



## Letter to the Members of HNDL of the Service Marie Saint-Frai

No one knows better than you the realities that the COVID 19 pandemic imposes on pilgrimage activities. The purpose of this letter is for me and the Sisters of the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of Sorrows to share with you our thoughts and concerns.

In these circumstances, we want to remain cautious because every day brings new developments that often contradict what seemed to be established the day before. We want to remain prudent because the misfortunes that are already affecting members of the Hospitalité and those that lie ahead for the whole population must encourage us to take judge things wisely. We want to remain confident, because however we succeed in meeting the challenges, it will necessarily be insufficient if the Lord does not help us constantly.

There are three aspects to our considerations: our appreciation of the medical, pastoral and economic situations.

First, here is our assessment of the situation regarding the pilgrimages which planned to stay in our Accueil. Apart from the French National from August 12 to 17 and the diocese of Bayeux Lisieux from August 18 to 22, which have delayed their decisions, 100% of group pilgrimages are cancelled until September 8, 2020. After that, there are already other cancellations as well as postponements for pilgrimages planned until the end of October. To date, and at best, we will achieve 15% of the planned occupancy. However, we can realistically anticipate a completely empty year.

Indeed, the protection of vulnerable people prevents their being grouped together for travel, accommodation and pilgrimage activities. If some Hospitalités do plan to bring a very small number of vulnerable people this autumn, they will prepare in a very professional way by choosing the people very carefully and by carrying out a tested protocol for particularly careful management. We think it would be a good thing for this experiment to take place in order to start learning the lessons, if by chance in 2021 we are in a situation comparable to that of 2020.

Here are our comments on what is being done to keep the spirit of service alive. It is always a matter of responding to this irrepressible need to be healed and to be forgiven which brings us into contact with Christ. The continuation of the chaplains' prayer in the Grotto, the public access to the Shrines by sound and by image, the continuous flow of prayer intentions, the pastoral activities organized by the dioceses during the time they should have been on pilgrimage to Lourdes: all of this always positions Lourdes as an important place of encounter with the Incarnate Christ, where the sacraments of healing and reconciliation are given in abundance. This need for Lourdes is undiminished, because here our weakness is made strength, to hear the proclamation of the Gospel and be led by our Lady to meet Christ. Our commitment to serve the Church and our sisters and brothers in this objective is even stronger.

However, we confirm that our economic resources are exhausted: our inability to pay our fixed costs, even though these have been reduced, is imminent. To date, I have placed all staff on partial

employment, I am renegotiating the reduction of our service and maintenance contracts, I have postponed investments and in liaison with the finance service of the Sanctuaries, the leasing of buildings. Along with the managers of hotels and guest houses, we are asking for a cancellation of taxation, especially the local taxes. However, since we are unable to set a timeline for resumption of our activities, we have not had recourse at this stage to a cash loan guaranteed by the State. All things considered, if we have an empty year, we will be short of €350,000 to meet these costs. Perhaps the government plan to rescue the tourism sector will help us, at least we hope so.

So, what can we do? Above all and always, we must serve the weakest to welcome Christ into our lives. I recall that in previous centuries, the Church avoided pilgrimages in times of epidemics and guided the faithful to serve the sick where they lived. The Confraternities of Penitents are remnants of those times. Our congregation, whose charism is to support elderly people in France and the Middle East, is working intensely in these times of great threat to the health of the most fragile. In the 21st century, some of us can make a spiritual pilgrimage just by mastering the rules of prevention of disease. The Sanctuaries are starting to open again this weekend. None of us has an excuse to remain inactive.

Many of you have asked us how you can help us. Some have started to do so, and I thank them especially. You can help us in four ways:

- Answer the call from Sister Amal who will need reinforcements when we partially open our Accueil.
- Come and stay in our Accueil when it opens; you know that until June 02 at least, our freedom to travel is limited to a radius of 100 km. The Accueil can accommodate more than 60 people in single and double rooms. Depending on the numbers, we can resume offering meals. I will let you know when we do open.
- Please donate to us as soon as you can. We will issue a tax receipt to individuals or businesses. I really urge you to help us in this way without diverting funds from the needs of and in your own diocese. Spread the word.
- Activate your relationships and your network. Indeed, the renegotiation with some of our service providers who are large companies goes right up to the board. I still intend to make contact with the Executive Committees of AXA and of SIEMENS France

Lourdes, le 13 mai 2020,

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