

Killaloe Diocesan Youth Ministry
Annual Newsletter
2021



Connected



Foreword

I warmly welcome the third edition of 'Connected' the annual Youth Ministry magazine for the diocese of Killaloe. The previous two editions were very well received and I look forward to seeing the third in the series.

No more than any aspect of faith life in the diocese, youth ministry has faced serious challenges with the various necessary restrictions and all the limited possibilities to gather in parishes, schools, third level and beyond, namely on the many pilgrim pathways. Nevertheless, the indomitable spirit of the resilient, faith-filled young people came to the fore, creating online options for people to link in and celebrate faith.

I highly commend the efforts of groups like The Mid Clare Youth Council and the Ceantar na Lochanna Youth Ministry, group for their good work. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting members of Kilmihil Youth Ministry for their most creative 'Live Crib' before Christmas and also the 'Meitheal's Merry Mission' group who visited Westbourne to record some fun on-line events for two very worthwhile charities.

This year while we didn't have a gathering to present the Saint John Paul II medals, I relished the opportunity to visit some of the individual schools to congratulate the graduates in person. We were delighted to establish an award for Outstanding Commitment to Youth Ministry this year. This award will be given from time to time to people deemed worthy of the honour. The first recipients are four young people who have made the leap from being members of a youth ministry group to being adult leaders themselves in the Mid Clare Youth Council and Ceantar na Lochanna Youth Ministry. They were an enormous asset over last winter leading the way on Zoom and on social media. Congratulations to Pádraig Casey, Doireann Kinsella, Saoirse Boyce and Sarah Mc Carthy. I received regular updates on the excellent work of the

young people from Birr who animated and enlivened Church activity during lockdown. I look forward to Fr Antony's reflections on their good work and his impressions of life here in Killaloe since

year was a recorded video blessing for the young people of the diocese and it was a beautiful combination or display of the faith, skills and talents of our young people with the backdrop of many of the



Aisling Clarke, Pádraig Casey, Sarah Fox and Bishop Fintan at the 'Gaeilge Challenge' as part of Meitheal's Merry Mission

his arrival from Kerala. For a number of years the Sunday evening Mass in Nenagh has benefited greatly by the involvement of the young people and I believe they have put pen to paper in reflection on that. The medium of radio has been a life line for many during the pandemic and the takeover of 'Beyond Belief' on Clare FM by the young people was an interesting experiment and appreciated by both the students and listeners. The work of the 25 or so New Ministers who are training in the area of Catechesis and Pastoral Care has been a progressive and hope filled step in the diocese and the importance of that is not ignored in Connect III either. Unfortunately the usual pilgrimages to Lourdes and Taizé have not been possible and this was a huge loss to the faith development of many young people of the diocese. Please God, fresh opportunities in this area will blossom in safer times.

One of the most creative projects of the

beauty spots of the diocese some of the outstanding sacred places. If you haven't viewed it already it is on the youth ministry section of the diocesan website.

For the past three years we have had the presence for the first time ever in the diocese of a full time Director of Youth Ministry, Ms Joanne O'Brien. She has brought a great spirit of faith, dedication, diligence and professionalism to the role and I thank her for her great work. I wish Joanne well with her decision to retire from the post, having done such good work. Every good wish and blessing to Joanne as she returns to her role as School Chaplain in St. John Bosco Community College, Kildysart.

Well done and congratulations to all involved in the work and preparation of Connected III. Happy reading to all and keep well and safe in these challenging times.

**Sláinte agus Beannachtaí
+ Fintan Monahan**

Reflection on 3 years as Director of Youth Ministry

I began the role as Director of Youth Ministry on October 1st, 2018. After arranging career break from my role as School Chaplain in St. John Bosco Community College, Kildysart, I set out on an adventure in this new role in the Diocese.

As I began the role, I was fortunate to be given carte blanche from Bishop Fintan and Fr Ger Nash, Director of Pastoral Planning. Fr Ger encouraged me to visit our neighbouring dioceses to see what was happening in Youth Ministry elsewhere. My first visit was to Fr Ger Godley in the Pastoral Centre in Killarney and I consider this visit to have been a great gift as I received very good direction. Fr Ger Godley advised me that there are two approaches one could take as a Director of Youth Ministry (1) A person who is constantly delivering programmes, this he said will eventually lead to burn out because you are working alone and the diocese is very large. (2) The second approach is to create 'The Multiplier Effect' – train many to lead in youth ministry and the fruits will be many. I have always been attracted to the wisdom of those who have been on the Earth longer than me and have learned through experience so on this day, I decided I would put my energy in to 'The Multiplier Effect'.

My next visit was to Aoife Walsh who has a long history of working in Youth Ministry in Limerick Diocese. Aoife spoke to me about Muintearas Íosa, the big family of Youth Ministry that exists in Limerick diocese. She went on to tell me about Anois – their Youth Leadership programme which was their flagship youth ministry programme. She suggested that I should see Anois in action in January 2019 as it is something which can't be captured by words, it must be witnessed. I took Aoife up on this offer and I have to say I was blown away by the experience. It was amazing to see 20 college leaders under the direction of Aoife lead 40 transition year students on a week-long residential programme. The atmosphere was so positive, and the activities were so much fun. I knew I was witnessing something very special and I very much wanted to recreate this in Killaloe Diocese.

I returned home exhausted (after the very long 15-hour days) but full of enthusiasm to bring this programme to our diocese. What impressed me most was the College leaders. The comradery they had, the generosity to share their time and gifts and talents with the young, the kindness they showed towards me and encouragement to create this opportunity for other young people in the country. This programme which is based on Paulo Freire's Training for Transformation is also run in Kildare And Leighlin diocese and through the Redemptorists in Cork. In both these places it is known as 'Meitheal' and we chose to go with that name due to its beautiful connotations and its recognition within the church nationally.

An enormous amount of preparatory work had to take place in order to make Meitheal a reality. I first of all needed a partner to lead the programme with me. Teamwork makes the dream work and I couldn't dream of a better team member than Fr. Donagh O'Meara who has always been at the forefront of Youth Ministry in our diocese and who is at all times so helpful and cooperative and calm. Thankfully Donagh said yes straight away.

Next, we needed a venue. We decided on Esker due to its remote location, its warm comfortable bedrooms, excellent food and its positive, caring manager Gearóid Mulrooney.

Then, we needed to find Leaders who would be brave enough

to take on this venture. Thankfully 16 College students signed up and trained as leaders on the October bank holiday weekend, 2019.

I am lucky to know so many teachers in different schools and 8 schools signed up and allowed us to come to their schools to interview students for the opportunity to travel to Esker to participate in this week-long programme.

The programme also needed financial assistance from the Diocese and I am very grateful to the Finance committee and local parishes for supporting this programme.



Current and past pupils from St. Joseph's Secondary School at Meitheal.

The week-long programme is filled with many interactive workshops which all need preprepared resources. Enormous effort went in to creating resources for 5 days of workshops. The 6th of January, 2020 finally arrived and we all landed in Esker, most not really knowing what to expect but thankfully everyone soon got in to the spirit of Meitheal and we had an amazing week where everyone grew in confidence, in friendship and in faith.

It was fabulous to hear what the week meant to young people, College age and Transition Years. The beauty of this programme is that it trains future leaders. I have no doubt that many of the TYs who attended would love to progress as leaders when they reach college age in 2022.

If you were to ask me what I am most proud of in my time as Director of Youth Ministry, it would certainly be Meitheal. Sadly due to pandemic restrictions, the week-long residential programme couldn't go ahead in January 2021 but the Meitheal leaders are still active and together they held a great week of fundraising "Meitheal's Merry Mission" and they had a Youth Takeover of the "Beyond Belief" programme on Clare FM. They were always available and willing to be part of every youth ministry venture which happened throughout the year. Mediations during Lent, The Youth Blessing and Postcards for the Leaving certs. A few of the Meitheal leaders have taken up roles as Leaders in the Mid Clare Youth Council and Ceantar na Lochanna Youth Ministry.

It gives me great joy to see others empowered. I was recently told by a Youth Ministry leader that they were able to run a Confirmation preparation programme in their parish on Zoom as they had learned all the skills through their involvement in the online Youth Ministry that we had been running via Zoom all Winter. It's lovely to hear that people feel upskilled and confident enough to do this.

In Autumn 2019 Fr Donagh O’Meara and I designed and ran a Diocesan Youth Ministry Course over 8 Wednesday nights. We were delighted to see so many participate and what was even better to see was the establishment of two new Youth Ministry groups in the diocese and Leaders in both attended this programme.

Looking back over my three pastoral years in this role I am very grateful to many lovely people who welcomed me to visit their school, their youth group or their parish. I leave the role having got to know so many fantastic people throughout the diocese.

I am very grateful to have been a leader in Ceantar na Lochanna Youth Ministry. Working with Edel, Lauren and Saoirse was always creative but best of all, it was fun. We created an atmosphere of joy in our planning meetings, our Youth Ministry meetings and afterwards at our review of the meeting.

My regular encounters with leaders of MCYC, Myriam, Pádraig, Doireann and Sarah were also a source of great leaven to this work.

While I didn’t have a fulltime Youth Ministry team, I did feel part of a great team which work from the Pastoral Development office in Clarecastle.

Maureen, Jean and I shared the highs and lows of the job. I am hugely grateful for all

I have learned from Maureen Kelly and I admire her vision for the church and her incredible work ethic. Fr. Ger Nash has been a great boss, he trusted me to serve the youth in ways which I saw fit and he supported me at all times. Bishop Fintan has been a huge supporter



Edel Mc Inerney and Joanne O’ Brien in St. Joseph’s Secondary School, Tulla on day of Meitheal interviews

of Youth Ministry and he has affirmed all the ventures over the past three years and he loves to see the young people given any opportunity to engage with their faith community.

We are at a pivotal time in the church, the old ways no longer speak to so many and those people have spoken with their feet. I am of the firm belief that faith

and community are still important to a lot of people. Young people leave the church when they don’t find meaning or purpose there. Our youth ministry groups parish and diocesan (Meitheal) nurture young people, we must listen to their needs.

One very positive announcement in recent months is that there is going to be a National Synod in Ireland in the next few years. Pope Francis recognises that the only future is through synodal approach. Listening to the youth will form a very important part of this synod. Young people want a church that helps them build a better society. We must empower them to live out their faith inspired by the Gospel.

So now the time has come for me to pass on the flame which has been burning brightly, to a new person. I am often comforted by Oscar Romero’s words- “We plant seeds that will one day grow”. I hope that I have planted seeds wherever I have travelled over these past three years. I am glad to have served the youth of our diocese for this time and I pray to the Spirit for blessings to be poured out to our youth who in the words of Pope Francis are “The now of God”.

Joanne O’ Brien
Director of Youth Ministry

Mid Clare Youth Council

This year, the majority of MCYC activities were held online. Although hard at times, it was a very rewarding venture. From planning meetings throughout the year, we had to adapt our normal activities to suit the virtual world. Through the help of our leaders and members, we all learnt new things as to how to carry out youth ministry online. Below, you will find an account of all of our activities that we took part in during the year, written by one of members.

The Mid-Clare Youth Council or MCYC is a group of senior cycle students, who along with excellent leaders, mix faith, fun and social awareness. We organize various events and activities that aim to bring faith into the lives of young people. New members are always welcomed into the group.

Despite the lockdowns of this school year, I had something to look forward

to, once, and sometimes twice a month. Just like school, technology has played





a significant role in the activities of the Mid-Clare Youth Council this year. Beginning in September, we had the chance to take part in zoom calls. These were fun and interactive. At least once a month, we chatted, we took part in challenges and games, and we had a quiet prayer time with a candle. Most of these Zoom calls had a theme corresponding to the time of year in which they were held. We virtually got together for Halloween, Lent, St. Patrick's Day and Easter. MCYC was also involved in the virtual remembrance prayer service in November.

For Christmas we safely met up for a Pizza Party. The long awaited in-person meeting had to be social distanced and masks on when we were not eating but it was a taste of normality. We had all been looking forward to it for so long and it turned out great. We had pizza, played some games, and had a Christmas prayer time. We were all excited to see each other again.

We also organised two separate projects around Christmas Time. First, we sent Christmas cards and small gifts to residents and staff of local nursing homes. Our aim was to spread some

Christmas cheer. The other project involved collecting non-perishable food at our Christmas party. The Christmas hamper was donated to the Redemptorists in Limerick. I was glad that we could help out in these hard times.

In previous years, a big part of MCYC was bringing young people together. The restrictions meant that getting to know

new people at MCYC was a challenge, but then cross-over meetings began. The MCYC joined with the Tulla based youth group, Ceantar na Lochanna, and we held meeting together. Starting with the Lent themed meeting. The Easter and St. Patrick's Day meeting were also held with Ceantar na Lochanna. The more the merrier! More people meant there were more ideas and games became more competitive. It was great to change things around a little bit.

This year was all about finding different ways to do things. I feel that MCYC have found a great way through these difficulties. A lot of work was put in by the organisers. They went the extra mile trying to make each zoom call different as well as updating the Instagram page with announcements and small activities. I really enjoyed being a part of MCYC this year. It was great to catch up with other students from different schools and with the leaders. It really showed me that we are all in this together.

Joanna Lacka, MCYC Member

As leaders, we would like to thank all of those who shared ideas with us, and especially our members for showing their commitment over the past year.

For more information about the Mid Clare Youth Council, check out our Instagram page (@midclareyouthcouncil).



Ceantar na Lochanna Youth Ministry

We held our first meeting of the year in Cnoc na Gaoithe, Tulla on Thursday October 1st, 2020. Everyone arrived with masks on, adhering to social distancing rules. It was great to meet again after the Summer break. We played icebreaker games including Just Dance and then we made St. Francis Prayer cards to give to someone we know. At the end of the meeting, we spoke about the possibility of having to move our activities to Zoom because of the restrictions. While it wasn't anyone's first preference, people agreed that we would give it a go.

Our next meeting took place on Thursday 29th October via Zoom. We had great fun playing Halloween games and we were highly entertained by our



Add for St. Patrick's Day meeting



St Patrick's Day meeting

leaders who wore Halloween costumes. Our leader Edel had a costume change for every game throughout the night. Lauren explained the connections between Halloween, All Saints and All soul's day. We said a prayer for all those we love who have passed away at the end.

We met 12 times over the year. At Christmas we had a physical meeting. We gathered outside the outdoor crib in front of the Church on Dec 12th, and we met with Fr Brendan Quinlivan who spoke to us about the crib and blessed it. We then went to the courthouse and we enjoyed drinking chocolate and buns while we decorated Christmas candle holders which we sold at mass that evening.

In February we held our first of three crossover meetings with The Mid Clare Youth Council online. It was nice to meet new people and the games got even more competitive which added to the enjoyment. There is always a theme at our meetings and some meetings which stand out are the St. Patrick's Day meeting where we participated in games all connected with Ireland. The accents game was great fun. Easter was celebrated by playing games like Where in the world is Bugs Bunny? Bingo and a Kahoot Quiz. We were treated to Easter eggs hidden in the Church in Tulla on Easter Monday.

We are going to complete the year by decorating stones and pieces of woods with inspiring words and hopefully placing them somewhere to brighten up someone's day as they are out and about.

It was a busy year and we are very grateful to our young people for continuing to meet and participate in the youth ministry group. A big thank you to our very positive leaders who put so much time and effort into our meetings, Edel, Joanne, Lauren and Saoirse.

Next year we hope that we will return to physical meetings, we look forward to fun times ahead.



Kilmihil Youth Ministry



The year 2020 for us all was challenging & especially for our young people in the Kilmihil Ministry. Unfortunately face to face meetings were cancelled which as a platform for communication is a crucial one when connecting with young people.

In August 2020 and prior to restrictions being re enforced we were able to take a trip to Killary in Co Galway and spend time together while encouraging teamwork and communication. Although there were several additional measures to adhere to it was a very successful trip and one that all our youths enjoyed immensely as it was a welcome break from the focus on Covid19.

Our Kilmihil Ministry members are from all different parishes such as Cooraclare, Kilmurry McMahan and Kilmihil and range from 1st to 3rd

years and these youths came together and helped to impact the lives of people who may be struggling with the impact that covid19 has made on our lives over the Christmas period. Beautiful letters were written and sent to the local people who were on their own for Christmas approx. 160 households. With the amazing design made by Aida Zorkot, special youth ministry cards were made, and we included blessed pieces of straw from the crib. These personal handwritten letters were warmly received and gave immense pleasure also to the member of youth ministry and also some siblings who also participated in the project with drawing and their own letters.

Christmas was celebrated very differently in households this year and Kilmihil youth ministry were beautifully represented in the Christmas masses by having a table set up in the church which featured our crib but also happy emotions were written on pebbles and were placed in a heart shaped box. This was a popular addition to the table as they could be taken and kept.

We are hopeful that the second half of 2021 will see restrictions ease further and when safe to do so we will be able to resume face to face meetings and welcome new members along with support from existing ones.



Meitheal's Merry Mission

Throughout the months of November and December 2020, I was delighted to be involved in a project we called 'Meitheal's Merry Mission'. I became a Meitheal leader this September and so far, my experience hasn't been a normal one, but it has been a fantastic one all the same. Everything was done online through Zoom meetings, and our Merry Mission was no different.

As Meitheal leaders, coming up to Christmas we wanted to share God's love with people by giving back to our community after it had been affected so much by Covid. We recognised that charities hadn't received the same amount of support as in other years, due to not being able to fundraise in-person. This is why we embarked on our Merry Mission online, through a Go-Fund-Me page. We wanted all funds raised to help local people around the diocese, so our first chosen charity was Clare Haven Services in Ennis, who support women and children experiencing domestic abuse, and our second charity was Happy Feet Happy Minds which is a mental health support service in west Clare.

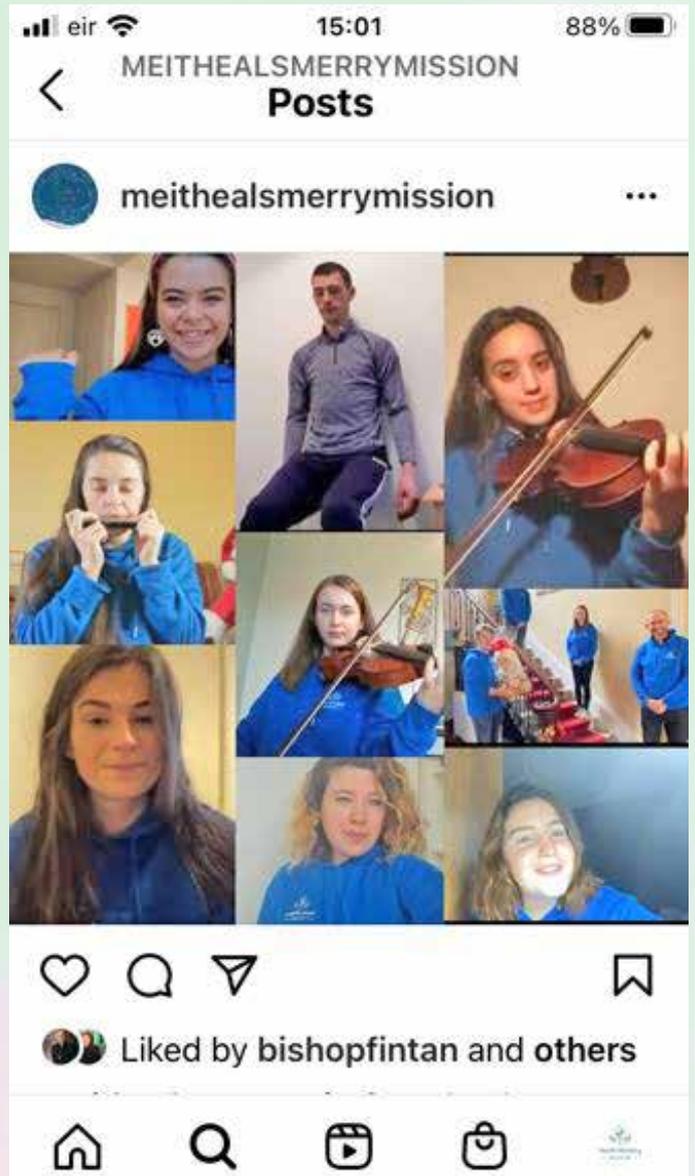
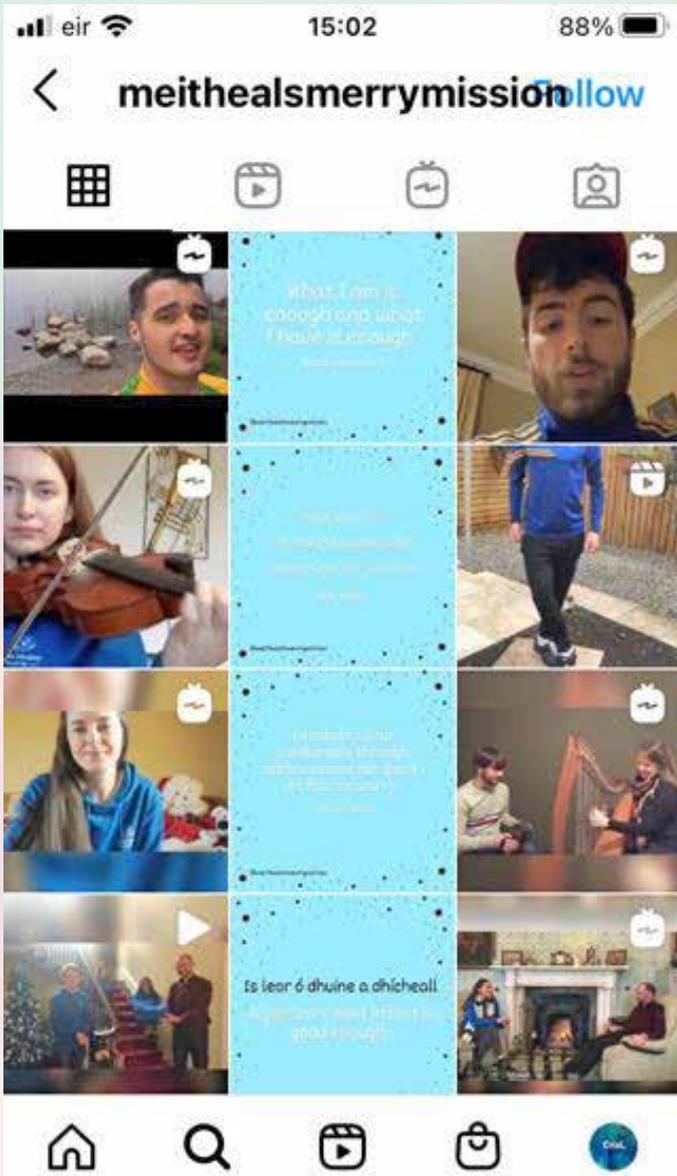
Our Mission took the form of a week of fun videos posted on our Facebook and Instagram pages. Our social media team did a great job at creating exciting pages, interspersing our videos



with some of Fr. Donagh O'Meara's lovely mantras. We started the week with a sports challenge, followed by lots of wonderful music from singers, dancers and musicians including some of our Meitheal leaders and friends of Meitheal from around the diocese, and we did a Gaelige challenge with Bishop Fintan Monaghan where he had a go at some tongue-twisters and Irish place-names of Clare. We also ran a few giveaways and had introductory videos from our two chosen charities.

In the end, we raised a grand total of €1,200 for the charities and they were incredibly grateful. As Meitheal leaders, we were thrilled to be able to come together as a group and make a positive impact in our community, even if it was all from a distance.

Aisling Clarke



The Beyond Belief Youth Takeover

The Meitheal leaders, a group of 18 3rd level students who help run a leadership programme with Transition years within Killaloe Diocese, did a takeover of the Beyond Belief programme on Clare FM on Sunday 13th December 2020. The radio programme marked the end of Meitheal's Merry Mission, an online charity week organised by the group in aid of Happy Feet, Happy Minds and Clare Haven Services.

The Meitheal Leaders planned, prepared and presented the radio show remotely in accordance with the government guidelines at the time. During our video call meetings, we decided the direction we would like to take for the takeover. We had check-in meetings to discuss our individual progress in the lead up to the programme. We were guided by Joanne O'Brien and Fr. Brendan Quinlivan in creating the programme. The Meitheal Leaders recorded their interviews and contributions on their phones which were assembled by editor Stephen Fletcher to form the programme. We are so thankful for the immense work they put in helping us to put the show together.

We created a programme that was bursting with a variety of entertainment for listeners. Saoirse Boyce recorded an interview with author and former Clare hurler, Tony Griffin. Mental health segments were created by Scott O'Donovan, Kate McGuinness and Méibh Dorgan. Sarah McCarthy interviewed Limerick Institute of Technology chaplain, Theresa O'Sullivan. David McNerney, Clare Hurling Captain was interviewed by Feargal Kearney. Sarah Normoyle, Kate McGuinness and I introduced the various acts throughout the programme. David McNerney,

<https://soundcloud.com/clarefm/beyond-belief-sunday-13th-december-2020?in=clarefm/sets/clare-fms-beyond-belief>



a participant of Meitheal Leadership programme 2019 and a student of St. Joseph's Secondary School, recorded "*O Holy Night*"; accompanied by Fiona Fitzgerald, especially for the show.

We gained huge experience from this takeover. It provided as an outlet from our 3rd level studies. It was an enjoyable opportunity to collaborate with the Meitheal leaders in an alternative way to our Meitheal leadership programme which could not be run this year due to Covid-19. We are so grateful to the Beyond Belief team and Clare FM for giving us the opportunity to take over the programme.

Arlene O'Sullivan

Best wishes to Bishop-elect

Ger Nash

On Friday 11th of June it was announced that our Chairperson of the Youth Forum, Fr. Ger Nash will be the next Bishop of Ferns. Bishop-elect Ger has been a leading force in pastoral development developing a program to train people in the new ministries of Catechetics and Pastoral Care. This program is the first of its kind in Ireland and other dioceses are now following Killaloe in training people in these ministries.

All those involved in youth ministry throughout the diocese and especially all the Youth Forum would like to say a big thank you to Ger for his support and dedication to youth ministry and to wish him every blessing as he takes up his new role as Bishop of Ferns from September 5th, 2021.



Pope John Paul II Award



Mr McGrath is St. Mary's Secondary Nenagh has been working with senior cycle students who are working towards the John Paul II Awards. The following is an excerpt from an essay written by Magdalena Piasecka a 5th year student who is a member of the Youth Parish Council in Nenagh.

"I also call upon younger members of our parishes to step forward in helping us manage the transition back to full parish life and the celebration of the Sacraments".

Archbishop Eamon Martin June 2020"

There is an African proverb that says, *"If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together"*. And it is only united together with the help of the younger members of our parishes that we will make the most progress, and manage the transition back to full parish life and the celebration of the Sacraments.

As a young person brought up in the Catholic faith and having been involved in helping out in the parish over the years, I couldn't but wholeheartedly agree with Archbishop Martin's words. I would encourage all young people to do so myself! For me, stepping forward to help out and being involved in parish life is and has been a wonderful experience and a journey that most definitely transformed me. All the way up from taking part in "pray and play" during mass when I was little, to being involved in the Youth group leading the 6 o'clock mass on a Sunday. I have been provided with so many wondrous opportunities throughout this time, of not only deepening my faith but also a chance of meeting so many different people and taking part in so many things I would've never gotten the chance to before.

Pope Francis at the World Youth day in Panama in 2019 called us young people, the "now of God". The "fertile and new soil that God gives to Christian communities". We, young people, are the future of the church and we must all remember that we are capable of so much more than we think.

I remember the very beginnings of our Youth led six o'clock mass in the parish. I was in 1st year and my sister in 5th class when we first happened to come across it. We always used to serve at noon and I remember hearing about a new youth mass that was happening in town and we came once, and after that we stayed. There was just something different about the youth led mass. Maybe it was the beautiful music or the fact that there were so many dedicated young people involved but it was definitely very special. There were a few readers, Eucharistic Ministers, a few girls who sang and played music and us- two altar servers. In the early days me and my sister stood outside the sacristy a few times and counted the number of people out in the congregation and there were just a few! But soon more and more people came and a lot more young people joined and the youth mass grew both

in faith and number, until today where it is here to stay. Later on I also took part by reading readings and prayers of the faithful. From all of my experience I know that us young people are very capable, but we have to be encouraged. We have to be given responsibilities and trusted. Now with Covid and level 5 I haven't been able to attend mass but over the webcam. However, after lockdown is lifted I will most definitely return and hopefully our youth group will be back again.

If lockdown has taught us all one thing it is definitely about the importance of helping others and being grateful for all the little things in life. The transition back to full parish life will undoubtedly be quite challenging and there are many vulnerable people to be looked after in our society, however we young people can help with that transition. We can help by returning and participating in our youth mass again. We can help by checking up on the elderly and our neighbours to make sure that they are okay. There's lots of things that we can do.



I couldn't but agree more with Archbishop Martin's words when he calls on us young people to step forward in helping manage the transition back to full parish life and the celebration of the Sacraments. Us young people have so much to offer and we should all bring our gifts and talents forward, set an example for others and help out in our community. For as it says in the Bible: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." (1 Timothy, 4:12)

LET YOUR FAITH
BE BIGGER THAN
YOUR FEAR



Youth Ministry
— KILLALOE —

Interview with Fr. Antony

Fr. Antony arrived on our shores almost three years ago, in this interview we hear about growing up in India, how his vocation was nourished and how he came to be living here in Ireland and carrying out his ministry in the town of Birr.

What is your full name?

Antony Sajeesh Puthiyaveetil. Antony is my baptismal name. Sajeesh is my registered name. The name Sajeesh was chosen by combining the first Malayalam letter (pronounced "sa") from my dad Stephen and the 2nd letter is from my mother's name Laiju (pronounced "ja").

Where in India did you grow up?

I grow up in southern state of India called Kerala, it is known as "God's own country" because of its picturesque landscapes and geographical structure. Every nook and corner in Kerala you would see temples, mosques, or churches which adds to the moniker God's country full of places of worship. It is fairly developed with a high HDI. It is very famous for its backwaters and forty-four rivers which make it a tourist hotspot.

Who inspired you on your faith journey as a child and teenager?

As a child it is my Mother. I was only 5 and my sister was 6 when we lost our father, who had an unexpected heart attack. So, my mother was toiled hard to look after us. She had great faith in the Lord. She never missed the daily mass. She had strong faith in the Eucharist. That was great inspiration for me as a child. As teenager I was inspired seeing the devotion of the teachers and priests in the parish. Nuns also influenced me to pursue my journey in faith.

Why did you decide to become a priest?

To bring love and happiness (we called it as good news) to where there is human suffering. As the word became flesh (Incarnation) it brought the divine revelation to the world that is God is love.

Where did you study for priesthood?

I started studying in India. I started studies in the Minor seminary, after a degree in philosophy I travelled to Northern India as part of a mission. Then I got the privilege to start my studies in theology in Italy.

How did you come to move to Ireland?

It was quite like a particular incident in St. Antony's life who is my namesake. A



Fr Antony and President Michael D. Higgins

priest who was supposed to preach could not arrive for the occasion so then St. Antony was asked to preach instead. Similarly, 4 years after my ordination I was on a mission in the Indian state of Punjab. The priest who was supposed to arrive here in Ireland (Fr. James who is in Shannon now) was unable to do so. Then I was called back from my mission, and now I am here in Ireland since 2018. I strongly believe that God has plan for everything. I had promised my obedience so I did as I promised and followed my superiors.

How has your experience been living in Ireland?

So far, the experience has been excellent. There has been a deep change in lifestyle for me. Everything has been positive except for the pandemic. The Irish culture is vibrant and the Irish have been very friendly and welcoming.

What areas of ministry interest you most?

I love to work with youth. Wherever I am I will strive to do my best. I would like to do more especially in the youth ministry. We need to have more parish level gatherings for the youth, and Diocesan gatherings once every year. We should work towards building a strong community for the youth to gather and partake in their faith. It is very sad to see the participation of the youth dropping off in church after their confirmation.

The corona virus has taken a terrible toll on your home country; you have been home recently. How is your family? Are you concerned for India at the moment?

The pandemic is terrible now in India. We have the 2nd largest population in the world. We were well able control the outbreak last year. But now things have taken a turn for the worse, especially in places with high population density like Delhi and other metropolitan cities. My home state is doing better, vaccination is currently going on and the healthcare system is better. Kerala being on the coastline is also facing the threat of a new cyclone, so it is twice the challenge. My family is doing good. They are safe and healthy.

I am concerned for India. There are certain political issues, and it is not easy for a complete lockdown because of the population. The vaccination drive has been too slow due to shortage. If there was a proper vaccination drive maybe this could have been avoided. It is very disheartening to see the plight of my fellow Indians.



Fr Antony in Lourdes

Reaching Out During Lockdown

The Youth Forum met on a monthly basis via Zoom throughout this year. The Youth Forum has always been a place where ideas are shared and people agree to work collaboratively to bring these ideas to life. Over the year subgroups were formed from the Youth Forum and great projects were carried out to reach out to young people during this challenging year.

There was a series of seven meditations during Lent. Click here.

<https://www.killaloeocese.ie/lenen-meditation-number-2-killaloe-youth-ministry/>



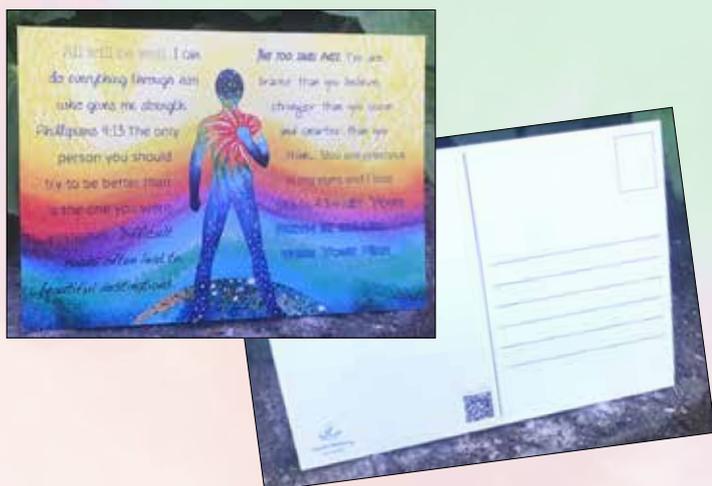
There was a Blessing for all Young People during May. Click here.

<https://vimeo.com/546433300>



'The Way of The Heart'

As we couldn't celebrate Easter in the usual ways this year a group came together and planned an Ecumenical project between the Church of Ireland and the Catholic Church. This project is brought the stations to the streets in a contemporary way. 15 shops/ businesses around the town of Ennis hosted contemporary pieces of art which varied from fine art to award winning photography to 3D Art, all of which highlight the suffering which people were enduring during the pandemic and lockdowns. In the photo above, young people from St. Joseph's Secondary School, Tulla stood outside the station they created based on station no.10 – Jesus is stripped of his garments. They depicted the Earth being stripped of it's resources with the help of their Art teacher, Mary Moran. Senator Roisín Garvey from the Green Party is giving the artwork a thumbs up in the photo above.



A set of postcards with inspiring quotes and a QR code linking a song was created and a set was sent to all Leaving Cert classes throughout the diocese.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the creation of these acts of kindness for our youth.