

In This Issue >>>

Welcome

News & Events

Quiz

Notices

Key Dates

Issue
46



Army Roman Catholic Newsletter



Welcome

From

*The Revd. Fr. Stephen Sharkey CF
Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain (Army)*



Welcome to Issue 46 of the Army Roman Catholic Newsletter

As our soldiers, chaplains and military families return from the International Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes, we give thanks for the faith, fellowship and prayer shared in the presence of Our Lady.

Lourdes brings together pilgrims from across the world, not as rivals, but as brothers and sisters seeking peace and healing. At a time when conflict and uncertainty continue to affect so many, that witness of unity and hope remains as important as ever.

For those who serve, faith offers a source of strength and resilience amid the demands of military life. May Our Lady of Lourdes watch over all who serve and guide us as instruments of reconciliation in a troubled world.

Ministry in Motion



A Special Day of Grace at St Pius X - by Fr. Youakim Chihane



On Sunday, 10 May 2026, the Roman Catholic community at the Church of Saint Pius X gathered to celebrate a particularly joyful occasion: the reception of Ethan-James David Johns into the Church through the Sacraments of Initiation.

Ethan's baptism marked the culmination of a period of preparation undertaken alongside a group of young military personnel who had requested instruction through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) programme. Their commitment and enthusiasm throughout the course have been a source of encouragement and inspiration to all involved.

Among the group, one candidate had previously received First Holy Communion, and another had received the Sacrament of Confirmation in the United Kingdom. Through their shared journey of faith, they supported one another as they deepened their understanding of the Catholic faith and prepared to receive the sacraments.

During the celebration, Ethan-James David Johns received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Holy Communion, fully entering into the life of the Church. Standing alongside him as Godfather was Finn Lewis Collin, whose presence and support marked this important milestone in Ethan's spiritual journey.

The ceremony was a moving witness to God's grace at work within our military community and a reminder of the enduring call to faith that unites us, wherever our service may take us.

We give thanks to the Lord for these abundant blessings and ask for His continued guidance and protection upon Ethan, his family, his Godfather Finn, and all those who continue their journey of faith.

"For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body." (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Please keep Ethan-James David Johns and all our RCIA candidates in your prayers.



The Roman Catholic Community of British Forces Cyprus in Akrotiri experienced a moment of great joy and grace on Friday, 29th May, when five children from our community; Luke Middleton, Aiden Muzavazi, Gabriella Muzavazi, Jason Muzavazi, and Penasio Tokaiqali received their First Holy Communion.

The celebration, presided over by Fr. Youakim Chihane, brought together the children and their families in an atmosphere of joy, prayer, and thanksgiving.

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Mrs. Anne Monkcom for her commitment, dedication, and care in preparing the children for this important step in their journey of faith. She reminded us with meaningful words that her role was to build upon the solid foundations of faith already laid by the parents, whom she described as the family's "domestic church."

We thank the families for their witness and steadfast support, and we entrust these children to the Lord, praying that they may continue to grow in faith, hope, and love, deepening their friendship with Jesus each day.

Our warmest congratulations and best wishes go to all the children who received their First Holy Communion and to their families on this special occasion.



“Faith Gives You Strength” My Experience in Lourdes

Written by Ciara Quinn



Earlier this year, I was lucky enough to go on a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes with the Scottish youth group as part of Group 207, supported by HCPT. What I first thought would just be a trip abroad quickly turned into one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. Lourdes is known around the world as a place of healing and faith, and from the moment we arrived, it felt really special. Being surrounded by so many different people, all with their own reasons for being there, was honestly quite emotional and really made me think.

As an army child, I've grown up moving around a lot and getting used to change. But one thing that's always stayed the same is the sense of community, and for me, my faith has been a big part of that too. It's always been something steady I could rely on, no matter where we were. Going to Lourdes helped me realise how much faith and resilience go hand in hand, especially in a life connected to service.

A significant influence in making this journey possible was the generosity and kindness of Father Stephen Sharkey. Having been a close family friend for many years, especially during my father's service in the army, his support was instrumental in me taking part in this pilgrimage, and there are no words that can express how thankful I am for his support, thank you from the bottom of my heart. This pilgrimage was not merely a personal voyage, but a powerful reminder of the strength found in community and the importance of giving back, principles that lie at the very heart of both faith and military service.

One of the highlights of the trip was meeting other military groups who were also in Lourdes. Even though we were far from home, there was still that same sense of connection and understanding. It really showed how strong the military community is, wherever you go.



During the trip, we took part in services and processions and spent a lot of time together as a group. But the main thing I'll remember is how close we all became. We supported each other, laughed together, and shared moments that I'll never forget.

This experience taught me a lot about being patient, appreciating what you have, and looking out for others. It also pushed me out of my comfort zone in a good way and helped me appreciate the small moments, like lighting a candle or just having a proper conversation with someone.

Lourdes is often described as life-changing, and now I understand why. It gave me time to reflect, grow in my faith, and connect with people in a way I hadn't before.

I'm so thankful to everyone who helped make this trip possible, especially Father Stephen and everyone who supported me along the way. It's something I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.

This pilgrimage meant a lot to me. It showed me how closely faith, service, and community are connected and how those values are a big part of who I am growing up in an army family.

"Faith gives you strength, wherever life takes you."



The 66th International Military Pilgrimage - Lourdes 2026



The International Military Pilgrimage (IMP) to Lourdes once again brought together servicemen and women from across the world in a shared spirit of faith, fellowship, and service. Thursday 21st May 2026 saw the UK Contingent depart for the annual pilgrimage to Lourdes, joining military personnel, veterans, clergy, and families from many nations in this longstanding tradition of prayer and reflection.

Throughout the pilgrimage, the contingent took part in Masses, processions, and acts of remembrance, while also strengthening the bonds of comradeship that unite the Armed Forces community. The pilgrimage concluded with the UK Contingent returning home on Monday 25th May 2026 after a meaningful and memorable few days in Lourdes.

The following articles reflect the participation, reflections, and experiences of our military pilgrims, highlighting the personal faith, fellowship, and service encountered throughout this year's pilgrimage.



Army Cadets attend The International Military Pilgrimage



For more than four years, Army Cadets have had the privilege of attending the International Military Pilgrimage (IMP) to Lourdes, joining thousands of military personnel, veterans, chaplains, and pilgrims from across the world in this unique gathering of faith, reflection, friendship, and service. What began as an opportunity for a small number of cadets five years ago has become an experience that leaves a lasting and often profound impact on those fortunate enough to attend.



For many cadets, the IMP is their first experience of international travel within a military environment and their first opportunity to engage with people and serving personnel from other nations and cultures. The shared experiences of worship, ceremony, music, conversation, and pilgrimage help build confidence, independence, resilience, and teamwork, while broadening horizons and strengthening communication skills. Cadets return with a deeper appreciation of service, community, and the importance of supporting others.

The spiritual impact of Lourdes should not be underestimated. Whether attending as practising Christians, members of other faiths, or with no faith background at all, cadets consistently speak about the atmosphere of peace, kindness, and reflection that they encounter there. Participating in Mass at the Grotto, walking in procession with thousands of pilgrims, and witnessing acts of compassion and care towards sick and vulnerable pilgrims leaves a lasting impression. Many cadets describe developing a greater sense of belonging, purpose, and understanding of faith in action, while others reflect on the experience as one that encouraged quiet reflection on their own values, relationships, and future aspirations.



Above all, the IMP continues to demonstrate to cadets the strength of international fraternity and shared humanity. In a world often marked by division, Lourdes offers young people an opportunity to experience friendship, respect, and solidarity across nations, cultures, and beliefs, lessons that will remain with them long after the pilgrimage has ended.



Faith, Service and Renewal: A Military Nurse in Lourdes

Written by Maj Lorraine Berry RAMS QN
Matron/Advanced Nurse Practitioner
Medical Training Facility, RMAF



Attending the annual military pilgrimage to Lourdes for the first time was a deeply moving and unexpectedly powerful experience for me. Like many others travelling with the British military contingent, I arrived with curiosity and perhaps a little uncertainty about what the week would hold. I left spiritually refreshed, emotionally calmer and with a far greater appreciation of the importance of faith, reflection and fellowship within the military and my role as a military nurse.

Lourdes itself is extraordinary. Nestled against the backdrop of the Pyrenees, it offers a sense of peace that is difficult to describe fully unless experienced in person. Despite the thousands of pilgrims present from nations across the world, there was a remarkable atmosphere of calm, kindness and quiet reflection. The torchlight processions, the Masses, the music and moments of silent prayer created space to step away from the pressures and relentless pace of everyday military and civilian life.

For many of us in uniform, life is often lived at speed. Responsibility, operational demands and the need always to remain resilient can leave little room for stillness. Lourdes somehow allows that pause. It provides an opportunity not only for spiritual renewal, but also for emotional decompression, friendship building and reconnection with what truly matters.

Marching through Lourdes in full FAD uniform under the heat of the southern French sun was certainly memorable and 'extremely' warm at times. Yet there was also something profoundly important about that visible presence of military personnel from across the services and allied nations walking together in faith and solidarity. The camaraderie was immediate. Conversations started easily, friendships formed quickly and rank seemed less important than shared humanity.

One of the greatest strengths of the pilgrimage was the opportunity to meet people from different services, cap badges and nations in an entirely different context from operational or professional environments. There was socialising, laughter, storytelling and mutual support, but also genuine openness. It was a welcoming environment for non-believers and believers of all faiths not just for practising Catholics. People spoke honestly about challenge, loss, service and hope. In many ways, Lourdes reminded us that strength is not simply physical robustness or professional competence; it also includes compassion, moral courage and spiritual resilience.

Within the military we often speak of the moral component of fighting power, the values, beliefs, sense of purpose and cohesion that sustain personnel through adversity. The pilgrimage reinforced this powerfully. It strengthened community, reflection and shared values in a way few other experiences can. Faith, whether deeply held or quietly explored, has an important place within the wellbeing of many service personnel, particularly in difficult or uncertain times.

What struck me most was that Lourdes was not solely about religion in the formal sense. It was about humanity. It was about service, humility, kindness and perspective. It reminded us that beneath the uniform we are all simply people — sometimes tired, sometimes carrying burdens unseen, and all in need of hope and connection.

As a first-time pilgrim, I arrived thinking I was attending an event. I left understanding that Lourdes is far more than that. It is a place of restoration, spiritually, emotionally and psychologically as well as catharsis. For those serving in the military community, that is not merely beneficial, it is invaluable.

United in Lourdes

Written by SSgt Tobias Chapman, SQMS, 29 Regt RLC

Fourteen Service Personnel (SP) from 29 Regiment RLC recently took part in a memorable visit to Lourdes, representing a diverse mix of both religious and non-religious individuals. Despite differing personal beliefs, the group shared a common sense of curiosity and openness, which allowed them all to engage deeply with the rich traditions of the Catholic faith on display. From the candlelit processions to the quiet moments of reflection at the Grotto, many found themselves unexpectedly moved by the atmosphere and history of the pilgrimage site. Even those who did not identify as religious spoke of feeling a profound sense of peace and connection, describing Lourdes as having a unique and almost magical quality. The experience fostered a collective sense of unity and reflection among the group, with many returning feeling more grounded, enlightened, and, in their own way, closer to a sense of something greater.

LOURDES

A UNIQUE MEETING PLACE!

Written by Fr. Volodymyr Sampara, Chaplain RTR

It is my second time in Army chaplaincy service that I have gone to Lourdes for the International Military Pilgrimage, held from 21-25 May 2026. Every time you are there, it feels like a completely fresh visit, even if you have been there before. It is a special place of hope, peace, and fraternity among multinational brothers and sisters in arms.

There are many reasons why people come to Lourdes: adventure, the opportunity to visit a different country, a chance to escape for a while from their duties in the Unit, a genuine interest in gaining new experiences, or simply meeting and making new friends. For many, however, the experience turns out to be quite surprising. They begin to think more deeply about the meaning of life and service; they find answers to personal questions through conversations with a chaplain; they recover and find healing from mental or psychological wounds; and they see their lives from a different perspective, especially regarding values and virtues.

The programme of the Pilgrimage is designed in such a way that it helps all participants appreciate their great value and importance within their countries, nations, Armed Forces, and, above all, in the eyes of God. I could describe this place as very "addictive" in a positive sense, once you have been there, you want to return and experience again the feelings of love, hope, and peace that quietly find their way into your heart.

Everything began in 1958 when the French and German Catholic Churches decided to bring soldiers together in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, seeking peace and hope in God. This picturesque place in Lourdes, France, became the perfect setting to gather in prayer, march together behind beautiful bands and national flags, and enjoy some fellowship afterwards.

Over the years, the Pilgrimage has grown to include more than 40 countries from around the world, with approximately 15,000 soldiers participating in 2026. They bring with them their cultures, mentalities, perspectives, and the richness of humanity, which they share with one another during these few days. Although the majority of participants are Catholic military personnel, you can also meet people from other Christian denominations as well as those of other faiths or none at all. They enjoy the atmosphere of mutual understanding, acceptance, and welcome, because this event is not reserved for Christians alone. During my time there, I met a Sikh soldier who had brought two military friends with him, one Muslim and one Hindu.

COME AND SEE LOURDES FOR YOURSELF - AND HELP MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR OTHERS!



Ukrainian Army chaplains and veterans with their families, also widows or those who lost their children.



Candle night military parade



The Way of Cross walk with soldiers. Praying and reflection on one's life and service.



Left to right: Bishop Paul Mason, Bishop of the Forces (UK), Fr. Vlod, & Bishop Scott McCaig, Bishop of the Military Ordinariate of Canada.



Military Colours and State Flags parade





Historical background

1945 (Post-WWII Reconciliation): Following the devastation of the Second World War, French Archbishop Jules Saliège of Toulouse requested a gathering of military personnel in Lourdes. The initial goal was to honour and support wounded soldiers and begin the difficult process of mending relations between the previously warring French and German armies.

1958 (Official International Opening): The movement formalized into the International Military Pilgrimage (PMI). French and German military chaplains officially invited armed forces worldwide to join them in Lourdes, transforming a national commemoration into a universal call for peace.

Expansion to 40+ Nations: What began as a localised bilateral healing event has expanded to include military personnel, veterans, and chaplains from over 40 countries, including contingents from the UK, the US, and across Europe.

Pastoral, moral and religious context:

This 66th IMP counted 15,000 soldiers from 37 countries. The UK Armed Forces were represented by the Army, Navy, Air Force and around 365 people. There were just two of us from The Royal Tank Regiment, myself and a trooper from FALCON.

Spiritual Healing: The sanctuary of Lourdes, a major Marian shrine since the apparitions of 1858, offers service members a space for spiritual renewal, to seek peace, and to process both the physical and mental traumas of war.

Fraternity and Fellowship: Beyond formal ceremonies like the International Mass and flag ceremonies, the gathering is known for its camaraderie. Participants from different cultures and branches share military traditions and swap uniforms in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Support for the Wounded: The event places a massive emphasis on supporting wounded, injured, and sick veterans. Initiatives like the Knights of Columbus, "Warriors to Lourdes" program focus heavily on facilitating healing for both visible and invisible wounds (such as PTSD).

Conclusion: The Pilgrimage organised by Catholic Church for the Military is not reserved for Catholics only. It is open to all other denominations and non-religious too. One Service Personnel from the Sikh Community had been to Lourdes a few times and brought his two other friends (one is Muslim and another is Hindu). I have personally experienced how people in the Military, whilst being in Lourdes, start asking questions about meaning of their life, reevaluating positively what they have got as a gift and trying to change their life for better in personal relationships and military service.

A Soldier's Perspective on Lourdes

Written by Cpl Luke Trott, 255 Sqn, 3 Ranger LSOF



Despite being as agnostic as they came, I approached the Lourdes Pilgrimage with an open mind. My first impressions upon arrival were of genuine amazement, driven both by the idyllic scenery and the sheer scale of the nations involved. With around 15,000 soldiers from nearly 40 countries present, it was immediately clear that this was not just a pilgrimage in the traditional sense, but a rare convergence of military communities on an international scale. Uniforms of different cuts, insignia from across NATO and beyond, and a constant hum of different languages created an atmosphere that felt both ceremonial and profoundly global.

A highlight of the trip for me was visiting the 15 Stations of the Cross. Led by Father O'Driscoll, he took the LSOF group through fifteen stations of contemplation, bringing to life the final hours of Jesus' earthly life, from his condemnation before Pilate to his laying in the tomb and resurrection. Despite my own lack of religious belief, Father O'Driscoll was able to make each station relatable on a human level, and I found myself taking genuine value from each moment of reflection. The themes explored, suffering, sacrifice, moral courage, forgiveness, and endurance, extended well beyond theology.

What stood out just as much as the religious elements was the sense of camaraderie that existed between nations. In an environment where rank, language, and uniform typically define boundaries, those barriers softened significantly. There was a shared understanding that, despite differences in nationality or doctrine, everyone present had come with a common purpose. That sense of unity was often expressed in the simplest of ways, through conversation, shared routines, or informal gatherings at the end of the day.

Whether through shared prayer or shared time spent together over a pint, there was a consistent thread of mutual respect and solidarity. It was in these moments that the idea of alliance felt less abstract and more human. In a time where the potential for conflict in Europe feels as present as ever, particularly among NATO allies, seeing that level of interpersonal connection between soldiers and officers from so many nations felt significant. It was a reminder that alliances are ultimately sustained not just by treaties or strategy, but by relationships built at ground level between people who, despite their differences, are capable of recognising something familiar in one another.

Ultimately, I left Lourdes with a renewed appreciation for perspectives outside my own. I may not have found faith in a religious sense, but I did find value in the act of reflection, and in the shared humanity that underpins even the most structured of traditions.



Through the Lens: The International Military Pilgrimage 2026 - Lourdes

Photographs taken and provided by Flt Lt Luke Bluer RAF







156 REGIMENT RLC

The International Military Pilgrimage (IMP) to Lourdes 21-25 May 2026



LOGGIES ON TOUR

Table of Contents

What is the IMP.....	1
About the 2026 trip.....	2
The planning phase.....	2
The deployment.....	2
Normalisation & the opening ceremony.....	3
The highlights.....	4
Do we recommend it.....	5

What is the IMP?

What's it all about?



The IMP is an annual multi-national gathering of uniformed Military Personnel from around the world. This year more than 40 nations were represented and over 17000 individuals took part in the activity. Support for this Defence Engagement activity, has been approved by all three Service Chiefs and endorsed at MOD level, fostering as it does, a positive outlook and genuine sense of camaraderie between Sailors, Soldiers and Air Personnel of all the nations represented.

How does it work?



Service personnel wear uniform throughout the period of the Pilgrimage, always remaining subject to military law and discipline, while participating in a programme of international and national events. In a very real sense, they act as ambassadors for their Service and Country, engaging with senior political, military and ecclesiastical figures from across the world. Throughout the event SP are classed as being on duty.

Ok, so why does it happen?



Lourdes has been a place of Pilgrimage since 1858. Today, over five million people visit the region per year. The IMP began in 1958 when the French invited the Germans, following WWII, to join them in a show of reconciliation and charity. Now instigated annually by France, by invitation to allies globally, asking them to join in a renewed act of international fraternity and celebration.

About the 2026 Trip

The planning phase

By kind permission of our Commanding Officer and generous contributions from NW RFCA & HQ RLC, 156 Regt RLC took part in the IMP 2026, for the fourth time in 6-years. Unsure what to expect from the trip, twelve members of the Regt commenced the journey with crucifixes ready and dress uniforms prepped; a trip as it transpires that they will never forget.

"Being Catholic by adult choice, in 2019 I completed the RCIA programme and I genuinely never thought I would get an opportunity to go to Lourdes and experience it myself" — A 156 Regt RLC Pilgrim

The deployment

Lourdes is a small town in the heart of the Pyrenees mountains in Southern France. Breath-taking mountains surround the town, almost hiding it from the rest of the world. It was here in 1958 that the IMP first started, with an invitation from the French Government, to the German military, to attend in the spirit of post war reconciliation. It is now an annual event growing in popularity as news of its existence spreads. This year, more than sixteen thousand service personnel from forty-eight nations came together in Lourdes to celebrate its 66th iteration.

Our pilgrimage group consisted of 9 Soldiers and 2 Officers (10 Reservists & 1 Regular SP). The group was a blend of practicing and non-practicing Catholics as well as some non-religious, but open minded individuals, with a variety of military experience. We travelled to France as part of the British Contingent, made up of three-hundred and fifty personnel from all three services.

Normalisation

The first day in these breath-taking surroundings, was very much about integration and administration. We arrived, settled into the hotel accommodation and received an introductory brief from the Roman Catholic Bishop to the Armed Forces to prepare us for the coming days.

Each day required an early start with much activity to compress into a relatively short period of time. A variety of events kept the party busy all day, and frequently into the late evening. The most notable events were the opening ceremony, taking place in an underground church capable of holding twenty-five thousand people, the candlelight procession around the main esplanade and the recurring evening 'thanksgiving gatherings' on the bridge; something that one must attend in-order-to do it justice.

The opening ceremony in the Pope Pius X underground basilica



The opening ceremony

This underground Basilica (Church) staged the 2026 IMP international opening and closing ceremonies. With a 25,000 capacity, the atmosphere generated during both events was akin to attending a Rock Concert. The National flags of each nation were marched into the arena by their standard bearers and accompanied by military bands, then a special message from the Pope was read out to all.

The highlights

The Candlelight Procession was a truly unforgettable experience. Over twenty-thousand people marched through Lourdes town centre to the Main Basilica singing hymns by candlelight. The procession culminated outside the Basilica where the assembled masses joined together to sing the hymn Ave Maria. This was such a magnificent and most moving experience for all.

*“A serene moving experience where thousands walked in quiet reflection” -
A 156 Regt RLC Pilgrim*

Other notable events included an international sports competition alongside some wounded veterans; an evening with injured veterans at a local hospice; a guided tour of the Upper Stations of the Cross; music displays from the military bands; attending numerous church services led by the military chaplains, who used personal testimony to communicate with the congregation and of course, the closing ceremony.

It's not just work.....

In the free time available, we were able to explore the town and engage with like-minded pilgrims from the different Military Nations represented, and in doing so, we established a common bond of friendships that straddled borders and language barriers.

The closest description that our group could offer in overall description would be to blend attending church, a military tattoo the euphoria of a large crowd at a mass sporting event - all whilst representing one's country as a serviceperson - truly exhilarating!

Do we recommend it?

.....of course we do.



The 156 Regt pilgrimage group at the main Basilica

Every person attended the pilgrimage for their own reasons, and regardless of whether they had faith or not, each Pilgrim received something unique from the experience.

For some, it was about meeting new people and making friendships that would otherwise not have been possible. One of our Pilgrims said "taking part in the IMP truly boosts my confidence. I feel I was of help to many people this year and helping others always helps me. For me, the 3 most valuable parts of the IMP is Faith, Friendship and Respect".

Everybody agreed this was an opportunity not to be missed and most have already booked for next year.

The 67th Annual IMP will take place in Lourdes from 20-24 May 2027. We will be going again, so why not give it a go?

Special thanks

Our sincere and special thanks are offered to those who made the trip possible with their generous funding donations

- The Armed Forces Roman Catholic Trust
- The North-West Reserve Forces and Cadet Association
- The Commanding Officer 156 Regt RLC
- HQ Royal Logistic Corps

Our final thank you goes to The Revd Fr Nicholas Gosnell VG, the Vicar General for the Bishopric of the Forces and chief IMP organiser.

Contact Us

For any further information on this trip, or to find out more about the 2027 trip, feel free to contact the Regimental 2iC, or alternately, go to the website of our tour operators 'Tangney Tours':

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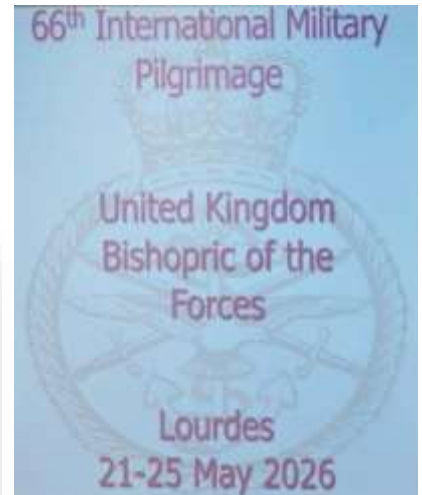
Phone: 0330 1660616
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The 66th International Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes 2026

7 AVN SP BN REME

Written by Cpl Mofor Tazoh



A Journey of Faith and Fellowship

The 66th International Military Pilgrimage (IMP) to Lourdes 2026 with the theme "Sentinel of Peace" has been a profoundly moving experience, bringing together service personnel from across the globe in a shared spirit of faith, reflection, and camaraderie. This annual pilgrimage offers a unique opportunity to step away from the demands of routine military life and find solace in the peaceful surroundings of Lourdes, a place renowned for its spiritual significance and healing.

Participating in the pilgrimage was both humbling and inspiring. The atmosphere was one of quiet contemplation and mutual support, as pilgrims from diverse backgrounds united in prayer and reflection. The daily processions, Masses, and moments of silence provided a chance to reconnect with personal faith and the values that underpin military service.

Personal Memories and Highlights

Personal Memories and Highlights

Key highlights of the pilgrimage include the International welcome and closing ceremony, Anglophone Mass at the Basilica and the Grotto, Stations of the Cross but one of the standout moments was the candlelight procession, where thousands of pilgrims carried candles through the sanctuary, creating a breathtaking sea of light. Sharing stories and prayers with fellow pilgrims, many of whom were experiencing Lourdes for the first time, was deeply enriching. Sgt Atabong Agendia stated that "The opportunity to assist and support those with disabilities or illnesses was a poignant reminder of the compassion and service at the heart of the pilgrimage" reflecting one of the Army's Core Values of selfless Commitment.



Dispelling the Myth

A common misconception about the International Military Pilgrimage (IMP) to Lourdes is that it is solely a religious event reserved only for devout Catholics or those deeply religious. In reality, the IMP is an inclusive and ecumenical gathering that welcomes military personnel of all faiths and backgrounds, as well as those who may be exploring their spirituality or simply seeking a moment of reflection and camaraderie.

The pilgrimage is not just about religious observance; it is also a powerful opportunity for service members to come together in mutual support, share experiences, and promote peace and understanding across international military communities. The IMP fosters a spirit of unity, compassion, and resilience, transcending religious boundaries and focusing on shared values such as service, sacrifice, and hope.



What the IMP Means to Me

The IMP is more than just a journey; it is a reaffirmation of the bonds that link military personnel worldwide. It serves as a reminder of the importance of faith, hope, and resilience in the face of adversity. For me, the pilgrimage reinforced a sense of purpose and connection, both spiritually and within the military community.

LCpl Nicholas Akuffo, a first-time pilgrim spoke of the overwhelming sense of peace and the powerful communal spirit he encountered in Lourdes. Many are touched by the kindness of fellow pilgrims and the opportunity to witness acts of selflessness and devotion. The experience often leaves a lasting impression, inspiring a deeper appreciation for faith and the support network within the armed forces.

The IMP to Lourdes should therefore not be seen only as a spiritual journey but also as a meaningful occasion for personal growth, fellowship, and international military solidarity. The 66th International Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes was a testament to the enduring strength of faith and fellowship within the military community regardless of nationality, faith or religious belief. It is an experience that leaves a lasting mark on all who take part, fostering spiritual growth and lifelong connections, an experience with every serving soldier and their dependants as well as veterans who are encouraged to witness.

A Chaplain's Reflections on IMP

Written by Deacon John Power, 1 Ranger



This was my first visit to Lourdes with a group of personnel from my regiment. For me it added an extra dimension to the Pilgrimage from the point of view of wanting to ensure that they had a good experience but also to balance that with letting the Spirit move as He wills. I think that the group had a very good experience and what everyone received is different and will continue to manifest in them as time goes on.

When we go to Lourdes some of us are hyper-vigilant in seeking experiences or situations that may be from the Lord and are not mere coincidence. In all of my visits to Lourdes, I have never had to discern that, because the signs I have received or have witnessed have clearly been the fingerprint of Our Lord and Our Lady. This year that was not so, however, I think I would say that all my group felt Our Lord with us in every step and on every day; we all felt that we were accompanied.

The Stations of the Cross is always a powerful moment at Lourdes; however, I sometimes find it a little rushed and chaotic as many pilgrims make their way up the higher stations with their chaplains and guides. This year I took my group to the Lower Stations, and we were alone. Again, the story of The Cross and Jesus's passion spoke to our hearts as we slowly made our way around each station.



Very early on as 'Jesus's mother comes to Him.' At this station, one of my group remarked 'I've got what I came on the pilgrimage for now.' A private conversation with that person later in the day revealed that Our Lord had spoken to that individual during the Stations earlier that day. The healing that the person received could have only happened when reflecting on Our Lord's passion and in this case, it could only have happened in Lourdes.

As I was sitting in the airport waiting to return home reflecting on my previous visits to Lourdes and being hyper-vigilant of healing experiences, a soldier, who I had not met before, asked me could he speak to me. He said he wanted to let somebody know what happened to him last night. He relayed a story of walking back to his hotel when he noticed someone sitting by the riverbank that flows through Lourdes. He said he felt moved to approach him and ask if that person was OK, which he did. He said that person replied that he was OK but had lost his sister 3 months ago and was thinking of her on this last night in Lourdes. The soldier informed me that he didn't know what to say and that he wasn't terribly religious himself so didn't feel comfortable asking him if he wanted to pray for his sister. After a while, he did pluck up the courage and asked him if he would like to pray. The soldier smiled at me and said, 'I don't know where my words came from, but I sounded like one of the Padres!' He said he and the soldier left each other after a very cathartic few moments together. As they departed each other, the person who had lost his sister said, during those prayers you mentioned my sister's name, but I never told you her name.'

In the airport, myself and the soldier reflected that Our Lord had been with them that evening. He had worked through the soldier to provide some healing to the person who had lost their sister and for the soldier a moment of affirmation that Our Lord is present and works through all of us as His sentinels of love and healing.



IMP Feedback Request



Dear Pilgrim,

I hope you are well and had a safe return from the International Military Pilgrimage (IMP)!

As indicated in the closing Mass for the IMP we would be grateful if you would take a few moments to complete the following survey:

UK Contingent Feedback Form: [66th International Military Pilgrimage, 2026 - Fill in form](#)



We would like to hear about your experience of the **International Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes**. The aim is to understand the experience of participants and your view will help us improve the pilgrimage in future. The survey will run throughout June 2026 and is open to all who attended the International Military Pilgrimage with the UK Contingent this year.

What will the findings be used for? The results will be used by the pilgrimage organisers to identify themes and inform decisions about future pilgrimages.

Why take part? Your views matter. Your answers will help provide evidence to support our planning for future pilgrimages.

Confidentiality. You are asked to provide your name to enable us to validate participants in this survey. All identifying information will be removed before any analysis is carried out. Answers will be reported in aggregated form only.

When you submit this form, it will not automatically collect your details like name and email address unless you provide it yourself.

If you have any questions, please contact Fr John Moriarty: john.moriarty101@mod.gov.uk

With every blessing,

Fr Stephen Sharkey
Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain (Army)



Shepherds in Uniform

IN THE BEGINNING:

THE FIRST COMMISSIONED CATHOLIC ARMY CHAPLAINS IN THE BRITISH ARMY

Written by Dr. James Hagerty

The Catholic padre is an important, familiar and respected figure in today's Army as he ministers to soldiers and their families in war and in peace. It was not always so. Until early-Victorian times Catholic priests were denied commissions as Chaplains to the Forces.

Catholics had been granted commissions in the Army after the passing of Catholic Relief Acts in the late-eighteenth century but it was only after decades of public lobbying and service by Catholic clergy as Officiating Chaplains in the Crimean War (1854-1856) and the Indian Mutiny (1857-1859), that Catholic priests were finally commissioned as Chaplains to the Forces. Catholics in the Army, many of whom were Irish, could now have their religious needs attended to by a clergyman of their own faith.

By Royal Warrant of November 1858 all chaplains, irrespective of denomination, were to be equal in pay and emoluments and eligible for four ranks - 1st Class, rank of colonel, 2nd Class, rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, 3rd Class, rank of Major, and 4th Class, rank of Captain.

On 28 August 1858, the War Office informed Bishop Thomas Grant of Southwark, who liaised with the War Office on behalf of the English and Welsh Hierarchy, that sixteen Catholic priests were to be appointed 'Assistant Chaplains to the Forces' and the Bishop was asked to name the sixteen priests.

On 18 January 1859, *The London Gazette* announced that 'Assistant-Chaplains to the Forces were to be 'Chaplains to the Forces. (4th Class.)'. The rank 'Assistant-Chaplain to the Forces' was discontinued as the term denoted a difference in status which was unacceptable to non-Anglican denominations. There were fifty-four Church of England chaplains.

On 31 March 1859, Bishop Grant informed the Hierarchy that originally eleven priests were to be commissioned, then another four names had been added, and ultimately yet another four bringing the total to be commissioned to nineteen. Of the nineteen four were still deployed in India after the Indian Mutiny.

The first 'RC' chaplains subsequently laid firm foundations of army chaplaincy which would be built upon and established a reputation which would be enhanced in future years. They served abroad in the many colonial conflicts associated with the British Empire and at home in garrison towns where chapels and schools had to be built in the face of War Office bureaucracy and anti-Catholic bigotry.

A padre's Seniority Date included Officiating Chaplaincy service prior to commissioning and padres rose through the ranks because of the length and quality of their service and their battlefield experience. Six of the original nineteen were promoted 1st Class, two 2nd Class, three 3rd Class and eight 4th Class. Some spent most of their priesthood at the service of the Army, others, for whatever reason, left the

Army after a short time. Much remains to be discovered about their military details. The following is a list of the original chaplains.

1. **Fr Laurence Parsley.** Archdiocese of Dublin. Commissioned 4th Class, 18.1.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 1.4.1861, 2nd Class 1.4.1862, 1st Class 1.4.1867. Served Dublin (1859), New Zealand in Maori Wars. Seniority date: 1.4.1847.
2. **Fr John Francis Browne.** Diocese of Salford. Born Blackburn, 1830. Educated English College, Lisbon; Venerable English College, Rome. Ordained 26.3.1853. Curate in Manchester 1853-1857. Commissioned 4th Class. 1.4.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 15.9.1859, 2nd Class 15.9.1872. Served Indian Mutiny (1857), Gosport (1859), St Helena (1862-1867), Aldershot (1869 & 1875), Portsmouth (1877), Egypt (1887). Retired 1888. Died Portsmouth, 6.11.1894. Seniority date 15.9.1857.
3. **Fr John O' Flaherty.** Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 1.4.1869, 2nd Class 1.4.1874, 1st Class 1.4.1879. Served Gibraltar (1859), Aldershot (1860 & 1879), Chatham (1880), Devonport (1879 & 1882). Served with Royal Irish Regiment. Seniority date: 1.4.1859.
4. **Fr Thomas Lloyd Coghlan.** Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 1.4.1869, 2nd Class 1.4.1874, 1st Class 1.4.1879. Served Plymouth (1859), Netley (1874), Shorncliffe (1879). Retired 1879. Seniority date: 1.4.1859.
5. **Fr Edmund Butler.** Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 1.4.1869, 2nd Class 1.4.1874, 1st Class 1.4.1879. Served Halifax, Nova Scotia (1859), Ashanti War (Gold Coast) (1873-1874), Devonport (1875). Seniority date: 1.4.1859.
6. **Fr Michael Cuffe.** Archdiocese of Dublin. Served Crimean War (1854-1856); Indian Mutiny (1857). Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 7.9.1868, 2nd Class 7.9.1873, 1st Class 7.9.1880. Served Dublin (1859), Chatham (1869), Aldershot (1878). Died 13.3.1894. Seniority date: 7.9.1858.
7. **Fr James Hamilton.** Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 1.4.1868. Served Curragh (1859). Seniority date: 1.4.1859.
8. **Fr Michael Hogan.** Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Served Dover (1859). Seniority date: 1.4.1859.
9. **Fr James Carey.** Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Served Portsmouth (1859). Seniority date: 1.4.1859.
10. **Fr Joseph O'Dwyer.** Diocese of Plymouth. Educated English College, Rome. Served Crimean War (1854-1855), Indian Mutiny (1857), Mauritius. Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 12.4.1868. Served Aldershot (1869). Died 24.4.1878, aged 73. Seniority date: 12.4.1858.

11. **Fr Thomas Molony.** Served Crimean War (1854-1856), Indian Mutiny (1857). Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 7.9.1868, 2nd Class 7.9.1873. Served Curragh (1861), Shorncliffe (1873-9). Seniority date: 7.9.1858.
12. **Fr W. George Morley.** Commissioned 4th Class. 1.4.1859. Served Chatham (1859). Seniority date: 1.4.1859.
13. **Fr Charles Morgan.** Served Indian Mutiny (1857). Commissioned 4th Class. 1.4.1859. Served Woolwich (1859). Seniority date: 1.4.1857.
14. **Fr Robert Shepherd.** Archdiocese of Westminster. Born Lancashire. Educated Ushaw College; English College, Rome. Ordained Rome. Worked on missions in England. Created Canon of Westminster before becoming a chaplain. Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 1.4.1869. Served Colchester (1859), Bermuda, Halifax Nova Scotia; Plymouth. Transferred to Reserve. Died March 1874; buried with full military honours, Plymouth Cemetery. Seniority date 1.4.1859.
15. **Fr Joseph Mc Sweeney.** Served Crimean War (1855-1856). Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Served Winchester (1859), Shorncliffe (1859), New Zealand in Maori Wars. Seniority date 1.4.1859.
16. **Fr Thomas Unsworth.** Diocese of Salford. Born Culcheth, 1822. Educ. Ampleforth College; Venerable English College, Rome. Ordained 1846. 1846-1855 Curate in Manchester, Rochdale; Rector in Rawtenstall, Levenshulme. Served Crimean War (1855-1856). Served Aldershot (1858), Gibraltar (1860). Commissioned Chaplain to the Forces, 4th Class, 18.1.1859. Retired 14.11.1861. Died, Culcheth, 16.11.1879. Seniority date: 10.7.1855.
17. **Fr John Vertue.** Archdiocese of Westminster. Born London. 28.4.1826. Educated King's College, London; St Edmund's College, Ware; English College, Rome. Ordained 20.12.1851. Worked on London missions. 1852 Papal Diplomatic Corps, interpreter, secretary to Papal Nuncio to Brazil; visited the United States. Returned to England; created Monsignor in 1855. Officiating Chaplain 1855. Commissioned 4th Class, 18.1.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 18.5.1865, 2nd Class 2.2.1870, 1st Class 2.2.1875. Served Chatham (1855), Aldershot (1855), Bermuda (1861), Colchester (1865), Portsmouth (1871), Malta (1878). Appointed Bishop of Portsmouth. 25.7.1882. Seniority date: 24.6.1855.
18. **Fr Joseph J. Mahé.** Diocese of Southwark. Served Crimean War (1855-1856), Expedition to Hong Kong (1857). Commissioned 4th Class, 18.1.1859. Promoted 3rd Class 5.12.1861. Served Shorncliffe (1856). Retired 4.2.1866. Seniority date 19.9.1855.
19. **Fr R Blake.** Commissioned 4th Class, 1.4.1859. Served Cork (1859). Seniority date 1.4.1859.

Understanding the Catholic Church: Its Signs, Symbols, Traditions, and Ministry

This new regular feature aims to deepen our understanding of the rich life and heritage of the Catholic Church. In each issue, we will explore different aspects of Catholic faith and practice, including the meaning of sacred objects such as the monstrance, the structure and hierarchy of the Church, the role of chaplaincy, vocations, liturgical traditions, and other topics that help shape Catholic life and worship.

The information presented in this series is drawn from a range of reliable Catholic sources, including resources published by Catholic Dailies, and is intended to support faith formation and understanding within our Army Catholic community.

WHAT IS A CHAPLAINCY?

Why the Church Sends Priests Beyond the Parish

PARISH PRIEST Serves the Parish Community	VS	CHAPLAIN Serves Beyond the Parish								
		 HOSPITALS								
		 MILITARY								
		 PRISONS								
		 SCHOOLS & UNIVERSITIES								
		 AIRPORTS								
		 POLICE & FIRST RESPONDERS								
<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Assigned to a Parish Serves a specific geographic area and local community.  Serves the Local Faithful Provides pastoral care to all parishioners and their families.  Regular Parish Masses Celebrates daily, Sunday, and Holy Day Masses for the community.  Parish Sacraments Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, Confessions, and other sacraments.  Territorial Ministry Ministry is centered within the parish boundaries and facilities. 	 @CATHOLICDAILIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">  Serves Special Communities Provides spiritual care in institutions or environments outside the normal parish structure.  Where People Are Goes to those who cannot easily come to the parish due to their circumstances or vocation.  Sacraments & Spiritual Support Offers Mass, Confession, Anointing, counsel, and spiritual companionship.  A Mission of Presence Brings Christ's love, hope, and the Church's care to every place and situation. 								
<p>EXAMPLES OF CHAPLAINCIES</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td> Hospital Chaplaincy</td> <td> School & Campus Chaplaincy</td> <td> Military Chaplaincy</td> <td> Prison Chaplaincy</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Airport Chaplaincy</td> <td> Police Chaplaincy</td> <td> Disaster Relief Chaplaincy</td> <td> Seafarer Chaplaincy</td> </tr> </table>			 Hospital Chaplaincy	 School & Campus Chaplaincy	 Military Chaplaincy	 Prison Chaplaincy	 Airport Chaplaincy	 Police Chaplaincy	 Disaster Relief Chaplaincy	 Seafarer Chaplaincy
 Hospital Chaplaincy	 School & Campus Chaplaincy	 Military Chaplaincy	 Prison Chaplaincy							
 Airport Chaplaincy	 Police Chaplaincy	 Disaster Relief Chaplaincy	 Seafarer Chaplaincy							



The Church does not only wait for people to come to her...
She also goes out to meet them.



One Church. Many Places. One Mission: To bring Christ to every heart.



SAVE A STORY OF FAITH & SERVICE

Help Restore a Rare Boer War Portrait

At the heart of this painting is a Roman Catholic Army chaplain who served with distinction during the Boer War, a quiet but powerful witness to faith, duty, and compassion amid conflict. Decorated for his service, he represents the often-unseen spiritual courage that sustained soldiers on the battlefield.

Time, however, has taken its toll.

Cracking across the surface, dulled pigments, and a weakening canvas now threaten to erase irreplaceable details; not only of the sitter's likeness, but of the story he carries. Without professional conservation, this extraordinary work risks being lost forever.

Why Restoration Matters

Your support will allow specialist conservators to:

- Stabilise the fragile canvas
 - Repair surface cracking
- Revive the original depth, colour, and presence
- Preserve this historic tribute for future generations

This is more than a painting. It is a testament to service, sacrifice, and moral courage in wartime.

How You Can Help

Every contribution, large or small, brings this portrait closer to renewal.
Donate today and be part of preserving history.

👉 **Donate via PayPal:**

https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=22APJZDMN38PU

📱 *Or scan the QR code to contribute instantly*





The Lourdes Grotto, France

O T I P L W W H Q G H Y E O X J H A I I L I H U
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 N S E N O I T P E C N O C E T A L U C A M M I D
 I H P I N Z I M V Q Y L H H K U R P L L M R N L

Immaculate Conception

St Bernadette

visions

Lourdes

holy

Miraculous Cave

springwater

miracle

Grotto

Mary

incorruptable

healing

France

Relic

Mass

St Wilfrid's Garrison Church Strensall, York



Saturday 27th June 2026 at 14:00

Bishop Paul will celebrate a Mass to welcome Our Lady of Victories' Icon to the North on her inaugural tour.

The Icon is based at Strensall until the Autumn, in support of Op INTERBOW.

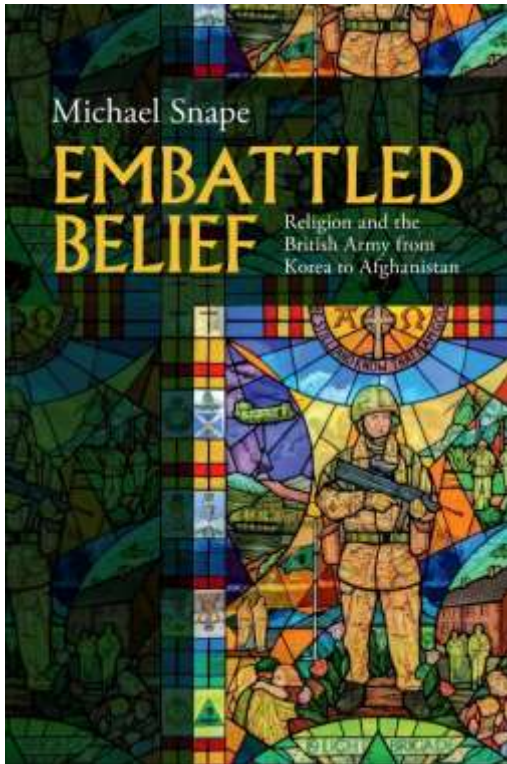
Music for the Mass will be provided by the York-based Rudgate Singers who celebrate the 30th year of their foundation.

All are welcome.

Further information available from Fr David Smith
917smith@armymail.mod.uk



Literature of Interest

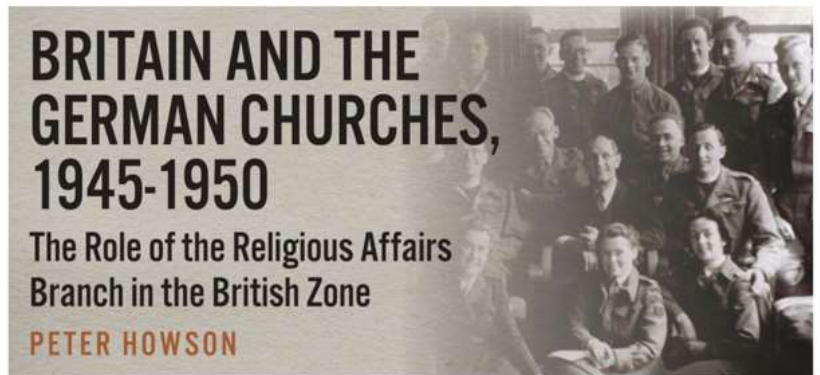


This landmark study of religion in the modern British Army, written by the museum's historical consultant, will be published next month. Drawing in part on the museum's archives, the book will be an indispensable guide for anyone interested in faith in the forces. https://assets.cambridge.org/97810096/09982/frontmatter/9781009609982_frontmatter.pdf



CATHOLIC MILITARY ASSOCIATION

The Catholic Military Association (CMA) is the official network for Defence Catholics. We support Catholics in the UK Armed Forces and have membership for serving personnel, veterans and other supporters. As a lay association of the faithful and registered charity (1205467) we cooperate to advance the faith across HM Forces. We work to inspire one-another in the Faith, growing through prayer and friendship. Find us at: catholicmilitaryassociation.org.uk and join for free to be included in our events and activities.



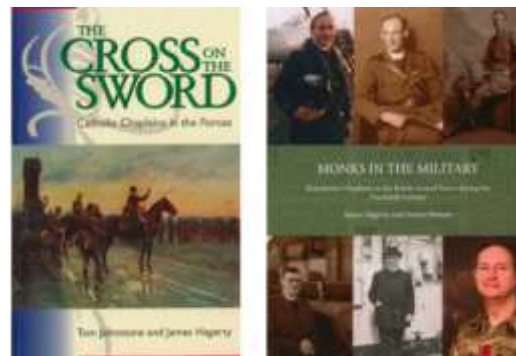
As a member of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department Rev Peter Howson served in Germany during the period 1977 to 1997.

More details are at:

Britain and the German Churches, 1945-1950 - Boydell and Brewer

Dr James Hagerty has written and co-written numerous books on Catholic history. His most recent research has been into Catholic chaplaincy within the British Armed Forces. You can find more information regarding his publications at:

<https://www.jameshagerty.co.uk/books/>



Vocations

Ready to Serve?

If you believe God may be calling you to this extraordinary form of ministry, we encourage you to contact the Vocations Director for the Bishporic for a conversation. Explore the possibility of serving both the Church and our armed forces with faith, courage, and compassion.

Vocations Director:

Fr Kevin Dow CF

email: Kevin.Dow101@mod.gov.uk

For further information on chaplaincy in the different services please see:

www.royalnavy.mod.uk/careers/roles/chaplain

www.jobs.army.mod.uk/roles/royal-army-chaplains-department/chaplain/

www.recruitment.raf.mod.uk/roles/roles-finder/chaplaincy/chaplain

The Bishporic of the Forces exists to provide for the spiritual, sacramental and pastoral well-being of Catholic servicemen and women, and their families, within the British Armed Forces. Unlike any other diocese, the Bishporic of the Forces has no geographical boundaries but encompasses anywhere in the world that United Kingdom military personnel are serving or deployed.

ANSWERING THE CALL: BECOME A CATHOLIC MILITARY CHAPLAIN



*Roman Catholic
Bishporic
Of The Forces*



O Lord Jesus Christ, instil in the hearts of priests the desire to dedicate their lives to you as chaplains to our Armed Services. Give them wisdom and strength, to hear your call. Give courage and compassion to those who serve you as Forces Chaplains. May their hearts be filled with zeal and love of you so that your name may be better known and loved, for you live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

Lay Chaplaincy at Waterways

Why Consider Waterways Chaplaincy as a Lay Chaplain?

Military life trains people to look out for others. Whether in barracks, on exercise or deployed, many of us recognise when someone is struggling, isolated or just needs a decent conversation. Waterways chaplaincy is a simple, practical way of using those instincts beyond work, without needing to be an expert or have all the answers.

Waterways lay chaplains spend time alongside people who live and work on canals and rivers boat owners, marina staff and volunteers. The role is mostly about being present: listening, checking in, and offering support when life feels heavy. There is no script and no pressure to "fix" anything. For anyone who has worked in welfare, leadership or supported others in the Military, this will feel familiar.

There are real benefits. It's a chance to develop listening and people skills in a very different setting, build trust with individuals who may not engage with formal services, and gain experience working with people from all backgrounds. It can also be a healthy contrast to the pace and structure of military life, while still feeling purposeful.

That said, it is not for everyone. The work is quiet and often unseen. There is no rank, no quick wins and no clear end state. The time commitment is a minimum of 3-4 hour a week, which needs to be managed sensibly alongside service commitments and approval from your Chain of Command.

Lay chaplains also need a strong sense of their own faith, as the role involves supporting others spiritually while respecting a wide range of beliefs. Comfort with working independently and knowing when to signpost is essential.

For serving personnel who value people, conversations and quiet impact and who are grounded in their faith, Waterways chaplaincy can be a rewarding way to give something back while still fully serving. It is not about preaching; it is about being human, consistent and trustworthy.

Full training provided.

Interested in finding out more? Get in touch with Corinna at corinnawwc@merciamarina.com.



67th International Military Pilgrimage Lourdes 2027



The UK Contingent will depart for the International Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes on Thursday 20th May 2027, returning Monday 24th May 2027.

Serving personnel may obtain details from their Military Chaplain or from the Pilgrimage Organiser:
Father Nick Gosnell, Cathedral of St. Michael and St. George, Queens Avenue, Aldershot, Hampshire
GU11 2BY. Tel: **01252 315042**

The Travel agents are Tangney Tours, Pilgrim House, Station Road, Borough Green, Kent TN15 8AF.
Tel: 01732 886666

Retreats 2026



Are you in need of stillness and sanctuary?

A one-day retreat centered on the theme of Spiritual Resilience will be held for Armed Forces personnel and MOD Civil Servants seeking a moment of reflection, renewal and reconnection. On **23rd June at St. Michael & St. George, Aldershot** and on **25th June at St. Joan of Arc Church, Catterick Garrison**. These retreats offer a valuable opportunity to pause from the demands of service life and explore the deeper dimensions of personal strength through guided prayer, quiet contemplation and group discussion. Rooted in the Christian tradition yet open to all levels of faith and belief, the day will focus on nurturing the spiritual pillar of the force resilience tetrad, alongside physical, psychological and social wellbeing.

Participants will be invited to consider how spiritual resilience can support them in times of challenge, uncertainty and transition. Through a blend of reflective exercises, scriptural insights and shared experiences, the retreat aims to foster inner peace, moral clarity and a renewed sense of purpose. Whether you are new to the idea of retreat or returning for a fresh encounter, this day promises a safe and welcoming space to deepen your faith journey and strengthen your spiritual core.

For further information please contact: armyrcpaa21@gmail.com

**You are invited to
take part in a
Walking Pilgrimage
to Assisi**

**10 - 17
October
2026**



Join with the Rt Rev Paul Mason, Roman Catholic Bishop of the Forces, and personnel from the Whole Force, to commemorate the 800th Anniversary of the death of St Francis of Assisi. We will walk 105 km of the Via di Francesco or Way of St Francis. Starting at the Umbrian town of Terni and finishing at the Shrine of St Francis in Assisi.

To express your interest to take part
and for further information contact:
jeremy.wynne109@mod.gov.uk



From: The Reverend (Wing Commander) David E Skillen MA QTS BA (Hons) RAF



Principal Roman Catholic
Chaplain (RAF)

The Chaplaincy Centre
RAF Cosford
Wolverhampton
WV7 3EX

Email: david_skillen100@mod.gov.uk

19 Mar 26

BISHOPRIC OF THE ARMED FORCES WALKING PILGRIMAGE TO ASSISI – 10 TO 17 OCT 26

2026 marks the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis of Assisi. Pope Leo has proclaimed a Franciscan Jubilee Year for 2026. This holy year invites the faithful to pilgrimage, particularly to Franciscan sites, offering special grace on the pilgrim, and focusing on peace, the ecology, and Franciscan spirituality.

To mark this Franciscan Jubilee Year, and to respond to the call of Pope Leo for pilgrimage, the Bishopric of the Forces is organising a walking pilgrimage along the Via di Francesco or Way of St Francis. We will start in the Umbrian town of Terni and walk 105km over 8 days through beautiful Umbrian Countryside finishing at the shrine of St Francis in Assisi. The paths we walk, and the villages we walk through, will have been familiar to St Francis. Daily walking distance will range from 8.2 to 24km. Our final day will be at leisure in Assisi.

Accommodation will be provided on a shared room, bed and breakfast basis in the Casa Nazareno Religious House in Spoleto. A packed lunch will be provided on each walking day. Casa Nazareno is run by the nuns of the Holy Family of Nazareth. The accommodation is ~~no~~ suite but simple, fitting for a pilgrimage of this type. The website of Casa Nazareno is www.casanazareno.it/en/welcome-cas-nazareno/

We will fly from London Stansted with Ryan Air to Perugia on Sat 10 Oct at 0600. We will return from Perugia to London Stansted on Sat 17 Oct at 0945. We will be transported to our accommodation and to the start of each day's walk by minivan, which will return us to our accommodation each evening. The evening meal on the first and last night will be taken as a group. On the other evenings, meals are on a self-help basis. We are limited to 16 pilgrims and we would like a mix of RN, Army, RAF and MOD civil servants.

Bishop Paul Mason, Bishop of the Armed Forces, will lead the pilgrimage as he did on our similar successful pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela in 2022, to Lisbon in 2023, and to Walsingham in 2024. There will be the opportunity for daily Mass and other devotions offered for peace in the world.

It is envisaged that you will need to take annual leave to take part in the pilgrimage, that you will need to arrange your own transport to and from the airhead, and arrange your own travel insurance. It is not envisaged that you will be able to make a claim against the public purse for T&S. That said, an Admin Order and JIs will be produced. Individuals are at liberty to approach their own chain of command and budget holder to discuss leave and funding options.

The overall cost of the pilgrimage per person is in the region of £800 to include flights, daily transfers, bed and breakfast accommodation on a shared basis, daily packed lunch on the walking days, Pilgrim Credential, and pilgrim T-shirt. The Service Roman Catholic Trusts have agreed to generously subsidise Whole Force personnel such that a personal contribution of £300 per pilgrim to take part is being sought.

For further information, or to register your interest to take part, please contact Jeremy.wynne109@mod.gov.uk. Deadline for expressions of interest is cop 19 Apr.

Yours sincerely

Reverend Dave Skillen





VATICAN
NEWS

Vatican News is the portal for Vatican information where you can find the latest news on Pope Leo, the Holy See, the Church in the world, and international news.

Please follow the link to access the site: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en.html>



Online with Saints App



Online with Saints offers a virtual encounter with 100+ saints from all around the world. Women and Men, carpenters and scholars, mothers and popes, princes and paupers: their inspiring life stories are linked to real life modern questions. Be sure to check the social media profiles of the saints in the app.

Anyone can become a saint. Each saint is different, with their own unique personality and destiny. Each of them found their vocation in a different way - demonstrating that God has a special plan and vocation for everyone.

Download the FREE online with saints app on either [Apple App Store](#) or [Google Play](#)

Discover much more information about the saints:

- Social media profiles of the saints.
- Animated videos about their lives.
- Information on their history.
- Pray with the saints and find patron saints.

Access videos

Turn on the subtitles in YouTube

- Via the app: scan a saint in the book.
- Via the app: click on a saint's profile, play the video.
- Via the website [onlinewithsaints.com](#)
- Via the YouTube channel of *Online with Saints*

Catholic Military App is Live!



The [Apostolat Militaire International](#) and [Tweeting with GOD](#) have launched the FREE Catholic Military Connect App. See the launch video [here!](#) It's designed explicitly for military Catholics.

- ❖ It offers:
- ❖ Strong Catholic prayers, all downloaded so they can be accessed easily whilst on ship/ops/ex etc.
- ❖ Answers to 200+ questions about faith and the military.
- ❖ Prayers specifically for the military.
- ❖ Testimonies from serving Catholics.
- ❖ Inspiring military Saints and quotes.
- ❖ Guidance for preparing for Mass and Confession.
- ❖ Spiritual first aid.
- ❖ Contact details for the Military Chaplain and Association of whichever country the user is in.
- ❖ The facility to upload spiritual reading.

The CMC app is currently available in both the [Google Play](#) and [App stores](#), for smartphones and tablets, in 8 languages (English, Italian, French, Spanish, Croatian, German, Portuguese and Dutch). This is an excellent resource for your spiritual armoury.

The Holy See endorses CMC App



The Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, sent a message for the launch of the CMC App to the International Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes. In his words: "I believe that the app will be immensely helpful to all military personnel, and in a particular way to young men and women who, in this important sector of civil service, seek to grow in personal friendship with Jesus Christ." See the video.



Key Dates in June & July

The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus –
12th June (Solemnity)

Immaculate Heart of Mary –
13th June (Memorial)

The Nativity of St John the Baptist –
24th June (Solemnity)

Ss. Peter and Paul, Apostles – *29th June*
(Solemnity)

St Thomas, Apostle – *3rd July (Feast)*

St Mary Magdalene – *22nd July (Feast)*

Information.....

If you wish to know more about Roman Catholic matters within the Army Faith Community, please contact: **Mrs Karen Horn MBE** Pastoral Assistant (PA) to PRCC(A) at: ArmyRCPAA21@gmail.com