

Killaloe Diocesan Youth Ministry
Annual Newsletter
2020



Foreword

One of the items last year that got most positive feedback in the diocese was the youth ministry newsletter for 2019. I am delighted to see that it is being published again this year, despite the unusual circumstances and recent standstill of the virus lockdown. It is great to see a compendium of the wonderful youth celebrations and events that go on in the diocese. These are presented in an attractive, colourful and interesting format. In doing so these events, as well as being currently informative can be recorded for posterity in a way that the electronic format might not be able to do.

The diocese is so fortunate to have so many committed people, interested in Youth Ministry and willing to put the shoulder to the wheel to enable our young people to be able to explore, celebrate and live their faith in a safe and secure environment.

An umbrella group called the Youth Forum meet regularly during the year to report back and share information in the diocese on the many great initiatives that happen regularly in the diocese and I always look forward to hearing what is happening, whenever I can attend.

This year, despite the obvious difficulty of the past three months there is still a wealth of material to draw upon and the publication has even expanded on last year which is fantastic news.

Some of the material this year includes news on pilgrimages like Lourdes and Taizé, the work of groups like MCYC, Boirne Youth Connect, Kilrush Youth Ministry, Kilmihil Youth Ministry, Ceantar na Lochanna Youth Ministry, Nenagh Youth Ministry, Youth Ministry in Kinnity, Youth 2,000, Rebecca Comerfords – A young persons experience of a year on Mission, Missionvale – Youth who travelled to South Africa to volunteer on Sr Ethel Normoyle's project in the township. There's also news of Solas, The overnight in St. Flannan's, Autumn Youth Ministry Course, the exciting new Meitheal project and the great week long training they embarked upon in Esker in January. There are features from the Chaplain's desk – Lorcan Kenny in Roscrea and Cora Guinnane in Shannon. There's a message from the Poor Clares, and the Cistercian's in MSJ. There are reports and pictures of the JP II Awards from secondary schools. Ecological and ethical issues are covered in Good for the Earth and Good for the People, An article on sustainable fashion & Ethical clothing



Bishop Fintan with Marty Morrissey who was the guest speaker at the John Paul II Awards.

Thank you to all involved in the youth, faith events. To the participants themselves who take part on an ongoing basis and all involved in facilitating and organising in any way. Special thanks to Ms. Joanne O'Brien, Director of Youth Ministry who continues to inspire, animate and enthuse some of the many groups who are active in youth ministry in the diocese.

May the Lord continue to bless this important work in every way.

**+ Fintan Monahan Bishop of Killaloe
Summer 2020**

Youth 2000

Kilmaley youth prayer meeting was set up on the 1st November 2019. It caters for young people aged between 16 - 25. It is run on the 1st Friday of the month. We are involved with Youth 2000 and have gone to Youth 2000 retreats and these retreats have inspired us to set up prayer meetings in our parish in the parish of Kilmaley in St John the Baptist Church. All youth from the diocese are more than welcome to join us in this time of prayer and reflection on the gospel and music. Afterwards there is a chance for refreshments and time to chat and meet other young people.

At Christmas time we put up a Christmas tree to remember the loved ones of people who passed away inside and outside our parish and people who are away from their family at Christmas.

Our prayer meeting at Christmas time is dedicated to the remembrance tree and the birth of Jesus.

From our experience we found the youth 2000 theme very inspiring and we tried to bring this theme to my parish. We spoke to our parish priest Fr. Martin Blake and Canon Michael McLaughlin. Both agreed with it and told us to fulfil our idea and they helped us organise it.

In the future we are hoping to go to Medjugorje youth festival as a group because our music theme is based on Medjugorje evening prayer.

**Katie and Jack Haren
Contact 0876720287 or 0834895189**

Greetings from the Director of Youth Ministry

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the second edition of Connected – The Killaloe Diocesan Youth Ministry Newsletter. These pages illustrate the creative, dynamic and faith-filled youth ministry activities which occurred all over our diocese during the past year. What a joy it is to see that we have two new Youth Ministry groups up and running, The Ceantar na Lochanna Youth Ministry Group and the Kilmihil Youth Ministry Group. Well done to all involved in the success of those two good news stories. In this newsletter last year we dared to dream of having a youth Leadership programme called Meitheal in our Diocese. This year that dream became a reality and in this edition some of the youth who attended will testify what the experience meant to them.

The pastoral year came to a sudden halt on March 13th with the onset of a pandemic and sadly so much of what we had planned including our regular meetings, pilgrimages and activities had to be cancelled. For some of our groups they continued to interact via online platforms and this became a very new way of experiencing youth ministry. All of us missed human contact and longed for days of being able to gather in groups again, to have fun and to celebrate our faith together. Covid 19 tested all of us, none more than the youth. Our thoughts are with all those who watched their Communion and Confirmation dates come and pass without the celebration we

had all hoped for. Students of exam classes were particularly challenged, especially leaving cert students. The usual stresses of the leaving cert were replaced with new ones this year and it is fair to say the nation empathised with your situation. May being the class of 2020 always stand to you, may you remember that you have been through tough stuff and you survived and you can take on any challenge life presents to you in the future with the conviction that you can deal with any problem.

As the articles for this newsletter kept arriving via email, I couldn't but help admire the great youth ministry happening in varied ways throughout the diocese. One could only be

impressed by the young people who travelled to Missionvale, South Africa, on their mid-term break last February to work on Sr. Ethel Normoyle's project. Testimonies from those who travel on the various pilgrimages tell us of the positive impact these pilgrimages have on the lives of those who travel on them. Behind every group and event is a team of very dedicated Youth Ministry leaders. Thank you all for your continued commitment to our youth. Míle buíochas to our Bishop, Fintan, for his huge dedication and support of the youth in our diocese. Thanks to Ger and all the team in Westbourne and to my two colleagues in the Pastoral Development office in Clarecastle, Maureen and Jean, who share the highs and lows of the journey. I'm grateful to all the priests throughout the diocese who support youth ministry. Permit me to single out one who has made big projects like Meitheal and the Autumn Youth



*Photo taken the night some Meitheal leaders and students spoke on Beyond Belief, Clare FM.
Left to right Ciara O'Connell, Sarah Fox, Doireann Kinsella, Arlene O' Sullivan, Joanne O' Brien, David Mc Inerney and Cathal Browne*

Ministry course possible, Fr Donagh O'Meara – thanks for your lovely calm presence and generosity of spirit.

The pandemic has demanded that we all set the reset button and begin anew. We live with uncertainty now and there is discomfort in that. Our ancestors in faith also lived in uncertainty throughout history. The Jews spent forty years in the desert en-route to the promised land. May we, like our ancestors, never lose our faith in God; may we never lose sight of hope and may we recognise the Spirit of God at work everywhere.

Taizé Pilgrimage | June 30th – July 9th 2019

It was the summer of 2019 when I made a trip that left a lasting impression on me. I was one of the group who made the annual trip to Taizé. Our journey to Taizé began in September 2018 with a monthly meeting in the calm and peaceful setting of the Church of Our Lady in Roslevan. At these meetings we sang chants and spent time in quiet reflection in preparation for our trip the following summer.

On Sunday June 30th 2019 we embarked on our exciting exploit. Leaving our home comforts in Ennis at 5.30 am, we headed by bus to Dublin airport where we took a flight to Geneva in Switzerland. I have a vivid memory of arriving at Geneva airport and stepping off the plane into an oven of dead heat. We had left Ireland and its cool climate clothed in leggings and jumpers and it's safe to say they were discarded the moment we touched down! Once we gathered our belongings and ensured no one was left behind, we boarded a bus for the final leg of our journey.

We arrived in Taizé to a vast cauldron of emptiness, devoid of the thousands of people we expected to see. I was convinced we had been brought on a wild goose chase! But within an hour I witnessed the multitudes of people exiting the church and I realised we were exactly where we were meant to be. Just when the hunger pangs were starting to take their toll, some of the other attendees appeared carrying boxes of food. Without hesitation the girls who had been to Taizé the previous year joined the team and distributed food to us. It quickly dawned on me that this selfless act was a key part of the Taizé experience. Once our bellies were full and in the midst of a thunder storm, we were assigned our rooms and our jobs for the week. For my part I worked at the Cadole each afternoon where my tasks ranged from pitching tents to sorting the rubbish. We retired for the night exhausted from our day of travel, knowing we had to arise at 8am

the following morning for prayer in the church.

We woke at 7.45am to the sound of our alarm. We dressed and hastily made our way to the church for the Morning Prayer with the thousands of other international pilgrims. The first morning we all congregated at the back of the church feeling intimidated by the enormous crowd and the splendour of the view before us. The Brothers began the chants which were sung in different languages and everybody joined in. I was taken aback by the powerful resonance of the chants which was in stark contrast

backgrounds. In these groups we had discussions about different texts from the Bible and once again we navigated the language barriers as we discussed our faith and learned about other cultures. Following on from the prayer group we returned to the church for Midday Prayer. As we became familiar with the operation of the community we queued up for our lunch and recognised a few friendly faces at the top of the queue as they handed us our meal. We ate our food which consisted of rice and beans with a spoon as the sole piece of cutlery.



to the immense silence during the quiet time of reflection. The time of reflection grounded me and allowed me to connect with my inner thoughts. Once the morning prayer ceased everybody flooded out of the church and lined up to get their breakfast. In the queue we met fellow young people from all over the world and despite the language barriers we managed to communicate on a basic level. We were given a bread roll with butter and a stick of chocolate for breakfast and we gladly consumed this along with a bowl of tea or hot chocolate.

We then went our separate ways to our pre-assigned prayer groups which consisted of people from different faith

For two hours after lunch we were kept occupied with our daily chores which gave us the opportunity and make more friends and enjoy the heat of the French summer sun. In between talks, work and prayer we managed to find some time for social engagement in the form of singing and card games with our new found friends. At 7 o'clock in the evening as the day began to cool, we gathered once more for our final meal of the day which was promptly followed by Evening Prayer and a sing song at the Oyak. We retired to our dorms at 11pm and lights were out by 11:45pm. After a very eventful and exciting day, it wasn't long before I was fast asleep. Thus, we had established the pattern of our daily routine.

The days gathered pace as we neared the weekend and all too soon, we had to depart.

On reflection there were times during the week where I was overcome with emotion as I reflected on my own life and my relationship with those closest to me. It gave me the feeling that the presence of God is very important to me and he exists through these relationships. My week in Taizé has left a lasting impression on me. The leaders took on a supportive role as they encouraged us to be open to this new experience which has left us with many happy memories, new formed friendships and a connection to the Taizé community.

This journey opened my eyes to a simple way of life where the community works with and for each other and I know that I will return to this unique place sometime soon.

Shauna Murphy



Taizé: A Unique Experience

When I first added my name to the list of people traveling to Taizé, I will admit I was skeptical. I would never have counted myself as a person with particularly strong faith or spiritual awareness, and the stories I'd heard of Taizé's indescribable atmosphere almost seemed too good to be true. I don't know why I decided to let go of my skepticism in the end, but I am infinitely glad that I did.

The very first thing that stood out to me, that I really wasn't prepared for, was the welcoming atmosphere that Taizé just radiates. People of all backgrounds, ethnicities, and levels of faith are welcomed equally within the community. There are no strict criteria you must meet in order to be welcomed without judgement, something that is nearly impossible to find in other areas of the world, and I think it all boils down to the motif of respect and trust that is reflected in all aspects of Taizé: respect between us and the leaders, respect between us as a group, and, most importantly, the mutual respect that exists within the community as a whole. The thing about Taizé is that you take

what you want from it; You choose to participate in the work, you choose to attend the prayer, you choose to open your mind to the experience that is Taizé, and, in doing that, you gain a whole new perspective on things that would previously have appeared mundane and unremarkable. I found that my time in Taizé enriched my personal development as well as my spiritual development. The simplicity of the place simplifies your mind, until only the things that matter most are left, creating a unique bond with the people around you in the process. I grew so much as a human being during those Seven days in Taizé, and it was lovely to see that same development



reflected in those around me. I went in a skeptical teenager, living in my own little bubble, and came out a more balanced and enlightened human being. What they have in Taizé is truly unique, and I count myself lucky to have gotten the opportunity to experience it.

Aobh Keating

Our wonderful, surprising journey towards God

Life at Mount Saint Joseph Abbey.



Mount Saint Joseph Abbey is a Cistercian Monastery of the Strict Observance. Whilst our community dates back to the late 19th century, our Order as a whole was founded in 1098 as a reform movement of the Benedictine Order. From then up to the present day Cistercians have retained their identity as men and women of simplicity and prayer; we at Mount Saint Joseph Abbey are no exception.

When you walk onto our beautiful monastic campus, you see a thriving school, a busy dairy farm, a guest house, a shop and, at the centre of it all, the Abbey Church connected to our monastery enclosure. You will see work taking place, from greeting guests, giving retreats and working on the land, to maintenance on our vast complex of buildings.

But none of this is our primary work, and none of it is our reason for being here. Primarily, we are people of prayer. That is our main work. Prayer is centred around the daily sacrifice of the Mass and a number of services throughout the day. We call this structure The Opus Dei, or The Work of God, and we find it to be our life's work. There is a line in the Psalms that says: "Better one day in the house of the Lord than a thousand elsewhere." And through our efforts at prayer, we seek to build that kingdom of God here

on earth. Indeed, we hope that you sense the peace of our home which is a distillation of over a century of seeking God in Roscrea.

But what is prayer and why are we so focused on it? The answers are simple: prayer is communion with God, it is a line of communication with our Creator. And we concentrate our lives on this communication because we have made it our vocation. Yes, our purpose in life is to build a relationship with our loving God. There is nothing more important than this.

The monastery is where we have settled to make this wonderful and surprising journey. Everything you see here on our monastic campus flows from that purpose: the purpose of seeking God. The school, the farm, the gardens and walks, the cooking, the maintenance work, the guesthouse: all of this is our way to Him, our method of prayer.

'Surprising journey', you hear us say!? Yes, it is surprising, living as a contemplative monk. The God whom we seek is 'the God of surprises', and we must learn to be surprised. Ours is a life of order and discipline. Nevertheless, as a monk you will find yourself developing new skills, new aptitudes, whether it is mowing the grass, cooking, birthing cows, bookkeeping, hospitality, providing care,

singing, tending our historic orchard or learning to play the organ.

And even then, you will be surprised. You will find yourself coming to depend on this ever-developing relationship with God. Through it, you will find greater inner depths. You will learn to use silence as a beautiful sanctuary. You will learn more about who you really are. You will develop fraternal relationships with characters you never thought you might. You will learn to love God by loving those around you. Which is the epitome of community life. Is it easy? No. But it is wonderful, and it is surprising!

We follow the Rule of St Benedict who calls the monastery a 'school of the Lord's service'. This is what we are: a lifelong school in which we develop skills to commune with our Creator. That's why our Abbey Church and monastic buildings are at the centre of our campus, both spiritually and physically. It is there that we come together and pray, singing the psalms and sharing our prayer around the Blessed Sacrament - the beating heart of Mount Saint Joseph Abbey.

We learn to always pray. We can pray whilst driving a tractor or scaling a ladder, studying scripture and theology, or typesetting a document. Whatever it is, we have the opportunity to pray. This is why we Cistercians have for nearly 1000 years taken a particular shine to manual labour. We like relatively simple work so that we can keep focused on prayer.

When you stand back to view our way life, you see a three-legged stool: the three legs being prayer, manual labour and study. These are the foundations to our life. We try very hard to remain uncomplicated, to not see the world in the same way as many others outside our enclosure. It may be that you would like to visit us and see some of our life for yourself. All are welcome to walk our grounds, visit our guesthouse and join us in our Abbey Church. When you do so, perhaps you will have a gentle introduction into our way of life, and through it feel inspired to begin

a new journey towards seeking God - a wonderful, surprising journey in which his grace abounds!

As monks, we know that it's important to live in community, to share and make way for others. This is where we fit. But it isn't just monastic life that would die without a good a community ethic. In fact, all Christians are called to develop themselves within community.

Over and above the current world pandemic and all the terrible inequality of this world, we get to ask ourselves a question: Where do we fit? And the answer is simple. Yes, it is alarmingly simple, even if it's more difficult to act upon. The answer is this: we fit in a world that has love at its core. We fit into this love by being loving, by not discriminating, by not judging, but by making all around us feel welcome. We're not talking here about only loving those we want to love - any self-centred fool can do that. No, we are talking about taking down the boundaries, so that we love everyone, perhaps especially those we don't like or don't agree with. This is the monastic way, but it is also the duty and vocation of all Christians.

In a funny kind of way, sitting at home during the lockdown has made us more vocal. We get to observe the world with more scrutiny. The **#blacklivesmatter** movement doesn't see the lockdown as a boundary, and injustice still goes on despite it. The world we live in has many shadows that we want to get rid of. We



Dom Malachy Thompson and Fr Laurence Walsh

do not naturally fit into a world of discrimination. And so, if there is no place for it, we can work in our own small way to make for ourselves a better place to live.

So, let us ask ourselves every day: where do I fit? What can I do to change this world to be more loving? Let us be God's image of love in this world, and allow those around us, and ourselves, to shine!

Dom Malachy Thompson ocsso

Abbott, Mount Saint Joseph Abbey, Roscrea

Youth Ministry in Kinnitty

Each year the Birr/Roscrea Curia of the Legion of Mary organise an annual pilgrimage to Knock. The Praesidium in Kinnitty organise annually a youth pilgrimage to attend on the same day. The young people range of 11 to 16 years old who are actively involved in parish life, All are current and past altar servers in the parish, some are actively involved in the parish choir and some



are readers. For the last two years some of young people have been actively involved in the John Paul Awards. Every Saturday morning some of our young people would help Mrs Kathleen Tooher Kinnitty Parish Sacristan clean the church and organise the weekly readings for the upcoming mass.

Good for the Earth and Good for the People

It is five years since Pope Francis wrote the encyclical on the environment 'Laudato Si' in which he calls all Christians to take serious action to reverse the damage done to Mother Earth. The fashion industry is sadly the second greatest polluter after the oil industry to our planet.

Geraldine Carton from @sustainabledublin kindly agreed to write an article for Connected to explain the effects of Fast Fashion on the environment and on the people who make our clothes.

The phrase "fast fashion" has been lampooned around quite a lot lately. For those who don't know, it refers to the blink-and-you-miss-it speed with which apparel is being produced and purchased. The upside of this phenomenon is that clothes have indeed become cheaper and more readily available than ever before. The downsides, however, tell a far darker and more sinister side to the story. Put simply, the fast fashion industry is wielding detrimental effects upon our environment, and ultimately to humanity at large. "How is it doing this?" you ask? Well, let us explain.

Local communities

Cheap stuff is great, and getting the latest trends as soon as they hit the catwalk is exciting. But take a second to consider the corners that must be cut in order to facilitate the low price and short turnover time that fast fashion embodies.

As the price of our clothes go down, more often than not, so too does the wage paid to those who make our clothes. Many of the lowest paid employees in the world are working in the biggest names in fast fashion, and roughly **85% of them are women**. What's more, these factories regularly see the violation of human rights as regulations are lax, ignored, or simply nonexistent.

Transport & climate

We're all aware of how most of the world's clothes are manufactured in countries that promise cheap labour (e.g. Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Vietnam, etc). However, to enable the low prices on clothing tags, raw materials *also* need to be sourced from wherever they are cheapest (e.g. China, the U.S. and India).

This means that the journey from *plant-to-pant* can require long-distance travel, often in huge cargo ships. These ships are cost-effective, sure, but they burn colossal amounts of low-grade fuel that is said to be 1,000 times dirtier than highway diesel. Once the clothing is manufactured in the factory, it is then transported back to the retailer by any combination of journeys via cargo ship/ rail/ trucks. Sometimes the destination is right back to where the original material came from.

Greenhouse gas emissions

According to a report by Quantis, an environmental consultancy, the global apparel and footwear industries account for an estimated 8% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions (almost as much as the European Union's *entire* climate impact combined) and the excessive transportation outlined above is largely to blame. However, the factories themselves are also to blame in this regard, as they are often coal or generator-powered and so produce huge amounts of carbon emissions every day.

Believers themselves must **constantly feel challenged** to live in a way consonant with their faith and **not to contradict it** by their **actions**.

Pope Francis
Laudato Si 200



Water Pollution

Have no doubts about it — the fast fashion industry has a lot to answer to when it comes to water pollution throughout the world. When not managed correctly, the industry's use of pesticides on farms and chemicals in factories cause immeasurable **damage to the health** of local communities, as these substances leach (or are dumped) into the surrounding water systems.

Textile dyeing alone is the second largest pollutant of clean water throughout the world (coming in short only to agriculture). An example of how potent the effect of textile dying has on local water can be seen in the Citarum River in Indonesia, which is said to be one of the most polluted rivers in the world largely due to the hundreds of textile factories that line its shores.

Microfibres

There is also the issue of microplastics (or "microfibres"); the perils of which have been widely discussed of late. Did it ever occur to you that your own spandex leggings might be contributing to this problem? Oh, you better believe it.

"There is no beauty in the finest cloth if it makes hunger and unhappiness"

Mahatma Gandhi



WHO MADE MY CLOTHES?



A huge percentage of today's fast fashion is made from cheap, **synthetic**, non-biodegradable, plastic **materials** such as polyester, nylon, and spandex. The trouble with these fabrics is that when they are washed, they release plastic fibres into the water which are so small that they pass through wastewater filtration systems and flow into our rivers and oceans.

Every year, our clothes release half a million tonnes of these microfibres into the ocean (the equivalent of more than 50 billion plastic bottles). Fish unknowingly eat these fibres and are dying in their droves as a result. In fact, it's been said that if things continue at the rate they are now, then by 2050 we'll have more plastic than fish in the ocean. It's scary stuff.

Waste & the disposability of clothes

The cheap cost and quality of today's garments make them seem as disposable as a coffee cup and affords them the lifespan of a plastic bag. Why hold on to last season's dress, when you can get a new one for next-to-nothing? Why mend a top when getting a new one is so much less time-consuming? Who cares about **why** this skirt is cheap — let's just rejoice that it was a bargain.

Every second, the equivalent of an entire garbage truck of textiles is sent to landfill or burned, and The Copenhagen Fashion Summit reported that fashion is responsible for 92 million tons of solid waste dumped in landfills each year. What's more, nearly 60% of all clothing ends up in incinerators or landfills within a year of being produced.

To make matters worse, these clothes are not merely sitting dormant; over time as they start to decompose, clothes actually begin to release methane (which is the worst of all the greenhouse gases).

Even donating has a dark side

But what if it's not sent to the dump? What if a person decides to donate their pre-loved clothes to a local charity shop? According to environmental scientist Dr. Cara Augustenburg: "There's a misconception that donating our unwanted clothes to charity is nothing but a good thing, but less than 30% of those clothes are re-sold internally. The remainder ends up in developing countries, collapsing indigenous textile industries and offshoring our waste problems."

So what do we do?

I don't know about you, but I don't want my clothes to fill me with guilt, nor do I fancy finding lumps of plastic in my salmon at dinner tonight. But as the world keeps turning, fast fashion keeps churning, and it's up to us to use our voices (be it via social media, petitions, rallies or in letters to our state representatives) to tell the industry that we demand change.

From sourcing fabric sustainably, respecting the health and wellbeing of factory workers, utilising environmentally-sound transport methods, spearheading ethical waste management and helping to support the local environment, every part of the fashion creation journey needs to be considered if positive change is to happen.

And when you think about all the horrors mentioned throughout this article, you might agree that change **really does** need to happen.

Geraldine Carton, Sustainable Fashion Dublin

Thanks to Geraldine from Sustainable Fashion Dublin for making us aware of how our habits of consumption have profound effects on our brothers and sisters in poorer countries and also causes detrimental effects to our planet. We could try our best to ignore the truths contained in this article as it makes us feel uncomfortable or we could take even one step towards slow fashion which considers all aspects of the clothes industry from the fabric used in the clothing, to the person creating our clothes to the air or sea miles involved.

In the picture below, you will see our Meitheal leaders wearing their Fair Wear ethical hoodies which we sourced from Grown.ie. There are so many ethical clothing companies working with local communities which ensure a fair wage, good working conditions and whose manufacturing processes are environmentally conscious. Some examples are: PureClothing.ie; Grown.ie; Veja-store.com; FatFace.com; Peopletree.co.uk



As Oscar de la Renta says "Fashion is a trend. Style lives in a person." Buy less, visit the multiple charity shops for once off gems and feel good that you are supporting a local worthy cause at the same time. As consumers we have power to choose a better way for all.

Joanne O'Brien

SOLAS – 22nd November 2019

On the 22nd-23rd of November 2019, I had the privilege of attending the Killaloe Diocesan Youth Ministry event called 'Solás'. I got involved kind-of by accident, but I'm so glad I did because it was so enjoyable and I had the chance to be united with new people through faith.

Upon arriving, I knew a grand total of one person. Daunting as that was, I was put at ease very quickly through the fun ice-breakers we did. The human bingo was really enjoyable! We had a card with different random talents or skills on it and we had to find someone in the room that could do each one. It was quite an experience to have people frantically approaching me to ask what month I was born in or if I could do a magic trick!! We were also so well looked-after, provided with sweets, treats and pizza! Excellent fuel for all the activities we engaged in, such as team rock/paper/scissors and a quiz.

Once the ice had been broken and we had expended a good amount of energy, it was time for a beautiful prayer service. We all lit a candle and gathered around on the floor together. The group from Nenagh had organised music and Bishop Fintan led us in a peaceful prayer. The dancing candlelight added to the tranquil atmosphere and reminded us all of God's presence among us.



Workshop with Fr. Chris O' Donnell



Solas Leaders



Solas workshop on the Ecology.

The relaxing prayer replenished our stores of energy for the crazy disco, courtesy of DJ Fr. Jerry Carey. Some of us changed into our pyjamas for the occasion, to add to the comfort! The tunes were classic, you couldn't help but get moving! It was great to see everyone getting involved, especially for the likes of the Macarena. It's fair to say that we danced the night away!

By the time we retreated to our dorms, I was acquainted with far more people than when I had arrived, and as a shy person that's quite the accomplishment! While we would have loved to stay awake chatting for hours, we were just far too tired and were asleep almost as soon as our heads hit the pillows!

Upon waking, still exhausted as we were, the delicious breakfast definitely lifted our spirits! It set us up nicely for the few hours of workshops ahead. The first one was led by Fr. Chris who did a fantastic job at spreading positive energy among us. He spoke to us about social media and faith in our world today and it was really interesting. After a short break for tea and biscuits, we had our second workshop, led by Neil Foley from the Environmental Protection Agency. This one was about the origins of our faith, the similarities between different beliefs, and also about God in the natural world around us. I particularly enjoyed this workshop as I feel like I gained new insights from it.

After a short reflection from the Kilrush Youth Ministry, it was time to go our separate ways. I thoroughly enjoyed this overnight event and I couldn't be more grateful to everyone who was involved in making it the fantastic experience that it was!



Fr. Michael Geraghty, Fr Chris O' Donnell and Pádraig Casey



Night prayer

**Aisling Clarke,
St. Joseph's Secondary School, Tulla, Co. Clare**

Confirmation Candidates

The last Confirmation celebrated with Bishop Fintan was with pupils from Puckane on March 12th, 2020.



June 2020

Dear Confirmation Candidates,

I hope you are well and that you have coped well during what has been a very challenging few months for you. On the last day of January the Confirmation season started and it was to finish in early June. About one third of the ceremonies were celebrated when the virus unfortunately put an end to all the great plans.

I enjoyed very much the ceremonies that were celebrated. As always it was so heartening to see the effort and preparation that each student did in preparing along with the great help from teachers, school and from home.

I very much regret that it was not possible for the other ceremonies to be held. I bet you were disappointed too! I missed very much the routine of the happy occasions and the great opportunity to meet you and share the big day with you. For many of you, you will have recently celebrated your Confirmation perhaps in a different way than was planned. I hope it was a happy and holy day for you. For many more of you, your Confirmation day has yet to happen, I pray it will be a happy day for you.

I recognise the end of your time in primary school and all the rituals of closure of your primary school days couldn't happen as it did for pupils before you. You will never forget the year you were in 6th Class with memories of the whole world yielding to the corona virus.

As you travel through your teenage years and secondary school, recall often the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Use the gifts of courage, wisdom and right judgement to help guide you on your path.

May the Holy Spirit be with you to lead and inspire you and give you great joy always.

God bless and take care.

Bishop Fintan

Pupils from Mountshannon N.S at their retreat on Friday Match 6th. Together with pupils from Whitegate N.S., they are looking forward to their upcoming Confirmation day which sadly had to be postponed like so many other Confirmation celebrations. Fiona Cahill led the retreat in East Clare Golf Club Holiday Village.



Cistercian College Transition Year Project 2020

Mount Saint Joseph Abbey - Cistercian College Transition Year Prayer Path Project 2019- 2020

The Transition Year Coordinator and Staff were wondering how they could ask fanatical rugby/hurling/gym young men in TY to do heavy manual work by way of a project.

The project they had in mind was to restore an over-grown path in the monks' forestry, from the statue of Our Lady to the statue of Christ at his Baptism next to the waterfall. This was to be a concrete show of our philosophy of our "One Campus, One Vision, in action. This project would be the start of further forest trails on the monastic land, part of Green Campus Eco-Tourism.

The project would require carrying hardcore stone up a steep slope in buckets and barrow the rest of the way. Then the same had to be done with a finishing grit. They would not work on their own, both monk and housemaster would work side by side with them sharing in that same hard labour. However, it was not all about the hard slog. This was an opportunity to teach the same lads, welding, pipe bending, block laying and horticulture.

Away from the classroom, they would listen to the dawn chorus of the birds. They would see the red squirrels leaping from tree to tree. The students entered into the project with great heart and generosity of time.

Where funding was necessary, they filled out sponsorship cards and brought their families on board with both cash and kind. Parents rowed in to offer railway sleepers, hardcore and grit and much else that was needed, such as beech hedging.

The final result is a Prayer Path, starting at Our Lady's Statue, given to the monks by the Christian Brothers when leaving Roscrea, and finishing at the statue of Christ at His Baptism, given to the monastic community by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart when they left Roscrea. Along the Path there are prayer stations with rustic seating made out of a tree from that grove of trees.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the Prayer Path has been finished and has been widely acclaimed for its beauty and simplicity and has already become a regular reflective for the many friends and neighbours who visit our monastery.

Last year Cistercian College first year students erected an outdoor Stations of the Cross and repeated the same this year.

I am proud to have been a hands-on partner with the students in this project and look forward to some exciting projects with TY in 2021 and 2022.

Fr. Aodhán
Mt. St. Joseph Abbey



My Experience of Mission Rebekah Comerford

"Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch."
St. John Paul

This time last year, I had just finished college and I had finally secured my dream job. Little did I know that God had other plans for me, plans I would have never envisioned for myself. I was about to embark on the greatest unexpected journey of my life, one that took me from West Clare to the heart of New York in the space of a month. A chance encounter tugged at my heart and against my better instincts, I decided to take a risk, leave all and go to one of the poorest districts in the US to become a missionary. Jesus was calling me to more.

The Emmanuel School of Mission is a nine-month Catholic formation programme aimed at 18-30 year olds who wish to grow in their faith and learn to be missionary disciples. ESM NYC is one of seven global schools which aim to produce fully fledged missionaries who will respond to Jesus' call to follow him. The school is built on four pillars of formation: intellectual, spiritual, community and missionary. Every day we grounded ourselves in theology and examined what it means to be Catholic by delving into topics like the Bible, liturgy and faith and science. We established a daily rhythm and a solid spiritual routine with 7am adoration, praise and Mass. We shared community life, living together and serving one another in teams like cooking. Finally, we went on mission, spreading the Gospel through acts of love (helping the Missionaries of Charity and CFRs feed the homeless, assisting the elderly) and evangelisation on the street, in school and in parishes. It was transformative, it was challenging and totally worth it.

I loved my time in ESM. It is amazing how much I have grown in freedom and joy as I let go of the distractions of life (phone included) and grew in relationship with Jesus. Our house was full of laughter and music. With 28 people from 8 different

countries living together, it should have been a recipe for disaster, with cultural differences, language barriers and age differences to boot. However, united in the spirit of service and commitment to this crazy journey, it was a place of joy and humility where you learned to grow in love.



Rebekah Comerford

Meeting people on the street opened my eyes to the daily struggles of the poor. People were friendly and shared their hardships with us as immigrants, homeless, or drug addicts. I learned not to judge people on their appearance as the toughest, scariest looking people could be the deepest and most open to God. The most grateful man I met was homeless and had been robbed twice in a few weeks. He had every reason to be bitter yet he gave thanks and praise to God. Many times, the poor evangelised me.

The slogan of ESM is 'Give all. Get More.' That is the message of the Gospel, the more we give the more we will receive in return. At times, our culture preaches to give less, not to sacrifice and to expect the same result, however, true joy comes when we give the gift of ourselves for others. It is not easy but we know that if we put in the work God is never outdone in generosity. By saying "yes" to giving up my life in Ireland, I received so much more than I could have imagined; joy, peace, healing and strength for the journey ahead.



Meitheal 2020

In January 2019, 40 Transition year students and sixteen college students travelled to Esker to participate in the week long Meitheal Youth Leadership Programme led by Joanne O'Brien and Fr. Donagh O'Meara.

My Meitheal experience began when I was dropped into St Flannan's to meet the bus. At that moment and time, I really did not know what to expect and, to be one hundred percent honest, I was extremely nervous. This was the first of many times over the week that I was pushed out of my comfort zone as I was going off to an unfamiliar place with a bunch of unfamiliar people. All the way to Esker I was questioning whether I had made the right decision to take part in this programme.

our smaller school groups for the first time. During this time, we began to get to know the people in our school groups in more detail which I felt was a real benefit as we bonded more as a group. We were given the challenge to name our group something unique instead of just being called Tulla or Flannan's or Shannon etc. and we had to design a poster for our group. For the rest of the week this is how each group was identified. I thought that this was a really nice thing to do as it was something away from the norm.



Night Prayer

When we arrived in Esker, we were given an extremely warm welcome to the monastery by Joanne and Donagh. We were assigned our rooms, and as soon as we dropped our bags, we were brought down into what felt like an enormous room but soon this room began to feel warmer and more home like. Each school group was sitting in a particular area in the room. To start the experience, Donagh and Joanne gave us an introduction and outlined what the week was going to entail.

On the first evening we took part in an ice-breaking activity called Human Bingo. This activity involved the students and leaders going around the room trying to find someone who could do different talents which were outlined on a sheet that we were given. This helped people get to know what talents people had in the room. This was also a basis for some funny moments later in the week. On this first evening we broke away into

In my own personal experience, it was not until the second day that I started to feel comfortable in the group and started to enjoy myself. The whole week consisted of lots of different challenges, activities, talks, fun, JUST DANCE, icebreakers, time to reflect on life, meditation and so much more. The week was not all based around religion, but it was still present. A lot of the week was about growing as a person in life. Each day we had prayer in the morning followed by Just Dance which everyone loved (and I felt that this brought out the inner-child in everyone in the room) we also had prayer in the evening before going to bed.

The prayer was so unique and like nothing I have ever experienced before. Rather than just saying "Lord hear us" we sang "Lord hear our prayer, Lord hear our prayer, Lord in your mercy, Lord hear our prayer" and had some words of intentions in between each chant. Before our breakfast, each morning we went for a ten-minute walk outdoors around the monastery. I found



Early Morning Walk

this to be a great way of waking up and giving us a chance to enjoy the rest of the day.

The entire week was so well planned, and we were never sitting idle. There was always some activity to do. Every student was given a journal to record their experiences and I find that this is a great way now to reflect. In all my life I don't think I have ever laughed or smiled so many times. As the week progressed, I feel that everyone in the group began to become more confident and were willing to take part and enjoy the activities.



Just Dance

On one of the evenings we had a Meitheal-Factor. This involved everyone being broken up into different breakaway groups than before where we were given two songs which we had to change the lyrics so that they had some sort of religious meaning about the week. I really enjoyed this activity as it helped me to get to know people from other schools. We then had to go back into the main room where we performed what we had come up with. This was a real challenge as we had to dress up in fancy dress outfits.

On our last evening we had our own Meitheal's Got Talent. This involved each person in the group including the leaders performing a talent in front of the group. I found that this was really interesting as it showed the different talents that people had it within the room. It also brought everyone out of their comfort zone one last time. I feel that as the week progressed, I began to feel more comfortable in the group and more confident in standing up in front of the group and speaking or singing. On the last night of the week we had a singsong. For me this was an extraordinary experience as everyone was willing to have a bit of fun and craic and did not care what anyone was thinking of each other. It was proof that people can have fun and go a bit mad without the need for alcohol and this for me was really nice as it showed alcohol is not necessary.

On the final day of Meitheal, Bishop Fintan came to the monastery and we had our closing ceremony where we had music, song and prayer. We also reflected on the activities over the week. The time to get on the bus and go back to Ennis came too soon. Everyone was hugging each other and saying goodbye and thanking each other. When you stood back and looked at the atmosphere you could see all the new friendships that were made over the week. You could see that no one wanted to leave. When we were going out the gate of the monastery some of the leaders were out on the wall singing and dancing saying goodbye to us. This gave me such a warm feeling inside and I really did not want to go home. On the bus journey home, we had another sing song lead by some of the leaders.

Overall, I think that this week in Esker was one of the best experiences of my life and I would love to go back. I have so many new friendships as a result of the week and I feel that it has improved me as a person. It was a privilege to spend a week with such a nice group of people. I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to take part in this programme to take it with both hands and do not be afraid to go out of your comfort zone.

Written By David McInerney



St. Josephs Secondary School, Tulla



St. Flannan's College, Ennis and Coláiste Muire, Ennis.



*St. John Bosco Community College, Kildysart,
St. Josephs Secondary School, Spanishpoint*



St. Caimins Community School, Shannon



St. Anne's Community College, Killaloe



Meitheal Leaders with Bishop Fintan, Fr. Donagh O'Meara and Joanne O'Brien.

I became a Meitheal leader as I have always had an interest in young people and helping to grow as people. I'm a leader in the Mid Clare Youth Council so when I heard about the program I jumped at the opportunity to become a leader. Being a leader has allowed me to build my confidence and self belief.

Sarah Mc (age 19)

Being a Meitheal leader was a very fulfilling experience for me as I spent a week working with a group of TYs and fellow leaders. As the week went by our relationships grew day by day as we learned about one another more and more. We learned about our happy and sad moments in life among other things and this definitely brought us closer together.

Feargal (Age 20)

A challenging and rewarding experience. Made great friends and had lots of fun.

Sarah F. (age 19)

Becoming a Meitheal leader was one of the highlights of my year. I'm very glad I took the opportunity to do it. It was a fun way to meet new people and make new friends.

Doireann (Age 19)

Being a Meitheal leader gave me a chance to meet new people, learn new things and have fun. The spiritual camp helped me to grow and make many memories with the youth members and fellow mentors. The whole experience will forever stay with me and I will use everything that I have learned in it throughout my life.

Aine (age 18)

Being a Meitheal leader was such a rewarding experience, seeing how much it means to the students. As I attended the Anois programme while I was in TY, being a leader was even more enjoyable.

Caoimhe (age 19)

Being a Meitheal leader was an enjoyable and rewarding experience, meeting and working with many new people. The week was packed with a variety of activities, constant laughing and fun. There was an incredible atmosphere all week with growth and development to be seen in everyone involved.

David (Age 20)

Being a Meitheal leader was a great experience; there's such a small age gap between the leaders and students, most of the stuff they're going through now, we went through only a few short years ago. This more than anything allowed us to connect with them and meet them where they're at, offering advice or even just a listening ear, which is often most important. I feel that the week at Meitheal provided a much needed safe space for the students, an environment that gave encouragement and a newfound confidence to every person.

Laoise (age 20)

During my experience of being a Meitheal leader, I gained a new circle of friends both younger and older than me. Becoming a Meitheal leader allowed me to get the opportunity to discover the true joy of being in the company of young people. A week full of laughter, games, joy and sense of achievement. A wonderful time to meet truly wonderful people.

Alannah (age 20)

Meitheal is an amazing week with many fun experiences and great people. It is a week I will never forget and has allowed me to grow. I will never forget the people and the memories made with them.

Scott (age 19)

'Being part of Meitheal was one of the best things I have ever participated in. From creating new friendships, strengthening existing friendships and being a positive influence on young people, Meitheal was an experience everyone enjoyed with countless memories!!!'

Pádraig (age 19)

Kilrush Youth Ministry

This year, I joined Kilrush Youth Ministry. There were 30 of us altogether with 7 leaders. Although the Youth Ministry was for teenagers from Kilrush Parish, teenagers from other parishes were welcomed with open arms- nobody was turned away.

From the beginning, it was explained to us that the youth ministry was not a club, but a group of faith. We all assembled in Kilrush Community Centre from 7-8 every Tuesday evening. At our very first meeting, we created our own code of conduct that would be followed both by members and leaders. This included rules and values that we felt were important. It also made us feel as though every member of the group was equal and that everyone would be able to express their opinions without judgment.

At some of our other meetings we watched videos explaining what faith is and how we can live a meaningful life. We made cards for Mother's Day, Brigid's Crosses for Saint Brigid's Day and handed these out at mass. We planned events and fundraisers for charity and learned the importance of serving others.

We took part in many activities. A group of us spent a night in St. Flannans College to take part in an event called Solas. We did many activities that helped us to explore our faith. There were a number of guest speakers including the Bishop, priests, climate change activists and many more. Other events that we took part in were bag packing, clothes collections and carol singing, where we collected money for charity.

One of the biggest collections we did was for a charity called Mary's Meals, a charity providing meals for girls in Third World countries so they can attend school. Members volunteered their time to read at mass and collect money during lent. In the space of two weekends we managed to collect just over €2000.

Unfortunately, the Youth Ministry of 2020 was cut short due to Covid 19. We had plans to climb Croagh Patrick and organise a bake sale for charity, organise a mass and Easter events for the community and go on a pilgrimage to Taize.

Although we were disappointed that we couldn't take part in these events, we immensely enjoyed our time with Kilrush Youth Ministry and hope that other parishes will follow suit and set up their own youth ministry. We are so thankful to all the leaders for volunteering their time to allow us to take part in so many activities and hope that Kilrush Youth Ministry will live on for years to come.

Namasté

Eleanor Crowe
Kilrush Youth Ministry



Carol Singing



Making St. Brigid's crosses.



Our Pilgrimage to Taize in July 2019.

Kilmihil Youth Ministry

On November the 1st 2019 Kilmihil Youth Ministry met for the very first time. The planning and organising for this group started long before this night. It involved various members of Kilmihil community coming together and giving their time to ensure we made this group a success by listening to voices of the youths and meeting their needs.



Kilmihil Group

Our 1st night was an exciting night with a small amount of trepidation as we waited to greet the young people and start off what we hoped would be the start of something positive and enjoyable for our community. On that first night we welcomed 15 1st to 3rd year students from various surrounding parishes for 1 hour and 15 minutes. This figure grew to 21 as the weeks progressed. It is vital to us that everyone participating in this group is respectful of each other and a code of conduct was discussed and agreed to on very 1st night.

We started a successful format on that night that we have continued since into 2020 where we light our candle and young people write their own reflection on what is important to them or are thankful for and some nights the leaders may say a few words. We then carry out some group activity where we do some crafts ie Brigid's crosses, work for our planned youth space in the church or for special masses. The tradition of hot chocolate, marshmallows and biscuits is one that brings us all together in a circle and allows us leaders to open-up the floor to our young people so they can be heard. It's a time for brainstorming ideas for fundraising, discussion on how our young people can participate and get involved in the community and what trips and events they would like to be organised. Every night ends with a fun active game that everyone takes part in and everyone has a lot of fun.

The leaders of the group come together with Fr Peter Loughlin and plan each meeting carefully. For us leaders the balance between making this group a spiritual one and ensuring the young people are connected with their community is so crucial.

So far in our short time we have joined the active retirement celebrations for Christmas and our young people helped in providing entertainment. They created some lovely crafts for the Christmas Eve mass in the church. We organised the travelling crib around the homes of the young people and each inserted a diary entry into a journal. We attended the local Tidy Towns meeting and the plan is to get involved and appreciate the beautiful place we live in. We organised a fun day for the youths where we had lunch of pizza and chips and then went on to the

"Escape Rooms" in Ennis to have fun but also to work together as a team and recognise that each of us has different skills and contribute in many different ways.

We had many more events planned which included a mindfulness wellbeing walk in the Burren in May and attending an adventure centre during the holiday. However Covid19 came into our lives and this was not possible. Our plan, however is to come back together strong when it is safe to do so and continue to grow and further engage with other ministries, all in the effort to enrich the lives of the young people and seen the good that can be achieved and the joy it gives when young people (or they) come together and the joy it gives.

Edel Copeland

Hi my name is Nóirín and I joined Kilmihil Youth Ministry in September. We generally meet up every second Friday night. This is a great way to wind down after the hectic week of school. Every meeting we have done different activities such as making St. Brigid's Crosses, playing games, making posters and preparing for our bake sale. We also catch up among ourselves over hot chocolate and biscuits. We organised a bake sale to raise vital funds intended to organise various events throughout the year. This made us all work as a team to run the event smoothly after mass. During the mid-term break we visited The Escape Rooms in Ennis. This encouraged us to work as a team. Luckily, we escaped in time. This activity was very enjoyable. I look forward to seeing what else we get up to in the next few months. We have planned to create a youth space in our local church.



Youth Ministry Meeting



Trip to Killary Adventure Centre, Co. Galway



Kilmihil Youth Ministry Leaders, AnnMarie Daly, AnnMarie Donnelly & Edel Copeland.

Boirne Youth Connect

Our local youth of the Parish of Ruan/Dysart, in the Imeall Boirne Pastoral Area, meet every Friday night, 7.30pm – 9.00pm in Ruan or Toonagh Hall. We take time out from our busy lives to chat and catch up with one another. It's a time when relationships are built up and acquaintances become friends. We have a "Be with the people you are with" policy, which involves leaving the phones away for the short time we are together. We take part in fun activities such as exercise nights, guest speakers, pizza and movie nights, exam prayer services, contributing to local masses, etc. It is a space and time when moments of encountering Christ are provided and encouraged.

This Youth Night began as a result of having a NET Ministries team in the Pastoral Area, and every year around Easter time, the group go to Donegal to participate in a Surfing Retreat. Sadly, this year that was not possible but we are all very much looking forward to getting back together and going on a retreat at the first available opportunity. The youth find this retreat to be a very special time, and so it is something that we will prioritise when circumstances



Boirne Youth Connect

allow.

This night is for secondary school age group. Thanks our great leaders Ellen Jones, Mary Wynne, Aidan Hastings and Martina O'Donoghue for making this opportunity possible for the young people.

Faith Friends

Faith Friends is the coming together of school children who are making Confirmation with members of the community to share their knowledge, wisdom and experience of being part of the Christian Church. In Ennis, senior cycle students from Rice College and St. Flannan's College train to lead the Faith Friends Programme with the Confirmation Candidates from Ennis National School and The Holy Family Primary School.

It is a specially structured programme which encourages sixth class students to speak about their lives and their faith so that they can recognize how unique and special each one of them is and learn to appreciate their own special gifts and talents. Each week a different topic is discussed such as Belonging, Believing, Christianity and the meaning of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. In a structured way but in an informal setting, the Confirmation Candidates listen and learn from each other's opinions on what they think Confirmation is about and how the reception of this sacrament is a key moment in their faith journey. Through this programme the Confirmation Candidates become truly aware that it is their choice to continue on the same path that their parents chose for them at Baptism. The senior students who become special Faith Friends not only help prepare sixth class children for Confirmation but also discuss with them the importance of a strong faith in the face of the challenges that adolescence brings in today's society.

The students from St. Flannan's College and Rice College who facilitated this programme in Ennis this year discovered that their involvement enabled them to deepen, refresh and renew their own faith especially when they shared some experiences of their own faith journey with the Confirmation Candidates. Reflecting on their participation in this programme, one of this years leaders commented "It has been several years since I received my own

Confirmation but I feel from my own experience as a Faith Friends leader that I have helped to prepare children in Ennis for Confirmation and I have strengthened my own understanding of the importance of the gifts of The Holy Spirit in our daily lives as Christians." **Anonymous**

"As a Transition Year student I volunteered to take part in the Faith Friends Programme. Each week had a different theme which benefitted me as a young adult because I learnt again what the Sacrament of Confirmation meant to me as a Catholic. I enjoyed my experience in Faith Friends because it was good fun to spend time with the sixth class students and to hear what they thought about the Sacrament of Confirmation. It was a learning curve for the students and for me as a mentor for them" – **Jillian**.

"Faith Friends was probably my first big opportunity to be a leader. It was great being able to improve my communication and people skills. The experience also boosted my confidence. I got to meet other people. I loved sharing my experiences with the sixth class students and helping them. I remember being a sixth class student myself and it felt great guiding them at such a special time in their lives, helping them understand how important their faith is and will be for them in every aspect of their lives" – **Joanna**

The Faith Friends Programme is truly an enriching experience for children as they prepare to receive Confirmation. Thank you to all of the Faith Friends adult leaders. The programme Co-ordinator is Sr. Betty Curtin. This year she had the assistance of Geraldine Cummins, Brid O Connell, Liz Mc Mahon and Marion Coughlan.

Myriam Black

Mid Clare Youth Council

The Mid-Clare Youth Council or MCYC is a group of senior cycle students who mix faith, fun and social awareness. We organize various events and activities that aim to bring faith into the lives of young people in a fun, interactive way.



During our meetings, we do lots of different things which include discussing our faith, planning different events and excursions. We also hold a games night where we play different board games and icebreakers with the group. Our meetings are usually an hour long and are a great way for young people to meet like-minded individuals.

Every Christmas, the Mid Clare Youth Council are involved with Down Syndrome Ireland in holding a Christmas party for the children and their parents. We have been involved in these parties for three years and they are a highlight of the year for our members. We engage with the children by helping them with arts and crafts and dancing with them. These parties are a great way to get involved in our local community. Engaging in these parties is very fulfilling as it is a great feeling to know how much it means to the children and their parents when we, as a group, are there to help.

We also got the opportunity to be part of the SOLUS overnight – an event which we all thoroughly enjoyed. From “Battle of the Parables”, to interesting talks by guest speakers, we all came away from the event with fond memories and new friendships with other Youth Ministry Groups.

This year, the MCYC also gained three new leaders (all of whom are writing this piece). Doireann Kinsella, Padraig Casey and Sarah



McCarthy were all members of the MCYC during their school years and, after completing the Youth Ministry Leadership Course supported by the diocese, progressed to become leaders of the MCYC. We all took part in the Pope John Paul II Awards and since then, have become heavily involved in youth events throughout the diocese. Becoming leaders of the MCYC was a natural progression for us.



Because of the amazing experiences we had with the group, we jumped at the opportunity to become leaders. The MCYC gave us an opportunity to grow in confidence and faith, while also providing great examples of what true leaders are like and how leaders can be a positive influence on young people. We want to share the experience we had with new members of MCYC, while also enhancing their experience. From running games nights, to interacting with the group, we also have grown in confidence. Becoming leaders has been a very fulfilling experience for us as it is very satisfying to be around like-minded people and feel comfortable to speak about our faith.



Like the entire world, we all had to adapt to stay connected with each other during the COVID19 pandemic. Instead of holding fun meetings in person, we moved MCYC online to our Instagram account. On our account, we hold interactive activities on different days, each day focused on a specific theme. Fun activities, wellbeing and elements of faith are explored on these days and anyone can get involved!

Written By, Padraig Casey, Sarah McCarthy and Doireann Kinsella

From the Chaplain's Desk

Cora Guinnane, Chaplain, St Caimin's Community School, Shannon.

When did you begin your ministry of School Chaplaincy?

Way back in 2003 I took up the role of Chaplaincy in Old Bawn Community School in Tallaght. It's a ministry I have loved everyday since and continue to do so. Although I changed schools and counties, I have never lost my love of being Chaplain to the young people I serve.

Can you describe the role of a School Chaplain?

Everybody brings their own personality and characteristics to the role of Chaplain. I believe my own personal experience growing up shaped the type of person and chaplain that I am. For me, being a Chaplain means being a presence, an advocate and companion to the students, their families and the staff of my school. Being Chaplain means I am there during the good times and the not so good, a listening ear, a spiritual guide, a good coffee/tea maker and above all a person who cares.

Do you find the young people in your school open to the Christian message today?

Young people are always open to the goodness of others and like to do good. They identify the Christian message in many forms and will always respond when they are led by example. Many young people are witnesses to the Gospel values themselves and are positive role models for the message of Christ.

Many young people may not necessarily be open to a discourse on the Christian message, but they are very open and honest about what is good and just and moral, and they can identify those who are authentic about promoting these values.

Young people love helping others and find joy in doing so. I have seen students who may not necessarily identify as been religious, have a hugely positive impact on another person's life. I believe it is important that young people have positive role models who are not afraid to identify with following in the footsteps of Christ. Most young people know the difference between right and wrong and develop a moral conscience when they see the impact of their choices or decisions on others. I think young people respond to the Christian message and values of Christ when they see them being lived out in a practical way in daily life. This I believe is the greatest witness to support young people as they journey into adulthood.

How do you nurture your own Faith?

I believe God has a plan for each one of us and this helps and supports me each day as I journey and support the community in my school. I take time to pray and reflect with the loving God who

is my companion each day. I ponder on the person of Jesus and the example, teachings and advice he gave us when he walked this earth. I take time to walk by the sea and take in the wonders of creation and restore my soul. What I give as Chaplain I receive back on the double from the young people I journey with. This in itself nurtures my faith.

What signs of hope do you see for the Christian message in today's world?

There are so many signs of hope in our world today. I see our young people chat, care and take interest in our senior citizens in our community. I see our environmentalists promote care of the earth and all God's creations. I see our budding scientists ponder on cures for diseases and ways to promote life. During Covid-19 I saw our students write letters to the residents of nursing homes to cheer them up. I saw them offering peer support to each other when online schooling was challenging. I see our youth leaders offer to help incoming students so that transitioning into secondary school will be less daunting. I see the messages of gratitude our young people offer to us teachers and to the wider community for making a difference. I see Jesus walk this earth every day through our young people and it is this that gives me the love of being a Chaplain each new day.



From the Chaplain's Desk

Lorcan Kenny, Chaplain, Coláiste Phobal Roscrea, Co. Tipperary.

When did you begin your ministry of School Chaplaincy?

I started my school chaplaincy in Roscrea Vocational School in 1997. At the time, I didn't realise it would become one of the biggest blessings of my life. At the time, I wouldn't have said that (I had no real desire to go into a school full time), but sometimes the wrong train takes you to the right station! We amalgamated with the Sacred Heart and Christian Brothers Schools in 1999 to become Coláiste Phobal Roscrea, I've been blessed to be there since.

Can you describe your role as School Chaplain?

My role is a really interesting, life giving, exciting, sometimes incredibly stressful position in the school. For me the heart of school chaplaincy is very simple. It's love. Love in action. Love born out of Eucharist. Love from Jesus that nourishes, upholds and replenishes it. I keep saying to my students (affectionately known as gérsghàs), figure out what you love, then figure a way of getting paid to do it!



Bishop Fintan Monahan, Michael O'Connor, Principal, Fr Lorcan Kenny, School Chaplain, Rev. Jane Galbraith & Fr. Tom Corbett.

For me personally, daily Eucharist is where chaplaincy is grounded. When I raise the bread of life, when I bless it, break it, share it, I think of students, staff and their families. I think of people whom life has blessed, or broken. I think of the people who raise the broken up and share their kindness, uphold their dignity and gently encourage them that they are not alone. I try to be Eucharistic in my everyday chaplaincy moments. For me the Eucharist needs expression in my daily work, by stopping, listening, laughing, helping people find a safe place to cry and pushing through whatever has been thrown their way.

Are young people open to the Christian message today?

When asked about young people being open to the Christian message I have to stop and ask myself, am I? Do I really know and live the Christian message of love and do I live it, or try to everyday? I love the Franciscan motto, "preach the gospel and use words if necessary". That might not fit in with others thoughts of catechesis, dialogue, inculturation etc but I like to keep things simple. Do I love, like Jesus taught? For me young people's openness to love, compassion, kindness, understanding and fun is very humbling. I'm a big fan of St Therese, my gérsghàs are sick of hearing "little things are big things" and who's against that?

What are the major issues facing young people today?

I do believe the biggest issue today for people, (not just young people), is what I call "spiritual loneliness". The loneliness of the soul manifests in physical, mental and emotional health problems. Wellbeing is a real conversation piece currently and that's really good. But I wonder do we understand it? And

not the learnt off answer of wellbeing. Soul-loneliness is very tangible in people. They become boats without oars, ships without a rudder, a sail with little wind to lift it. I worry about that sometimes. Because connecting people with others, nature, scripture, faith and indeed with their own unique, brave heart can bring such healing.

I believe in the current times people have been forced to stop and might just hear the quiet voice of their soul whispering "notice me... notice what's important... notice what you can hold onto and notice what you can let go of". Quietness, connection, compassion and nature can truly sooth loneliness of the soul.

How do you nourish your own faith?

For myself, I nourish my own faith by chatting away to Jesus. This is throughout the day and at specific times early in the morning. I'm not a night owl, so long prayer moments at night don't work for me. I barely give God a holy fist bump goodnight. Morning walks are when I connect with Him most and Eucharist. I also have a few very close friends with whom I can share soul stuff and I'm in an excellent chaplain cluster group.

I'd like to finish by simply saying to whoever is reading this, may your soul be light. May you find hope in our beautiful mixed up world, may your own faith journey be interesting and real and lastly, may He who is Love, bless you and yours.

*Amen,
Lorcán*

Pope John Paul II Awards in the Diocese of Killaloe

A crowd of over 300 people gathered at the West County Hotel in Ennis recently to witness the sixth annual presentation of the Pope John Paul II Awards in the Diocese of Killaloe. Bishop Fintan Monahan and Mr Marty Morrissey presented 110 young people from across the diocese with their awards.



Borrisokane Community College.

The Pope John Paul II awards began in Derry in 2006. They are dedicated to the memory of the late Pope Saint John Paul II whose love of young people was so profound.



Colaiste Muire, Ennis

The Purpose of the awards is to recognise and affirm the good work that young people are doing in their parishes and communities. They are aimed at young people in the senior cycle of secondary school. The awards are based on the principle that our faith is for living and through taking part in church and community activities young people can experience the contentment and fulfilment that comes from serving others, especially those in need.

Some examples of the work done by young people across the diocese include, working with the Society of St Vincent de Paul, visiting nursing homes and schools for those with special needs, working in charity shops, fundraising for charities, singing in choirs, reading at Mass, serving as Eucharistic Ministers, tidy towns, training underage teams, building homes in Romania and many other activities.

Speaking at the presentation ceremony Bishop Fintan Monahan commended the award recipients for their generosity of spirit and encouraged the young people to continue the work that they had begun as part of the awards. He said "I want to make sure you know how welcome you are in the Church of the Diocese of Killaloe. You are so important to us as Church, because without you the wonderful message of the Good News of Jesus Christ will not be passed on to future generations. You are the future of our Church and we are very excited to see you participate in it. I warmly congratulate you on your achievement, your parents and families, teachers, school, the priests and religious who accompany you."



Kilrush Parish

Award recipient Rebecca Keane from Colaiste Muire Ennis spoke about her experience participating in the awards. She recounted her time as part of the youth section of the diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes which helped to care for the sick pilgrims. "Christ's teachings were very evident throughout our pilgrimage to Lourde. One of the main teachings that I saw in action was to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. We all enjoyed the experience so much that every single one of us started crying when it came to leaving. One of the many reasons we thought Lourdes was so special was that everyone was treated equally no matter the disability. The Love that was shown towards us in Lourdes was remarkable and I would say that this trip made me fully understand how God wants us to live."

The final speaker was guest of honour Mr Marty Morrissey. Speaking to the award recipients he said "What you have done with the John Paul II awards is special. To give of yourself, to give of your time and to serve your community and your parish is the greatest gift you can give, to yourselves and your community and indeed to God. Doing something together as a parish and being proud of your own place, that means something! Thank you for what you do, who you are and where you're from.

**Anyone from the Diocese of Killaloe wishing to participate in the awards or seeking further information can contact the Pope John Paul II Awards Coordinator,
Fr. Ger Jones at
jp2killaloe@gmail.com**



Rice College, Ennis



St John Bosco Community College, Kildysart



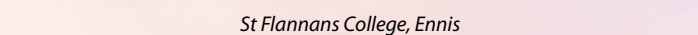
St. Joseph's Secondary School, Tulla.



St. Brendan's Community School, Birr.



St. Mary's Secondary School, Nenagh.



St Flannans College, Ennis



St. Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon.

Nenagh Youth Council

I joined the Youth Pastoral Council about nine months ago. At first, I was a bit sceptical but was quickly reassured. After my first meeting, I never looked back. We have meetings every three weeks to a month. These involve students from St. Marys or The CBS coming together after school with Ms. Maher, Ms. Dillon and Fr. Michael.

We go through what we can do in the local community and look to see if there are any appeals coming up. This year we completed a clothes and toy appeal. The clothes appeal was for St. Vincent de Paul and the toy appeal was for Novas. Novas is a voluntary agency that works with single parents, families and children that are disadvantaged. Unfortunately we did not get to complete any other fundraisers because of Corona Virus. I also got the opportunity to go to St. Flannans for a night back in November. It was a chance for us to meet other people our age who are from other Pastoral Youth Councils.

For me the most important thing we do is when we sing, read and give out communion at 6 o'clock mass on a Sunday in Nenagh. It is so nice to have people my age coming in and showing that there still is hope with young people in the church and hopefully that will continue in time to come.

Obviously this wouldn't happen without the help of the teachers and Fr. Michael and we are very grateful for all the work they do behind the scenes. I am so glad I joined the Pastoral Youth Council I have come upon so many opportunities and I have made so many friends. I cannot wait to get back to it once it is safe to do so.

Mary Darcy.



Nenagh Youth Council visiting Rome in August 2019.

I joined the Youth Pastoral Council at the start of transition year. I really enjoyed being part of the youth pastoral group. Some of my friends from school also joined at the start of the year. I have made lots of new friends too!

As part of the youth pastoral group we met every month as a group to discuss different topics such as events like the food appeal at Christmas. Meeting up as a group every month was fun as we got to talk as a group as well as planning different events. We also got food and drinks at the meetings which was really nice as most of these meetings were straight after school.

The youth pastoral group helps at the six o'clock mass on Sundays. Father Michael usually says the mass and we all have different roles such as doing the readings, being in the choir and being Eucharistic Ministers. By helping out we help create a lovely evening mass. The six o'clock evening mass has grown in popularity as now a lot of people of all ages enjoy the community spirit at it. After mass Father Micheal gets pizza delivered to the church and we all get to enjoy some pizza and we get to catch up with each other.

We have so many talented young people in the group who are part of the choir and who play the music which makes the six o'clock evening mass joyful and enriching. I love seeing how it's not only just families coming to the mass but all age groups coming to celebrate together. This evening mass has grown so much and it's great that we have such a lovely one in Nenagh!

I love being part of the youth pastoral group and being part of the community too. Hopefully we will all be back to normality soon!

Laura Ryan



Mass in The Irish chapel in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

A Lifetime of Cocooning for Poor Clares



Cocooning and leaving home only in limited circumstances is a new phenomenon all over the world, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, but it is a way of life for us Poor Clares... a treasured way of life, chosen because of a vocation where we are called to live apart so as to have the necessary space and atmosphere to enable us to live the lives of prayer and contemplation to which we have been called.

I am a strong believer that there is a spiritual purpose behind everything that happens, whether that is perceived as being good or bad. The Covid-19 virus is reminding us that we are all equal, regardless of our culture, religion, occupation, financial situation or how famous we are. This disease treats us all equally. It is reminding us that we are all connected and that what has an affect on one person has an affect on another. It is reminding us of how precious our health is. The shortness of life, and our mortality and life after death, is in sharp focus as never before. It is reminding us that when the chips are down it is only the essentials that all of us really need, food, water, medicine, and not the luxuries of life. It is forcing us back into our houses so we can rebuild them into our homes and strengthen our family unit. It is reminding us that we can be patient or we can panic. It is reminding us that after every dark there is the dawn and that 'this too will pass'. It is reminding us to be generous and not selfish... in the darkest hours the brightest stars shall shine. Above all it is reminding us that we are in God's loving care and that He will carry us through this.

We, your Poor Clare sisters, hold you in our hearts at prayer during this difficult time. We are very mindful especially of our

young people, who have been through such an uncertain and traumatic time, not knowing whether you would or wouldn't be sitting your exams. And now that your exam situation has been clarified you have had to endure the controversy surrounding the correcting of your exam papers. Our hearts have gone out to you in prayer during all this stressful time for you. We will continue to hold you in our hearts at prayer as you move forward and search for what providence has mapped out for each of you.

Young people have been at the forefront of those clamouring for 'climate change'. How right you are. Even the worst pandemics eventually pass, but the environmental crisis will not pass. That is why this may be a moment of huge significance for all life on earth. While many people long for the restoration of social interactions, for reunion with family and friends, for a return to normal, we must ask what 'normal' might be after this. Our young people have the awesome responsibility for how our behaviour impacts on 'life after Covid 19'.

*And then one day
The fog of fear lifted
Gently
The night of anxiety passed
Quietly
And the pain of sickness and death eased
Palpably.*

Sr. Bernardine. Poor Clare Monastery, Ennis

Killaloe Diocese Youth Ministry Autumn Course 2019



Participants in the Diocesan Youth Ministry Course. Front row: 2nd from right is Fr. Peadar O' Loughlin SSC, who sadly passed away since after a short illness. *Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dilis.*

In Autumn of 2019 youth ministers and aspiring youth ministers in the Killaloe Diocese were given the opportunity to attend a 6-week Youth Ministry Leader training course every Wednesday evening at the Carrigoran Wellness Centre, Newmarket on Fergus, County Clare.

This was an opportunity that many jumped at with hopeful enthusiasm and some simply with quiet curiosity and a desire to learn more and to reach out to the young people of today's world. Fr Donagh O' Meara and Joanne O'Brien led the way in this venture. On our first Wednesday night, the warm and welcoming atmosphere they provided and their kind words made us feel at ease. The meditative prayer led by Fr Donagh placed God's immense love for us all at the centre of our focus.

The areas covered on six nights, which actually ended up increasing to eight, included: "Introduction to Youth Ministry", "Pilgrimage, Residentials and Confirmation Retreats", "Prayer, Special Liturgies, Youth Masses & Pastoral Care", "Children's Liturgy and Training Alter Servers", an obligatory night on "Safeguarding", "First Aid" and lastly on the final two nights "Introduction to the Enneagram, Planning, Liturgy, Blessing and Commissioning" of which the latter part was carried out by Bishop Fintan Monahan.

It was wonderful to hear from many different speakers throughout the course, especially those who have travelled along the road of youth ministry already and can attest to its benefits and also share some of its challenges with us and how to overcome them.

The moments that stood out most for me were: Firstly the blessing on the final night from Bishop Monahan which really spurred up and fanned the flame of the Holy Spirit within our hearts to go forth and do God's work in whatever way we could for the youth of today.

Secondly the major influence that a Grandfather, Grandmother or parent's faith and prayers can have on their children/grandchildren's life, even if this is not always immediately apparent or visible.

The Enneagram with Sr. Carmel Kehoe which was a fun experience for many of us. The Enneagram consisted of a series of questions that led you to your personality type, the strengths that you have with that personality type and the faults that often come with it and so things we can try to be more aware of when interacting with others!

It was great to be able to meet and interact with so many different people. All were present for the same purpose, to nurture the vital gift of Faith in children and teenagers by doing our best to lead them to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Aoife Ní Chathasaigh, Shannon



Youth Ministry Leaders from Kilmihil.



Youth Ministry Leaders from Ceantar na Lochanna.



Youth Ministry Leaders from Shannon.



Youth Ministry Leaders from the Abbey area.



Youth Ministry Leaders from the East of the Diocese.



Youth Ministry Leaders from the West of the Diocese.

My experience in Lourdes



June 25th 2019 was my first time ever in Lourdes and it most definitely will not be my last.

Throughout my life I had seen pictures of young people in yellow bibs. I often wondered what role they had to play in the pilgrimage to Lourdes. Having spoken to youth volunteers who had been to Lourdes prior to me I failed to understand how they could not provide me with much of a description of the place and the work they had done. It wasn't until I was chosen from my local youth ministry group to take the trip myself that I realized it is almost impossible to describe the sense of fulfillment, peace, strengthened faith and just exactly what takes place in Lourdes.

Having left Shannon Airport with 4 close friends, I landed home with a plane full of friends and memories, more than I could ever have imagined. From the moment we left our parents at the door of the airport and were under the supervision of all our fantastic leaders, I knew it was going to be the trip of a lifetime. Although we had only met our leaders once at the introduction evening, they immediately felt like close family members who we could trust with our lives. We were divided into smaller "buddy groups" in which we gathered for head counts and daily check ins. Each buddy group had their own leader. I was led by Tracy Murray who went above and beyond to help us in any way possible just like the other leaders did. They no doubt have left a lasting impression on us forever more.

We travelled to Lourdes on a flight with the assisted pilgrims and leaders as a group of strangers. It didn't take long before we all became close friends and were planning our trip to return in the coming years. When we arrived, we youth volunteers got to spend time together beginning the friendships that will last forever more. We were given our yellow bibs, the bibs that meant so much to each and every one wearing them and which helped people to pick us out from the crowd. When we were introduced to the assisted pilgrims, we were nervous at first, we had no idea just what was in store. As our leaders told us to try and not get too attached, we wondered what exactly they meant.

Throughout the week, as a group, we shared the most special moments with one another. The group meals, the ice cream trips, the walk in Bartres with Bishop Fintan, the beautiful candle lit procession and our participation in daily rituals and time spent with the assisted pilgrims are among the many wonderful moments that played a huge part in helping us grow closer together than we ever could have imagined on that very first day we met.

One moment that stands out for me from the hundreds of memories made is the final night. As a group of young volunteers, we said our

goodbyes to the assisted pilgrims after a week of being in their company. I truly think that night was the most emotional night of my life. As we hugged and took pictures with one another and the assisted pilgrims, the tears began to flow. It was the hardest goodbye I have ever experienced. The assisted pilgrims we had just shared the most memorable week of our lives with would now become lasting memories in our minds. As we lit candles and held hands around the statue of Our Lady while singing Caledonia with our leaders who had made our experience the best it could possibly be, we reflected on what an amazing week we had shared with one another.

At times, like now for example as we are in the middle of a global pandemic, I often wonder how each and every one I met along my journey in Lourdes are coping? This is probably the most difficult thing about the trip, leaving the wonderful people who have impacted in such a great way on our lives without knowing if we will ever meet again.

Lourdes is what I can only describe as a little piece of heaven on earth. It truly was a life changing experience and I would do absolutely anything to spend one more day there in my yellow bib alongside what I would now consider my second family. The assisted pilgrims' positivity, the responsibility shown by our leaders and our ability to work together as a team for the benefit of others has helped me to grow as a person and taught me to never take life for granted, which can be easily done before witnessing life in Lourdes.

Lourdes is an indescribable experience and there is only so much I can tell you about it until you make that journey yourself. If you are given the opportunity to wear that yellow bib, please do and do so with pride. You will be grateful forever more. I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to experience Lourdes for myself and I can't wait to revisit when the time is right. It was and always will be the best experience of my life and there is not one thing I would change about it. My many new friends both young and old, each and every one of them will hold a special place in my heart forever more.

Ceantar na Lochanna Youth Ministry



Ceantar na Lochanna Youth visiting the Aqua park in Kilrush.

Last Summer, Joanne O'Brien and Edel Mc Inerney saw the need to set up a youth faith group for the Ceantar na Lochanna Pastoral Area which includes the parishes of Tulla, Kilkishen/ O'Callaghan's Mills, and Broadford. Leaders for the group were recruited and the first meeting took place in Fr. Brendan Quinlivan's kitchen back in September 2019. Over the weeks the leaders met with the young people and listened to what they wanted and a date was set for the Saturday 21st for the first outing. That Saturday morning there was a great atmosphere as thirty five young people and seven leaders set off on their first outing to West Coast Aqua Park in Kilrush followed by a trip to the beautiful and peaceful, Scatterry Island. After a fun filled day with water sports and contemplative activities the young people headed back to Tulla to break pizza with each other.

Over the following group meetings with the young people they discussed their interests, what they wanted from the group and they felt it was important for the group to create a code of conduct.

In November, for the month of Holy Souls, the young people remembered those close to them who had passed away. On a dark evening in November the group gathered at Tulla Court House, candles were carried and a procession was led by Fr. Brendan Quinlivan to the Tulla Graveyard. The young people prayed and lit candles for their dearly departed. The second part of the evening entailed games and group activities.

Leading up to Christmas there was great excitement as a travelling crib was organised to go to the homes of each young person, where they wrote about the experience into the travelling journal. Our leader Edel told the story of Christmas to



The Duff brothers enjoying hosting the Advent Travelling Crib

the group through Godly play. We hadn't experienced this kind of storytelling before and we were all mesmerised by the beauty of it.

Before the lockdown occurred the group was steadily progressing and the young people decided to meet every second week rather than once a month. We began each meeting with hot chocolate and marshmallows which set a welcome and friendly tone to the meetings.

The spirit of the group has been going strong despite the lockdown thanks to Instagram. On one of our final gatherings we had a fun time coming up with a name for our insta account. We decided on '**CnaL_Youthministry**' and a big thank you to one of our leaders Saoirse Boyce for setting it up. Going forward we are planning a 'Zoom' meeting for the leaders to put a plan in place for our next gathering which we hope will be soon.

A massive thank you to the young people who were brave enough to take the leap and join the group, to our fabulous leaders Edel Mc Inerney, Lauren King, Ger Coughlan, Eimear Coughlan, Saoirse Boyce, Rita Mc Inerney, Deirdre Hogan and Joanne O'Brien and to Fr Brendan Quinlivan for wholeheartedly supporting the group and opening up his home for our planning meetings.



On the boat to Scatterry Island.



The young people of Ceantar na Lochanna Youth Ministry.

Missionvale



*The group from Co. Clare that travelled to Missionvale in February 2019.
The empty chair was for Sr Ethel but she was needed to offer support to a family in need at the time the photograph was taken.*

Last Spring, Father Donagh O'Meara came to St Joseph's Secondary School Spanish Point with a life changing opportunity for four students. A ripple of excitement spread throughout the school as soon as it was announced that a group of students would be selected to travel to Missionvale, a township on the outskirts of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in a year's time. The students would get the chance to work in the Missionvale Care Center, a facility founded and run by Sister Ethel Normoyle to improve the lives of the local people.

Interviews were carried out to ensure the applicants for the trip would be capable of coping with the severe poverty we would be greeted with, but also to find out what we could bring to the group. A week later, the names of the successful candidates were announced over the intercom; Liam Lenihan, Alison O'Loughlin, Diarmuid O'Sullivan and Ciara Burke. We were all surprised and delighted to learn that we would be travelling to South Africa the following February.

Finally, on Friday 14 February we departed from Shannon Airport along with thirty-five other volunteers to begin our journey to South Africa. Missionvale is a place where extreme poverty is an unavoidable part of daily life. But behind all this poverty and hardship lies a community of people who sing, dance and bring joy to others even though they have little or nothing themselves. We got to see so much during our week in Missionvale, but most importantly we saw what simple kindness can do to improve people's lives.

Once we got settled into our hostel in Port Elizabeth, we got the opportunity to rest and get to know the rest of the volunteers. Monday morning came and we arrived at the Missionvale Care Centre where we were greeted by the amazing Sr. Ethel Normoyle, along with the people of Missionvale. We were immediately put at ease by the sight of a group of the locals waving Irish flags, singing, dancing and cheering. Such a welcome was so uplifting and heartwarming.

Our work began in the clothing unit. We had all brought large suitcases filled with clothes, shoes, toiletries and school supplies which had been kindly donated by family, friends, neighbours and schools. All these donations had to be organized into bundles based on size. In the afternoon, we worked in the gardens which involved clearing and raking dry grass in order for the vegetables to grow.

On Tuesday, we took part in the daily ritual of devotions which consisted of singing, dancing and praising God. We then got the opportunity to go out into the township and observe the home visits accompanied by two carers. Here we got to see elderly people getting their blood sugar and blood pressure levels checked and young children receiving medication for malnourishment. Many residents of the township suffer from more serious illnesses such as TB and HIV. However, for health and safety reasons, we were unable to accompany the care workers on their visits to these individuals.

Wednesday saw us working in the nutrition unit. Here, many people from the township queue up each morning to receive their daily food package which consists of half a loaf of bread and a cup of soup powder. Once a week, these families get a food parcel of five teabags, a tin of beans, a tin of fish, a small bag of sugar and maize and two bars of soap. In the evening we helped out with the Youth Development Programme. This involved playing with the local children after they finished school. We played soccer, danced and mesmerised the kids with our phones. A simple photograph of themselves on our phones brought huge smiles and laughter.

Thursday morning saw us working in the Christmas workshop where Mother Christmas, a wonderfully cheerful woman named Rachel, works all throughout the year making over five thousand gifts for all the children of Missionvale. We helped wrap these presents in old newspapers on which we painted Christmas symbols.

Friday, our last day in Missionvale, brought much sadness for all of us. We enjoyed a fantastic morning of music, song and dance as part of the daily devotions. Later on, we worked in the craft unit where the local women make clothes, bags, beaded necklaces and much more. We all bought some beautiful gifts here for our families back home. We helped make the beaded necklaces but were also shown how the local women crochet and knit some beautiful clothes. In the afternoon we took part in a beautiful remembrance mass for people from the community and past volunteers who have passed away. The mass came to an end as we all sang Amazing Grace, sharing one final, emotional moment of unity and harmony.

With heavy hearts, we began to say our goodbyes to the unbelievable staff, volunteers and children of Missionvale. These children have so little but yet they can show so much love. They hugged us with such warmth and joy. We climbed on the bus and each and everyone of us brought home a suitcase full of amazing memories that will stay with us forever.

When we arrived in Missionvale we believed that we were travelling to the township to make a difference in the lives of the local people. I think we managed to make a small contribution in the short time we spent there. However, in reality, the gifts

we received from the individuals we met far surpassed anything we could ever offer them. The people of Missionvale have so little and yet are so incredibly grateful. Their enthusiasm was infectious. On returning to Ireland, I was shocked by the trivial worries and cynicism that make up such a large part of our attitudes. I think we could all learn something from this community and follow their example to become more optimistic and cheerful in our daily lives.

*Liam Lenihan, Ciara Burke,
Alison O'Loughlin, Diarmuid O'Sullivan*



Sr Ethel with teacher Róisín Meaney and students from St. John Bosco Community College, Kildysart.



Youth Ministry
— KILLALOE —

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If you would like to find out more information about any of the activities celebrated in this newsletter or if you would like to see a youth ministry group in your area. Please get in contact with:

Pastoral Development Office Diocese of Killaloe
45 Garden View, Creggaun na Hilla, Clarecastle, Co. Clare.