together on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Medjugorje is a small village in Bosnia and Hercegovina where the Blessed Virgin Mary has been appearing since 1981. We are sisters – the elder Aleksandra is a busy homeschooling mother of six and the younger, Gabriela, decided to change her job after 14 years. We both needed a break from our busy lives and space to pray and think.

## Alexandra's story

The very first time I heard about Medjugorje was in 1994 when I was 17 years old and I was in secondary school. I read an article in a Christian magazine about this small village in a far away country, where Our Lady appears regularly. I thought that I would love to visit and experience this place as any other apparition that I heard about happened long before I was born. Unfortunately, there was war in the Balkans and going there was not even an option.

In secondary school, I talked about faith with friends a lot, many of them were Protestants and they used to say that they didn't need Our Lady and Jesus is the only mediator between God and men.

**“I fell in love in praying the rosary and in that moment the whole Mariology became clear and I understood why we need Her in our lives”**

I still didn't understand why a man needed Our Lady, I was very confused. A few years later I obtained a master's degree in Theology and even though I had the knowledge of Our Lady I still didn't have it in my heart.

In 2012 we finally decided to visit Medjugorje, I was both excited and a bit sceptical, but in this little village between mountains something amazing happened – I experienced Our Lady in my heart, I experienced her as my mother. I fell in love in praying the rosary and in that moment the whole

Mariology became clear and I understood why we need her in our lives. I got so close to her and that hasn't changed since.

## Gabriela's story

I have just returned from my fifth pilgrimage to Medjugorje where I was blessed to attend the apparition of Our Lady to Mirjana.

**“I remember very clearly my first arrival to Medjugorje, I suddenly felt this instant peace in my heart, as if there were no worries in my life because someone else took care of them all for me”**

The first I heard about Medjugorje was about 10 years ago at a Youth 2000 retreat. I heard of people's experiences, of how their lives had changed since visiting this small village in Bosnia and Hercegovina, and most importantly about Our Lady's messages to all of us. I then started to read everything I could find on Medjugorje and felt this desire to go there and experience what others were talking about.

I remember very clearly my first arrival to Medjugorje, I suddenly felt this instant peace in my heart, as if there were no worries in my life because someone else took care of them all for me. Now I understand why she is also called 'The Queen of Peace'.

Medjugorje to me is heaven on earth. I wish I



Gabriela (right) and Aleksandra at Apparition Hill, Medjugorje.



could go there every year, I wish I could take all my relatives there, and friends – but especially the non-believers so they could experience the love Our Lady and her son Jesus Christ have for them. As Our Lady said in one of her messages: “If you knew how much I love you you'd cry of joy”.





# Final Thoughts



## Fr Ruairí Ó Domhnaill, Administrator at Carlow Cathedral, examines the experience of hearing Confession in Medjugorje

There is something about the experience of hearing Confessions in Medjugorje that even the most skeptical of priests has to admit that the unique and sacred quality of this sacramental encounter in this little village in Bosnia Herzegovina is rarely experienced anywhere else.

I have often listened to priests returning from Medjugorje after their first visit who have been deeply moved by what they have experienced while celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation there. They speak of the huge numbers queuing to be absolved of their sins, of the significant presence of younger people, and of the experiences of those who have been away from the Church for decades and decades, and who now, in this sacred place, express a deep yearning to return to their faith.

Some of my colleagues account for this phenomenon by saying that wherever people gather to pray and celebrate the Sacraments the grace of God will be evident. They imply that the very obvi-

ous renewal of faith which occurs in Medjugorje is not evidence of the presence of Our Lady but simply the 'natural' consequence of people coming together to pray.

When I hear this comment from priests I always reply by saying, 'If Our Lady is not appearing in Medjugorje then you should definitely go there because it means that you could replicate the same back in your own parish.' No one, as yet, has risen to the challenge!

**“But in Medjugorje I encountered God as real, alive, and almost tangibly close to me”**

I travelled to Medjugorje for my very first time when I was only 16 years of age. The seven days which I spent there on that first occasion profoundly touched my life. I was raised in a large Catholic family where we prayed

the Rosary each evening and attended Mass each Sunday and whenever we could during the week.

But in Medjugorje I encountered God as real, alive, and almost tangibly close to me. As I prepare these words I have a picture on my desk of my 16-year-old self standing outside Saint James' Church on that first visit. Even today I can remember the profound joy which I experienced in that week and it still moves me to tears as I recall that memory over 30 years later.

When I returned from Medjugorje on that very first trip I remember feeling a certain frustration as I tried to put into words why exactly my visit to that little corner of Communist Yugoslavia had impacted so deeply on me. Others who returned spoke about the sense of peace which they found there among the hills; but for me as a teenager 'peace' was too passive a word to describe my own experience.

A number of weeks after my return I remember going

to Sunday Mass and hearing the priest proclaiming St Luke's account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection of Jesus.

**“As a priest I see my primary purpose as guiding people in their search for God.”**

As soon as the priest pronounced the sentence, “Did not our hearts burn within us as he walked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us,” I realised that those words articulated exactly how I had felt in those first days of pilgrimage. My

heart had burned within me as I encountered Christ as real and alive.

That encounter with Christ through prayer is at the heart of the Medjugorje message. Many people comment negatively on the frequency of messages which emanate from Medjugorje. They complain that the messages seem bland and repetitious. But the key to understanding the messages is that they are not simply to be read for information. They are in fact given as an aid to prayer. Mary acts as an anam cara of sorts in Medjugorje. Her messages are given to be prayed over and meditated upon. Mary's purpose in Medjugorje is to lead us to Christ through our practice of personal prayer. As a priest I see my primary

purpose as guiding people in their search for God. One of the most valuable experiences for priests who accompany groups to Medjugorje is not only to experience a deepening of our own relationship with God but to witness first hand as people recognize, often for the first time, the closeness of God to them in their lives.

**“To witness the change which occurs in each group as they journey through their week in Medjugorje is a wonderful and humbling experience”**

To witness the change which occurs in each group as they journey through their week in Medjugorje is a wonderful and humbling experience. I am delighted that Pope Francis has sanctioned official pilgrimages to Medjugorje at both parish and diocesan level. It can only be a good thing that the obvious fruits of Medjugorje will now be more abundantly experienced within the wider church community.

