

LEITRIM GUARDIAN PERSONALITY OF THE YEAR LOURDA MCGOWAN

Why me? asked Lourda McGowan, "I haven't done anything to deserve an award."

Such reaction is typical of Lourda. She is a person who shirks the limelight but yet is the epitome of what The Leitrim Guardian Committee wishes the Personality of the Year to be.

Lourda McGowan's voluntary efforts on behalf of her community and of her county bring her no reward apart from the satisfaction of helping others. But it is fitting that people like Lourda do get recognition and appreciation.

Though involved in many spheres, it is for her work with the handicapped children of Leitrim that Lourda is being honoured.

The **Irish Handicapped Childrens' Pilgrimage Trust (I.H.C.P.T.)** was founded in Ireland in 1970 by Anthea O'Grady, with the express purpose of bringing handicapped Irish children on a pilgrimage to Lourdes — a shrine especially meaningful to all those who are ill. Since 1970, when 14 children were brought to Lourdes, the organisation has made rapid growth throughout Ireland, with at least 500 children now visiting Lourdes annually.

Lourda McGowan became involved with I.H.C.P.T. while a student in Dublin — her initial contact coming through Ballinamore man Fr. Dermot McCarthy.

On returning to Leitrim, involvement with I.H.C.P.T. continued. Modestly playing down her own contribution to the Trust, Lourda is high in her praise of the others involved — Joe Earley, the leader of the Leitrim group and his wife Dr. Beth Earley, Seamus



Regan, Eamonn McGowan, Margaret Cox and Margaret Flynn, Nurse Una Brady, Fr. Tomás Flynn and many more — and is quick to point out that she herself is but part of a team.

Each year, at Easter Time, a group of physically and mentally handicapped children from Leitrim is brought to Lourdes by the county branch of I.H.C.P.T.

This involves many months of fund raising and diligent preparation — in fact, from year to year, it is an on-going process, finalising one trip, preparing for the next. Lourda and her fellow workers travel with the children, care for them, entertain them — ensuring that the trip to Lourdes will be an experience they will treasure.

One would imagine that someone who is employed as a national teacher (Lourda is on the staff of the Convent of Mercy N.S. in Longford) would be anxious to have a break from contact with

youngsters in her social life. But not so with Lourda. She loves children, enjoys their company and has a special love for those suffering from either a physical or mental handicap.

This love is shown in her work of fund raising for the children — American Teas, Concerts, Sponsored Cycles, Collections — in her anxiety to help I.H.C.P.T., in the care she shows the children year after year, without seeking reward or recognition.

Lourda McGowan raises money for other charities too, including Concern; she is Joint Secretary, with Mrs. Aideen Huston, of Mohill Show Society; she is Secretary of Mohill Community and Development Association and Secretary of the North West Region of the Irish Shows Association. These and numerous other involvements make very time-consuming demands but Lourda is generous with her time, her talents and her energy.

"Briseann an dúchas tré shúile an chait", they say. Very true in the case of our Personality of the Year. Lourda's parents Harry and Noleen McGowan and all the members of the McGowan family have been to the forefront in the promotion of the economic and social life of Mohill and Lourda is especially appreciative of the support of her parents and of her two brothers and six sisters in her own involvements.

The Leitrim Guardian has always encouraged community involvement — indeed, this is the corner-stone of the magazine's survival.

We are proud to honour Lourda McGowan as our Personality of the Year.