

Maria Igoe's Medjugorje Diary

People often ask us what we do when we go to Medjugorje. So, during our recent visit, I decided to write a diary....

‘On **Tuesday 26 September** at 4.30am, 7 of us met at Edinburgh Airport to travel with Easyjet to Dubrovnik. Then we had a 3-hour bus journey and arrived in Medjugorje before 2pm. As it was Pauline's first time there, I went out for a walk with her to show her around. At the cemetery we met old friends, Mary Walsh and Helena Murphy, who had worked with Sr Muriel Geisler to set up 3 homes outside Medjugorje, one for the elderly, one a Hospice and one for disabled children. They were visiting Sr Muriel's grave. She had spent over 30 years serving the poor in the hills and countryside around and died there at the age of 96. In the past we had been out with Mary and Helena delivering food parcels to very poor people of all faiths. After a rest, we went to the outside Croatian Mass. The weather was lovely, and it was very pleasant being in the open air. The 7 of us had a lovely meal at Colombo's. We had a great chat and felt very blessed to be there.

On **Wednesday** after a good night's sleep and breakfast, we attended the English Mass in the Parish Church of St James. We then went to the Stations of the Cross around the statue of the Risen Christ. We always say 'Mary the Mother of Jesus' Stations and sing the 'Stabat Mater'. It is very moving. After a seat in the shade, having a cool drink, we had a rest. Then a few of us walked across the fields to the Blue Cross, where we sat with lots of others, praying quietly. After an ice-cream, we got a taxi back. Taxis in Medjugorje cost 5 euros. At 6pm we went to the Croatian Mass and then went for a meal.

On **Thursday** after the English Mass, I had a chat with a Dominican Priest, Fr Colm Manion, from Dublin, who was with a group of 40 members of the Legion of Mary and friends. Our group went to say the Mysteries of Light at the beautiful mosaic pictures, along the walkway leading to the Statue of the Risen Christ. After a light lunch, 4 of us went by taxi to Cenacolo, the house for recovering addicts. We arrived at 1.25pm and asked if there would be talks in English. We were surprised and delighted that they were starting in 5 minutes. We joined a crowd of English speakers in their theatre. The video of the starting of the Community by Mother Elvira makes me very emotional - so great is the grace of God. Then 2 lads gave witness of their recovery from drugs. One was Edward from Broomhouse, Edinburgh. We had seen him a year and a half before and it was good to see him again. Edward is 43 and the other guy was from South Carolina and was 22. Edward mentioned Fr Laurence Brazill, who spent time in St Joseph's Parish, when the Augustinian order was there. I knew him well and was pleased to hear that he had played a part in Edward's recovery. We had our meal early so that we could go to Adoration from 7-8pm. Afterwards we met up and had a drink and a chat. It had been a wonderful day.

On **Friday** after Mass, we went to the St John Paul Hall for a talk from the young Parish Priest. As I sat down, I was aware of ladies next to me with Scottish accents. When I looked, I recognised Teresa, who had come to Medjugorje with my group nearly 10 years before, when she lived in a cottage at Castle Moffat, Nunraw. It was good to see her and for her to meet up with one of her neighbours from there. It was amazing that in this large hall with hundreds of people, I should sit beside her. We had just been talking about her. It was after this that things went rather downhill, when Joyce tripped on the pavement and hurt her right wrist. It meant a trip to hospital in Mostar and, as the wrist was broken, a plaster was applied. Being Joyce, she did not let it hold her back from taking part in our activities. She was very brave.

On **Saturday** we bought a better sling for Joyce, and she was doing well. She did not want her sons to know, but had reckoned without Derek, who quickly spread the news! After Mass we gathered at the old church grounds and said the Rosary in the little Chapel there. We then sat at the outdoor cafe we liked and had drinks and chatted. Adoration was at 9-10pm that night.

On **Sunday** the local people use St James Church for their Masses. The Mass in English is in the St John Paul Hall at 12 noon. It gives us a chance to have a 'long lie'. Afterwards we sat with drinks and chatted. Then a few of us went to Our Lady's statue and said the Rosary.

On **Monday** we decided to go to Nancy and Patrick's castle. 3 went by taxi and 2 of us had a peaceful walk through the fields. It was Nancy's 65th birthday. We were treated to juice and cake. We went to the Chapel of the Child of Prague there and said the Rosary. After the first decade, we were joined by an Irish couple. We were sitting on cushions on the marble seats, but the man knelt before the statue with great devotion. He led a

decade for us. After the prayers, he witnessed that he was an alcoholic and had been drinking every hour of the day. When he came to Medjugorje he was going to climb Kricevac, the hill of the Cross, but his body was shaking. He wanted a drink, but his wife said to wait until after the climb to have a drink. He came down and has never had alcohol since. That was six and a half years ago. He and his wife were glowing with the grace they had received. They live near Heathrow Airport and the journey for them to Medjugorje is easy. They were there for 3 weeks, so happy are they to be in this place of grace. Teresa and I walked to the Oasis of Peace Chapel. This Chapel has a very realistic crucifix. They also have all day Adoration. We were fortunate to get into this Chapel, which is small and has lots of visitors. It was a beautiful experience. We walked 16,000 steps that day and enjoyed every step.

On **Tuesday** after Mass, we chatted over drinks and then went to wait for the new group arriving. There was a problem with accommodation, but our host, Gordan sorted it and when the group arrived, they settled in happily. We were now 18.

On **Wednesday** after Mass, we said the Stations of the Cross with our whole group. Then we all did our 'own thing' and met for our meal in the evening.

On **Thursday** after Mass, we said the Mysteries of Light together. Joyce and I went to see the lady of the house, where we had been the first guests. We stayed with her twice and keep in touch with her. We had a nice chat and got an update on her family.

We went to the Adoration Chapel, where there is Adoration every day from 2 -5pm. Later we went to the Croatian Mass and outside Adoration from 7-8pm. Thousands adore in silence, with only occasional hymns and prayers in several languages.

On **Friday** it was the start of the Mary's Meals Pilgrimage. After Mass we went to the Hall and had a talk from Magnus McFarlane Barrow and the Parish Priest. In the afternoon a large group climbed Apparition Hill together. It is a beautiful climb with wonderful views.

On **Saturday** Archbishop Aldo Cavelli, the Pope's representative, was the main celebrant at the English Mass, and some of the Mary's Meals group did the readings and bidding prayers. We then had a celebration at the Mary's Meals Cabin, which was blessed by the Parish Priest. We had some nice nibbles, with coffee and cherry brandy. In the afternoon, the group climbed Kricevac. Those of us who decided not to climb, went back to the Cabin and watched 2 videos about the work of Mary's Meals. The one with Gerard Butler (actor) is called "Love Reaches Everywhere" is very heartwarming and can be watched on 'Youtube'.

Sunday was a special day for me. I had not been to Confession and only had 2 days left. That evening I was on my own beside the Church at 8.45pm. Confessions finish at 9pm, although many Priests are very generous and will stay as long as they are needed. I saw a Priest sitting by the Church wall, who had a lady with him. I could see they were nearly finished. So, I waited and then sat on the chair beside the Priest. He was a young Priest from Denver, Colorado. He heard what I had to say and then asked questions, encouraging me to forgive and be healed. He was just what I needed, and I felt very comforted and blessed by the grace of the Sacrament. I then went on to the candle area and lit candles for those who had asked me to pray for them, and those I wished to pray for. In the dark with the light on the red candle holders and the large crucifix behind, this is a special place.

On **Monday** the main celebrant at Mass was a Dominican, Fr Brian McKeivitt. We know him well for he is a great supporter of Medjugorje. As this was our last day, we were having a quiet day, doing peaceful things. Some of us said the Rosary under the trees in the shade. One of the men with us said he sat under the trees for 2 hours just being thankful for the blessing of being in this beautiful, peaceful place. There was a fundraising concert in the hall that night. One of the acts was Fr Ray Kelly, who had been on 'Britain's Got Talent'.

The Hall was packed, and the atmosphere was lively. The M C was David Parkes from Dublin, an excellent singer, who had received physical and spiritual healings over 20 years ago in Medjugorje.

We were very blessed. The weather was fantastic - high 20s every day with sunshine and blue skies. What a bonus that was. It was 2 weeks of peace and blessings.

This has been a long report, but people often ask what we do in Medjugorje. It is difficult to explain the peace there, and that every day people witness to conversions and physical healings. Everyone has a story of blessings received. I would say, "*Medjugorje is the place where you fall in love with Jesus.*" Mary leads you to her son and you realise how much he loves us. We are booked to go back for 2 weeks in May. ‘