



## **My Lourdes Story: Why One Week Changed My Life (and Why You Should Come Too) By Molly Ingleton**

I've been going to Lourdes with the Catholic Association every single year since 2012, the first time I went I was 17. Back then I had no idea what I was walking into. I remember standing by the coach in London, suitcase in hand, and thinking "Why on earth did I sign up for this?" But the moment I got on that coach and started talking to the other young helpers, everything shifted. It turned into one of the most important weeks of my life.

### **What It's Really Like to Go for the First Time**

I won't lie I was nervous. It was my first time away from my parents, and I was worried I wouldn't fit in, especially because I felt I "wasn't Catholic enough." At 17, I was questioning pretty much everything, including my faith. I genuinely thought I might spend the whole week feeling out of place.

But Lourdes didn't judge me. It welcomed me.

The masses, the services, the conversations... it helped me reconnect with my faith in a way I didn't expect. And every year since has felt like a reset, a reminder of who I want to be and how I want to give back.

### **The Work: Hard, Real, and Completely Worth It**

I started as a Young Helper/Handmaid. We worked in teams with people of all ages, helping both hotel-based Assisted Pilgrims and those staying in the Accueil, who often have more complex needs.

My very first shift was at 6am in the Accueil. I was terrified. My first job was to help a lady called Teresa shower and get ready. Two hours later, one flooded bathroom and a lot of laughter we were finally ready for breakfast. She was the first person I cared for in Lourdes, and she ended up becoming a huge part of my life for the next seven years. I still treasure that friendship.

The work can be tough, with early mornings, tired legs, and lots of pushing wheelchairs in the August heat. But the gratitude, the smiles, the conversations... it changes you in the best possible way.



Over the 14 years I've been attending the pilgrimage, I have worked a variety of roles within the Catholic Association. I started as a young helper splitting the week working with Assisted Pilgrims in both the hotel and Accueil. I have been both a Deputy Team leader and a Team leader. The last few years I have been on Core Care that is a team of volunteers that works with the Accueil Assisted Pilgrims, there is a lot more care involved but spending more time with those pilgrims is always such a pleasure. Outside of the Pilgrimage I also sit on the Hospitality committee I attended regular meetings throughout the year helping to plan the upcoming pilgrimage.

### **The Fun: Because It's Not All Hard Work**

One of the things that surprised me most was how much fun the week is. Young helpers stay together in the same hotel, so you're never on your own. The first day is all about getting to know each other and figuring out Lourdes together.

We have youth nights, night prayers, a youth Mass, and a big youth party where everyone can unwind. And every evening volunteers gather at a local hotel the Solitude to share stories, laugh, and usually end up in a singalong. It's honestly one of the best parts of the week.

I've made friends for life through Lourdes. We meet up throughout the year, and last year I even went to the wedding of someone I met on my very first pilgrimage.



### My Favourite Memory

In 2019 I took Teresa out for the afternoon. It was boiling hot and, despite having been to Lourdes many times, we managed to get completely lost. We found some shade and ended up watching an Italian pilgrimage group singing and dancing together. Later we had ice cream at The Little Flower (which really does have the best ice cream in town), and she spent the rest of the afternoon trying to marry me off to a French pilgrim.

It was her last pilgrimage and that memory is something I'll carry with me forever.



### Why You Should Come Too

If you're thinking about it, even just a little, my advice is simple: **do it**.

You don't need to be super religious, you don't need experience, you don't need to go with friends. You just need to show up with an open heart.

Lourdes gave me lifelong friends, unforgettable memories, and a deeper understanding of myself and my faith. It's the most exhausting week of my year and absolutely the best.

### Want to Join Us This Year?

We're looking for helpers of **all ages**, and if you want to attend as a pilgrim instead, you're just as welcome.

If you're 17–24 and want a meaningful, fun, life-changing experience this summer, Lourdes might be exactly the thing you didn't know you needed.

### To learn more or apply:

Look on the Catholic Association website to find out more <https://www.catholicassociation.co.uk/join>

**Catholic Association Pilgrimage**  
Founded in 1891

Friday 21 to Friday 28 August 2026  
**Join our Young Helper's Group (age 16-25)**  
Register your interest:- <https://tinyurl.com/InterestCA2026>  
[youth@catholicassociation.co.uk](mailto:youth@catholicassociation.co.uk)  
[www.catholicassociation.co.uk](http://www.catholicassociation.co.uk)

**ALL ARE WELCOME**

*Why volunteer?*

- \* Meet other people your age
- \* Share your faith with others
- \* Fun and fulfilment
- \* Connect to others of all ages
- \* Learn more about Saint Bernadette and Lourdes
- \* Spiritually nourishing

Subsidised places will be available for young people