

Discovering Irish roots

written by Malea Hargett |



Twenty-eight Arkansas pilgrims journeyed to Ireland Sept. 11-20 to learn more about the Catholic faith of the Emerald Isle and popular saints like St. Patrick and not-so-well-known saints, including St. Kevin, St. Kieran and St. Brigid.

The Diocese of Little Rock's first two bishops — Bishop Andrew Byrne and Bishop Edward Fitzgerald — were born in Ireland, and the first religious order in the diocese — the Sisters of Mercy — was founded in Dublin.

Led by Father John Connell, grandson of Irish immigrants, the pilgrimage began in Dublin to visit St. Patrick Cathedral, now an Anglican church, and the body of St. Valentine the Martyr, at Whitefriars Carmelite Church. Other highlights included a day at Our Lady of Knock Shrine, where Sts. Mary, Joseph and John appeared to 15 villagers in 1879, tours of monastic settlements from St. Kevin and St. Kieran and a stop at the mountain where St. Patrick spent Lent 441 in prayer and fasting, according to legend. Daily Mass was celebrated by Father Connell in several local cathedrals and chapels.

Sightseeing also included a stop at the Cliffs of Moher and the Blarney Castle to kiss the Blarney Stone.

The pilgrimage was hosted by Arkansas Catholic.



Father John Connell, pastor of St. Joseph Church in Conway , elevates the Eucharist during the consecration in the chapel at St. Mary Pro-Cathedral in Dublin Sept. 19, while Father Brian Cundall, pastor of Christ the King Church in Fort Smith, looks on.



On Sept. 18, Joan Stanton, a member of St. Joseph Church in Paris, places her hands on the original stone where the apparition appeared in Knock in 1879.



Pilgrims enjoy Ladies View, a section of the Ring of Kerry, and the Lakes of Killarney Sept. 15.



Norma and Don Henderson of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in North Little Rock (Marche) pray the Our Father during Mass at St. Colman Cathedral in Cobh Sept. 14. Cobh was the embarkation point during Ireland's mass emigrations.