

Return to Lourdes



□ Bishop Stephen Wright with pilgrims from our diocese.

OUR diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes – the first in four years – was blessed from the start, writes Mick Davison.

We were joined by thousands of young people visiting as part of their journey to World Youth Day in Portugal.

On the Saturday and Sunday evenings the underground basilica of St Pius X became a huge dormitory for over 3,000 young people.

We shared the leading of the Torchlight Procession with Arundel and Brighton and Salford pilgrims. Some of our helpers were given the privilege of carrying the statue of Our Lady.

Being joined by the World Youth Day pilgrims turned the procession into one of the most vibrant, joyous and prayerful experiences that even those of us who had been to Lourdes on many occasions could remember, with tradi-

tional Marian hymns; singing and traditional drumming from the African contingent and an American choir that reminded everyone of Sister Act. The Rosary Square was full.

A request was made for a period of silent prayer for the young people travelling to Portugal. I thought: 'There's no way you'll get silence in a crowd this size', but as though someone had flicked a switch, there was complete silence.

It was a hairs on the back of the neck moment as tens of thousands of pilgrims united in prayer.

The procession ended with the young people who did not make it into Rosary Square performing a unique Mexican wave with their lighted candles.

● Turn to pages 8-9 for more.

Mini Vinnies' are delighted to welcome a special guest



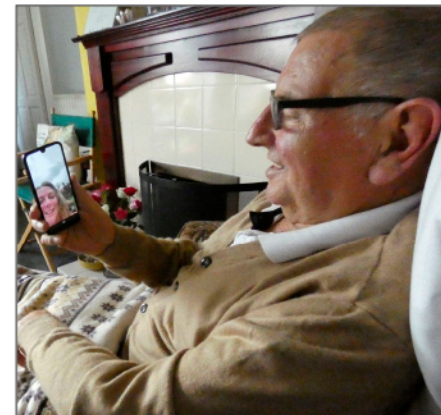
MINI Vinnies at St Philip Neri Catholic Primary, Dunston, were delighted to welcome Ian Mearns MP to their school in July, writes Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust director of ethos, Barbara Reilly-O'Donnell.

They wrote to him regarding the cost of living crisis and invited him to visit to hear what they were doing to support families – and so they could find out what the government

was doing to help people locally.

After giving Mr Mearns a school tour they asked him many probing questions about how people can feel supported in these difficult times. It was a great opportunity for advocacy – the children felt listened to and empowered to continue their good work.

● Turn to page 2 to read more news from the trust.



□ Joe McCabe with wife Valerie and his letter from Cardinal Nichols, left, and speaking to his daughter, Catherine, above.

Thanks for all you've done, Joe

by John Bailey

JOE McCabe got the shock of his life when the morning post brought him a thank you letter from the top of the Church in England and Wales.

The popular member of Our Lady and St Cuthbert parish in Crook, well known by SVP members, opened the surprise epistle on August 4 and was stunned to see it was signed by Westminster's Cardinal Vincent Nichols.

Joe and wife Valerie's first puzzle was how he had come to know Joe's circumstances – including recent confinement at home on palliative care for terminal liver cancer.

It turned out one of his daughters, Catherine, who lives in Edinburgh, had contacted Cardinal Nichols to tell him about her dad's illness and how much he'd be missed by lots of people besides his loving family.

Her elder sister Julie Tam contacted Northern Cross.

In the letter His Eminence says: "For all of this, and for so much more that is known only to you and to God, I write to thank you most sincerely."

Catherine had told the cardinal about her dad's start as an altar boy at Our Lady and St Cuthbert's, which he only retired from this summer, aged 86. Then his service as a eucharistic min-

ister taking holy communion to sick and housebound parishioners, boundless work for the St Vincent de Paul Society, and his magnificent sale of Northern Cross at the church door each month... all of which Cardinal Nichols mentions in his letter.

The 'much more' includes serving on the board of Crook's Leonard Cheshire Home and visiting residents there, helping a lady called Angie and eventually ten others from Crook to attend an SVP dance in Newton Aycliffe once a month, organising the SVP's annual summer fete at Burn Hall when it was a Mill Hill mission centre, building an audience through stalls, a fun walk, a famous football tournament for school and family teams and a procession to Our Lady.

The Cardinal wrote: "In doing so, I thank you for using the years that God has graciously given you to serve Him and his holy Church with great faithfulness and generosity."

Cardinal Vincent twice offered a blessing and prayers, and concluded: "I will remember you and your family in my prayers and do keep me and my ministry in yours."

Joe promises to do just that – keeping up his daily full Rosary with the parish 18inch tall statue of Our Lady in the living room at home where his hospital bed is now sited.

"Each morning when I wake up," Joe

told Northern Cross, "my eye catches sight of the statue and I give my pal Our Lady a wink. She's always looked after us along with Valerie."

Julie, Catherine, their brother Joseph and their families – along with Valerie's wider family and Joe's sister Kate Bolton – have been moved by the personal nature of the letter which now sits on the family mantelpiece framed in place of honour.

Parish priest Fr Nick Jennings read it on one of his visits and the parish FcJ Sisters took a copy for their prayers.

So how did Catherine McCabe Raitt reach the cardinal? "My first thought was to ask the pope to say a Mass for my dad," she said.

St Mary's Catholic Cathedral, Edinburgh, helped Catherine with the cardinal's address and phone number in Westminster.

"His secretary got in touch and we exchanged emails about what my dad has done in his life helping people through the Church," Catherine explained.

Joe added: "Our Catherine talked to the cardinal and when she began to talk about details he said he wanted to make a note and write a letter."

"The cardinal was as good as his word and has followed up his prayers by writing to thank dad. I'm very grateful to Cardinal Nichols and thank him very much," Catherine ended.

Nicholas is our golden boy

THE parishioners of St Gregory's Church, South Shields, have been dazzled by the achievements of one of their young altar servers, Nicholas Balls, who won gold and silver medals in this summer's Special Olympics, writes Maria Frazer.

Nicholas, pictured, represented Great Britain at the Berlin games.

The free-style swimmer left the rest of the field gasping in the 1,500m swim, crossing the finish line six minutes ahead of his closest competitor.

Back home Nicholas, 19, delighted Sunday morning Massgoers with the presentation of his two medals and received a hearty round of applause. Fr Keith Walker was amazed at their size and weight!

As a young boy, Nicholas was a pupil at St Gregory's Primary, later attending St Joseph's RC Academy, Hebburn, and St Bede's Catholic School, Peterlee.

Having just completed his studies, he is now a lifeguard, working at swimming pools in Heworth, Whickham, Birtley and Gateshead.

Nicholas has to fit in many hours of training each week, but his hard work, commitment and perseverance have paid off.

It's not the first time this year Nicholas has touched gold – in March he received his Gold John Paul II Award.

His eyes now are set on major competitions in the coming years.

Nicholas – we're sure it'll all go swimmingly for you!

