

20th March 2023



Diocese of Waterford & Lismore
Three-Year Strategic Plan
for Youth & Young Adult Ministry
2023 - 2026



Intentionally walking with young people on their journey of faith
and offering meaningful opportunities to encounter Jesus.

Verso
l'alto

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati

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Introduction

I am more than happy to write these few lines in support of the Strategic Plan for Youth & Young Adult Ministry in our Diocese.

Nodlaig Lillis has brought much vision and energy to apostolate with young people since she came to work here over two years ago.

This new Plan is the result of a careful discernment with others of the current state of ministry to youth, builds on what is already happening across the Diocese and then puts shape and structure for a way forward.

Key to this plan will be working with priests and lay faith representatives from parishes who will use their God-given talents to walk with young people and help bring them closer to the heart of Jesus Christ.

The Strategic Task Force will guide this work which, if it is to be fruitful, must ultimately be the work of the Holy Spirit.

May God abundantly bless this plan and may the hearts of many, *many* of our young people seek Him and find Him and then become His disciples.



Bishop Alphonus Cullinan

Context:

[For the purpose of this plan “Youth” refers to those aged approximately 12 - 17, and “young adults” refers to those aged 18-35 approximately. “Young people” is used to describe both categories.]

The Ascend Strategic Plan stems from the **Diocesan Pastoral Plan 2019 - 2024**, particularly the vision for *Theme 1: Evangelisation*.

- *Pope Francis calls us to be an evangelising community, to “boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.” (EG, 24)*
- *But first, we as Christians are invited to a “renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ” (EG, 3).*
- *He challenges us to commit ourselves to become missionary disciples through ongoing formation in the faith.*

The Ascend Strategic Plan seeks to offer opportunities to help our young people encounter the person of Jesus Christ, find meaning and purpose in their lives, and become not only disciples but hopefully effective evangelisers themselves.

“Young friends, don’t wait until tomorrow to contribute your energy, your audacity and your creativity to changing our world. Your youth is not an “in-between time”. You are the now of God, and he wants you to bear fruit.” (Christus Vivit, 178)

This strategic plan also sets out ways in which links between the diocese, parishes, schools, families, religious communities, and prayer groups can be strengthened by working together towards a common goal.

Collaboration with existing committees and groups within the Diocese of Waterford & Lismore will also be key (e.g. Safeguarding, Liturgy, Vocations, Eucharistic Adoration, Sacramental Preparation, Faith Camp Coordinators). We embrace the opportunity to learn from the wisdom and experience of those already working within specific areas, as well as discovering new ways to reach young people together.

Having listened to the comments from the diocesan Synodal Process, particularly the concerns around young people missing from our churches, this Plan aims to provide our young people with spaces of encounter where dialogue and accompaniment are possible.

Lastly, this strategic plan emphasises the need for a solid foundation and backing of prayer in all that we do, and invites religious communities, parishes, prayer groups and individuals to pray intentionally for young people, and also for vocations in the diocese.

What does the plan involve?

The plan involves four strands:

- **Strand 1:** Recruiting, training, and resourcing a network of voluntary Parish Faith Representatives throughout the Diocese
- **Strand 2:** Strengthening and promoting existing faith-based initiatives / projects / events
- **Strand 3:** A collaborative approach to developing new faith-based initiatives / projects / events, linking schools, parishes, home, and the diocese.
- **Strand 4:** Ongoing consultation with stakeholders to substantiate its content / steer the plan.

Guiding Values:

- Supporting the priests in our diocese
- Supporting parents / guardians and families in passing on the faith
- Collaborating with post-primary & primary schools, and third level institutions where possible
- Connecting youth / young adults with other faith-based groups and Catholic initiatives nationally and globally (Holy Family Mission, Pope John Paul II Awards, Christ on the Street, Youth2000, Lightfever, NET, FOCUS, Mary's Meals, TINE Network, Guides and Scouts of Europe & Ireland etc)
- Recognizing the individual faith journey of each young person, and acknowledging that no one plan fits all.

Strand 1: Parish Faith Representatives

Ideally, two Faith Representatives will represent each parish and will be encouraged to work collaboratively with other Faith Representatives in their neighbouring parishes, while linking with the Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer and Ascend Strategic Task Force.

What is a Parish Faith Representative?

A Parish Faith Representative is a parish-based volunteer whose role is to support clergy, post-primary school Religious Education teachers / chaplains, and parents in enabling young people to form a relationship with Jesus Christ. The role of the Parish Faith Representative is as follows:

- to act as a link between parish, school, and home, under the guidance of the Diocese.
- to enable / support key Diocesan Youth & Young Adult Ministry Projects and Events
- to circulate information in their parish / area regarding Youth & Young Adult Ministry events \pilgrimages etc.
- to attend relevant Diocesan Faith Formation Conferences and workshops.
- to be a part of the ongoing development of Youth & Young Adult ministry within the diocese, particularly through their feedback / experience on the ground.

Where possible, the role will be linked to the Pope John Paul II Award in the parish.

Who can be a Parish Faith Representative?

- A practicing Catholic, over the age of 18, supported by the local Parish Priest / Curate.
- Someone who relates to young people, adheres to Diocesan Policy and Procedures, and supports the Strategic Plan.

- *Please note: Safeguarding training, Garda Vetting and References will be required for this position, as per Diocesan Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.*
- A responsible and reliable person.
- *Ideally* someone with experience in supporting their parish community already.
- *Ideally* a Parish Faith Representative would be available to support some projects during the working day, but this may not always be the case.
- Examples of Parish Faith Representatives: retired persons, homemakers, third level students, teachers etc.

Recruitment of Parish Faith Representatives

A plan will be put in place to recruit two Faith Representatives from each parish and will involve:

- Supportive letter sent by the Bishop to all members of clergy encouraging them to select / nominate Parish Faith Representative candidates.
- Creation of information brochure and promotional posters on the role of the Faith Representative to be printed for Church noticeboards / parish and other use.
- Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer will write to all parish priests and curates with a summary of the plan and promotional material for Faith Representatives. This is to be followed up by visits / phone calls to each priest by the Ascend Strategic Task Force / Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer.
- Recommendations will also be sought from:
 - active Church members and existing diocesan appointments.
 - existing diocesan committees, Parish Pastoral Councils, Leadership Teams etc.
- Online media campaign and PR strategy will involve:
 - Adverts on Diocesan website, Facebook page, and Instagram account
 - Adverts on Ascend Facebook page, and Instagram account
 - Adverts in Diocesan **Check it Out** Events Bulletin, **Faith@Home** Newsletter, **To the Heights** Newsletter
 - Adverts in parish newsletters, on noticeboards, Facebook pages and websites.
 - Personal invitations
 - Launch of the Strategic Plan
- Script for possible Mass announcement / notice for newsletters to be circulated to clergy
- Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer (and / or Task Force members where possible) to speak at Masses to explain the plan and promote recruitment. Mass talks to explain the plan can continue even after recruitment of Faith Representatives to raise awareness across the diocese of the ongoing work and need for support.
- Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer (and / or Task Force members where possible) to speak at Parish Pastoral Council / Leadership Team meetings where possible.
- Potential Faith Representatives should contact their parish priests as a first step.
- Three in-person information sessions around the diocese and one online (if necessary) will be held to further explain the role of the Faith Representative and the vision and scope of the plan.
- Interested parties will complete an application process in accordance with Diocesan Policy and Procedures.
- A key element of the continued launch will be publicising the commissioning of the selected Parish Faith Representatives.

Training, Resourcing and Supporting Parish Faith Representatives

It is envisaged that the Parish Faith Representatives will become part of the Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry team across the Diocese. They will be an integral part of the faith formation of our youth and young adults. The Diocesan Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer will be the primary support to Faith Representatives, with the assistance of the Ascend Strategic Task Force and other key personnel. This will happen in the following ways:

Training

- Relevant training for the position will be provided by the Diocese before Faith Representatives are commissioned in their role, to include Diocesan Safeguarding Training (including the module for use of Online Communications and Zoom) and relevant GDPR Training.
- Training will include topics such as: How to run Alpha Youth, the Pope John Paul II Awards, Small group facilitation, Prayer Spaces, Walking with Gen Z and Gen Alpha, Discovering my own skills and temperaments, and so on.
- Ongoing training / formation opportunities will be sourced and provided as required.

Resourcing:

All resources required will be provided by both the parish and the Diocesan Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer, members of the Ascend Strategic Task Force and other experienced facilitators / groups both within and outside the Diocese.

Support:

The Diocesan Faith Representative will be supported in the following ways:

- In-person and zoom meetings
- Regular 15-minute Lectio Divina sessions on Zoom
- Weekly **To the Heights** newsletter and **Ascend** resource pack (as well as previous **Ascend** resources online)
- One-to-one visits / phone calls by member of Ascend Task Force or another nominated person within the Diocese who will act as a mentor
- Website / email support from Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer
- Annual Faith-based retreat / conference with relevant speakers
- Annual Ascend newsletter
- WhatsApp group for Faith Representatives to encourage networking and support.

The local Parish Priest / Curate will provide secondary support to the Faith Representative and will involve them in relevant parish committees e.g. pastoral committee / parish leadership team.

Strand 2: Strengthening and Promoting Existing faith-based initiatives / projects / events

It is important to recognise the existing youth / young adult projects which were already operating successfully within the Diocese of Waterford & Lismore prior to the launch of this plan:

- Pope John Paul II Awards
- Holy Family Mission House of Formation / Retreat Centre
- Campa Mhuire Mháthair Faith Camps

- Alpha Youth
- Transition Year Day at Mount Melleray (pre-Covid)
- Youth Helpers on the Annual Pilgrimage to Lourdes
- Youth Groups in parishes
- Folk Groups / youth choirs in Parishes
- Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage to Medjugorje (First Pilgrimage held in August 2022)
- Faith@Home Family Newsletter (first issued in October 2020)
- Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry:
 - *To the Heights* weekly newsletter (first issued in January 2021)
 - Ascend Youth Ministry Resource packs (first issued in January 2021)
 - Ascend Youth Ministry social media (began in January 2021)
 - Encounter monthly Young Adult Gathering (first event in March 2022)
 - Ablaze Life in the Spirit Series for Young Adults (began in Spring 2022)
 - Diocesan Zoom Series with Young Adult Groups (began in Spring 2021)
 - Cherished Women’s Ministry (began in Spring 2022)

Recognition of the great work carried out by each individual and group must be acknowledged, and particularly the contribution of the previously existing Diocesan Youth Council. They have provided a foundation for this Strategic Plan. This plan aims to build on the success of these groups in providing more opportunities for our young people to encounter the person of Jesus Christ.

Strand 3: Developing new faith-based initiatives / projects / events, linking schools, parishes, home, and the diocese.

A cross-over exists between Strand 2 and 3 as many existing initiatives will be built upon, as well as new initiatives / projects which will be developed.

Expand and Develop the Pope John Paul II Awards

A sub-committee for the Pope John Paul II Awards in the Diocese will meet on a regular basis. The key areas the strategic plan will focus on for the next three years are as follows:

Support for existing / potential Award Leaders

- Create Diocesan Starter Pack with all relevant information & key dates
- Host a Zoom information session for in May (or early September) to upskill existing Award Leaders and encourage new parishes / schools to come on-board.
- Offer follow-up visits to parishes / schools who are interested in participating / to encourage signing up for the Pope John Paul II Award in September.
- Update Diocesan Brochure with ideas for possible activities for parish / social activity hours.

Support for Pope John Paul II Award Participants

- Foster stronger links between schools and parishes
- Offer online and in-person faith formation opportunities for participants.
- Explore options for the development of a leadership / formation module for all participants to complete before beginning their activities in parishes
- Organise an Annual Pope John Paul II Award Diocesan Retreat Day / Hike each year for participants / Award Leaders.

- Encourage representation at the Annual Diocesan Pope John Paul II Award Day in Knock.
- Arrange visits from members of the Pope John Paul II Award Committee / Faith Representatives to participants ideally twice a year to reflect on their experiences, using a new Reflective Journal model as template. Their experiences will provide invaluable insights into how to continually afford greater opportunities for responsible participation by young people within parishes and the diocese, build connections and hopefully foster a greater sense of belonging for participants within the Church, creating a space where their voice can be heard.

Parish / Diocesan Level Promotion / Support:

- Share Pope John Paul II Award Information at Annual **REnewal** Conference each year and through the visits of the Diocesan Advisor to post-primary schools.
- Organise Pope John Paul II Training for Faith Representatives
- Explore the opportunities for Pope John Paul II Award Ceremonies to be organised at local parish level, including a commissioning ceremony before the participants begin activities.
- Offer Pope John Paul II Award presentations to priests / parish pastoral councils / parish leadership teams to encourage parish support of these awards

Promotion of Retreats for post-primary schools / youth-groups:

Holy Family Mission, Glencomeragh House has been established as the Diocesan-supported Retreat Team for Post-Primary students. Glencomeragh House is an ideal setting for school retreats with its spacious grounds, facilities such as a large hall, a chapel, a dining area, and a resident community of young people.

Retreat days can be an enriching and potentially life-changing experience for young people, especially as they are offered opportunities to encounter their faith in a new and personal way. The witness and joy of young people of faith in the community at Holy Family Mission can be an especially encouraging and gentle factor in this. Holy Family Mission provides several options for retreats, which can be tailored to the needs of individual schools, either onsite at Glencomeragh House, or alternatively at a school or other chosen venue.

Retreat days can be tailor-made to suit the needs and preferences of a school / parish group and can include: *Engaging Talks and Personal Testimony | Interactive Workshops | Team Building Activities | Games and Sports | Prayer - Meditation – Reflection | Sacramental Preparation | Eucharist and Reconciliation | Small Group Discussions | Arts & Crafts | Music, Drama, Video | Hikes.*

The Diocesan Advisor for Post-Primary schools will distribute promotional material from Holy Family Mission during school visits and Holy Family Mission will be involved in the Annual **REnewal** Conference for post-primary RE Teachers, Chaplains, Principals and TY Coordinators.

Schools are encouraged to book a retreat at Holy Family Mission. It is hoped that schools would choose a date to be maintained on an annual basis. Parishes / Primary schools are encouraged to select Holy Family Mission as a retreat option for Confirmation candidates also. For more information or to book a school retreat contact info@holyfamilymission.ie / 052 613 3181 or download a brochure at www.holyfamilymission.ie

For local schools, there is also an option to choose a surfing retreat where you can enjoy a surfing lesson and learn about your faith. This retreat day option is offered in partnership with Freedom Surf School in Tramore, Co. Waterford and can be booked through Holy Family Mission.

Pilgrimage for youth / young adults:

Pilgrimages provide many opportunities for young people to personally encounter the person of Jesus Christ: through prayer, scripture, silence, through fellowship with others, through challenging themselves and learning more about who they are and who they are called to be, and through personal and / or communal experiences that are difficult to create in their normal everyday surroundings. As such, creating opportunities for pilgrimage at local, national, and international level will form an important part of this plan.

A sub-committee for the Youth & Young Adult Pilgrimages will be formed to discuss and plan options, develop resources and practical guidelines for schools / parishes / youth groups, as well as liaising with the Diocesan Safeguarding Committee, and other relevant stakeholders e.g. St Declan's Way Committee, Mount Melleray Abbey, Lourdes Committee.

Where possible, links will be made with the Pope John Paul II Awards in this area.

Diocesan Camino: St Declan's Way / Melleray Loop Walks

- Research and develop a St Declan's Way Diocesan Camino package for youth / young adults
- Possibilities for a St Declan's Way Schools' Walk or Mount Melleray Loop Walk will be explored liaising with Mount Melleray Abbey, St Declan's Way Committee and supported by members of the Ascend Task Force, Holy Family Mission, and Religious Communities where possible.
- Possibilities for an Annual Young Adult Camino / Retreat option to be explored.

Medjugorje:

- Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage to Medjugorje to be organised each summer when possible, inviting Diocesan Faith Reps and priests to accompany youth and young adults from the Diocese, to experience their faith through an international dimension in the joy-filled and peaceful environment of Medjugorje.

Lourdes:

- Liaise with the Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage Committee and relevant stakeholders where possible to explore ways in which youth ministry could be provided / supported prior to or as part of the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes, along with the promotion where possible of the pilgrimage to youth and young adults.

World Youth Day:

- Investigate opportunities for young adults to participate at International World Youth Days.
- Exploring possibilities for a celebrating a local Diocesan World Youth Day on an annual basis for youth / young adults, in line with the vision of Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict and now Pope Francis.

Local Pilgrimage Resource Pack:

- Encourage and enable priests and Faith Representatives to engage with young people and share the richness of their local faith community through visiting the local church, local shrines, holy wells, or discovering and sharing faith stories from the past and present.
- Develop a Local Pilgrimage Resource Pack for schools / parish youth groups which can be tailored to sites / churches in their own local areas.

In addition, the Pilgrimage sub-committee will assist the Diocesan Director of Safeguarding, Safeguarding Committee, and other relevant stakeholders to develop a local pilgrimage policy and

procedures, including Risk Assessment Templates, Codes of Conduct and Guidelines for pilgrims / parents & guardians / teachers / leaders to complement the Munster Dioceses' Pilgrimage Safeguarding Policy.

Faith-based Programmes and Resources for Youth / Young Adults:

- **To the Heights** weekly newsletter and **Ascend** Resource packs with Sunday Gospel link
- Diocesan **Game-changer Series** (resources on saints and Christian role-models as a way of encouraging young people to see faith as a lived experience) *[which can also be used to supplement Junior Cycle RE CBA 1 research]*
- **Ascend** Social Media posts and prayers
- **Ascend** YouTube / Spotify Playlists for weekly Gospel themes / liturgical seasons
- **Ascend** Prayer Spaces for Schools resource packs (updated annually) – liaising with *Prayer Spaces in Schools in Ireland*; guide to Lectio Divina
- Develop / promote formation series options for Pope John Paul II participants (which can also be open to their peers not participating in the awards)

A subcommittee will be established to research, pilot, promote and review relevant resources / programmes suitable for use by post-confirmation & post-primary schools and parishes. Examples include: **To the Heights** Club | **Alpha Youth** | **Nua** Series | **Credible Catholic** | **The Chosen** Series | Ascension Press **Altaration** Series | **Diocesan Produced Series: Gamechangers** (e.g. Sr Clare Crockett / Blessed Carlo Acutis / Blessed Chiara Luce Badano) / *Eucharistic Series* / *Lectio Divina*)

To complement this, a **“Practical Guide to Starting a Youth Group”** pack will be created to cover the essential safeguarding, GDPR and practical elements of running youth groups at parish level. This will be created in consultation with the Diocesan Director for Safeguarding and Safeguarding Committee, Parish Faith Reps and other relevant stakeholders.

Social Justice / Outreach Opportunities

Pope Francis reminds young people that *“You are the ones who hold the key to the future! Continue to fight apathy and to offer a Christian response to the social and political troubles emerging in different parts of the world. I ask you to build the future, to work for a better world. Dear young people, please, do not be bystanders in life. Get involved! Jesus was not a bystander. He got involved. Don’t stand aloof, but immerse yourselves in the reality of life, as Jesus did”* (CV, §174)

Young people will be offered opportunities to engage with Diocesan outreaches such as Little Nellie’s Baby Bank and Christ on the Street, as well as other opportunities for service: through active volunteering, fundraising and/or awareness raising.

Pope John Paul II Award Participants will be offered opportunities through their social awareness hours to get involved in social justice / social outreach within their own communities as well as on a diocesan / national / international level.

The commendable work done by international charity “Mary’s Meals” will be promoted in particular to schools, Pope John Paul II Award participants and youth groups.

Liturgical Resources for youth / schools / families:

Expanding the knowledge of young people, their teachers and their families regarding liturgy can be a simple but significant way to support the faith development of a person. This will be facilitated by the Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer, the Diocesan Advisor and The Diocesan Liturgy Committee.

- Diocesan Liturgy Training Days to be promoted to RE / Music & Choir Teachers where possible.
- Sharing liturgical resources for young people e.g. opportunities to bring alive the Word of God in an accessible way to our young people, particularly with regard to training John Paul II Award students as Ministers of the Word.
- Sharing liturgical resources for the Religion Teacher / Chaplain through the Diocesan Post-Primary Advisor and regular *Ascend* mailouts
 - e.g. **Faith@Home** weekly newsletter, **To the Heights** weekly newsletter and **Ascend** Resources, **Check It Out** events bulletin, Advent & Christmas Resources, Lent & Easter Resources, November Remembrance, Graduation resources and so on.
- Sharing liturgical resources for home that will support the parent at home in handing on the faith to their children
 - e.g. **Faith@Home** / **Let's Dive In** weekly newsletters, **To the Heights** weekly newsletter and **Ascend** Resources, **Check It Out** events bulletin, Advent & Christmas Resources, Lent & Easter Resources, November Remembrance etc
- **Spotify / YouTube Playlists** for Liturgical Seasons.
- Develop a guide to Eucharistic Adoration for young people, particularly those participating in the Pope John Paul II Awards.

REnewal

A **REnewal** subcommittee will be formed in the Strategic Task Force to support the Diocesan Post-Primary Advisor's role in promoting and encouraging liturgical and faith formation opportunities for RE teachers and Chaplains, TY Coordinators and Principals through creating / sourcing classroom-ready resources, organising workshops for RE teachers / Chaplains, and creating opportunities for networking and sharing.

REnewal aims to provide additional ways to nurture and support the faith and spiritual lives of Diocesan post-primary RE personnel and principals through the following ways:

- Annual Diocesan **REnewal** Day at Glencomeragh House, facilitated by the **REnewal** subcommittee.
- Offering Diocesan Workshops both in-person / online (for which certificates of attendance for CPD hours can be issued)
- Promoting and encouraging attendance at Diocesan faith formation series / events (for which certificates of attendance can be issued)
- Retreat / pilgrimage options for RE Teachers / Chaplains to be explored and facilitated by Diocesan Advisor

Young Adult Ministry (18 – 35 years of age):

- Creation of database for Young Adults in the Diocese for Events bulletin.
- Young Adult Ministry will be primarily anchored in **Encounter**: a Diocesan Event for Young Adults (aged 18-35): input / testimony followed by music, Eucharistic Adoration then fellowship and refreshments. While based in St John's Church, Waterford, other parishes in the diocese will be encouraged to run Encounter events with the support of the Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer. Encounter can provide a simple space where young adults can find connection, a sense of belonging and purpose, and one they can invite their peers to.
- Other Diocesan outreaches for young adults to be continued / explored:
 - Ablaze Life in the Spirit (or similar online series) hosted by Fire in the South Ministries, Tramore and supported by Holy Family Mission.
 - Philosophy and Faith nights
 - Movie Nights
 - Frassati Hikes
- Promotion of and creation of a specific young adult breakout room for Diocesan faith Zoom Series run each Autumn and Spring, supported where possible by Holy Family Mission / Faith Representatives as hosts/helpers.
- Actively encouraging and supporting young adults who attend to take up roles of responsibility.
- Efforts will be made to link young adults with existing diocesan and national initiatives / communities such as Holy Family Mission, St Mary's Abbey Glencairn, Mount Melleray, Cherished, Nightfever, Lightfever, Christ in the City, Youth 2000, Evangelium Ireland, Campa Mhuire Mháthair Faith Camps.
- An annual retreat / outing to be scheduled each year for young adults in the diocese e.g. at Glencomeragh House / St Declan's Way / Pilgrimage to Sr Clare Crockett's grave / Knock.
- Connecting young adults to men's and women's ministry within the diocese e.g. Cherished Women's Ministry, Servant Sisters and Priests of the Home of the Mother etc.
- Providing opportunities, both informally and formally, for young adults to discern their vocation in life through connecting with clergy, religious communities, married couples, and persons with a vocation to single life.

Continuity for Confirmation Age Onwards (aged 11/12 to Junior Cycle)

The Ascend Strategic Plan recognises that very few faith-based opportunities exist for young people after they have made their Confirmation, and the majority tend to drift away from practicing their faith or attending parish events after this sacrament. A subcommittee will be created to research and develop initiatives at parish and/or diocesan level for this age category, liaising with the Sacramental Preparation Committee, Parents, Faith Camp Coordinators, Holy Family Mission, Pope John Paul II Award subcommittee and participants, and other interested stakeholders. Possible approaches to include:

- Faith formation, fellowship, and fun to be a guiding principle for all initiatives.
- The lives of modern saints, such as Bl. Carlo Acutis, are to be particularly recommended as an approach e.g. **Ascend Gamechanger** Series.
- Possible resources to be investigated include:
 - e.g. **To the Heights** Club

- **Ascend** Resources,
- Suitable Apologetics options for young teenagers,
- **Alpha Youth**,
- **Nua** Series
- Promotion of Family Days and Faith Camps e.g. Campa Mhuire Mháthair, Camp Veritas, Camp Creideamh, Home of the Mother Encounter Days and Camps.
- Children who attend Faith Camps will be more intentionally encouraged to return as junior helpers when they are too old to attend as participants.
- Explore links for Pope John Paul II Award participants with these initiatives, in a youth leader / mentoring capacity.
- A variety of practical options will be created by 2026 to be offered to parishes as a way to continue to engage this age group.

Vocations and youth / young adults:

In a world of uncertainty, young people need a sense of purpose – a sense of connection with something bigger than themselves. Creating a culture of vocations is an essential task, whether it be to priestly, religious, married, or single life. This strategic plan aims to provide spaces and opportunities for young people to discern their purpose by learning to hear and respond to their own call within the *“universal call to holiness”* (Lumen Gentium, 5). In the words of St Catherine of Siena, *“If you are what you should be, you will set the world on fire.”*

- The Ascend Strategic Task Force will liaise with the Diocesan Vocations Committee and other relevant stakeholders:
 - to create a resource pack for schools / parishes around the theme of Vocations to be promoted yearly.
 - to compile a list of possible speakers, videos, podcasts to be circulated to schools to encourage ongoing discussion / discernment.
 - to innovate creative ideas to promote awareness of vocations at parish / school / diocesan level.
- The Ascend Strategic Task force will also liaise with the Diocesan Eucharistic Adoration Committee and the Vocations Committee to develop and promote a *“Holy Hour for Vocations”* initiative: a simple structure of prayer, either as a guided Holy Hour or individual time of prayer, which can be used at parish and diocesan level to intentionally pray for vocations and young people discerning their path in life.

Intentional Prayer Support for youth / young adults:

- The Strategic Task Force will organise in-person and online prayer sessions ahead of the launch of the plan, inviting prayer groups, individuals, and members of religious communities to intentionally pray for young people and those who work with them in the diocese.
- It is hoped that the Strategic Task Force will be able to formally establish a prayer support network for youth and young adults in the diocese, and for the spiritual support of the Ascend Strategic Plan on an ongoing basis.
 - People will be encouraged to *“Adopt a Parish”* with the intention of praying specifically for the young people, priest(s), and (prospective) faith representatives in that parish.

- A WhatsApp “Ascend Prayer Team” will be created within the diocese: one message (maximum) per week will be sent to ask for prayers for specific upcoming events for young people and/or faith representatives.
- This network will be vital in the development and delivery of this plan: without prayer and a Christ-centred approach, we cannot hope to succeed.
- A Strategic Plan prayer will be composed and circulated through prayer cards.

Strand 4: Ongoing consultation with stakeholders to substantiate its content / steer the plan.

While the vision and ideas for Youth & Young Adult ministry vision have been set out in this strategic plan, we are open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and understand that ministry needs to be flexible. To this end, ongoing consultation, advice, feedback, and suggestions from relevant stakeholders will be encouraged on a formal and informal basis, as well as continued offerings from the ongoing synodal process in the diocese.

How will all this happen?

The schedule for the Strategic Plan has been laid out in the following stages:

Stage 1: Consultation (Commenced in May 2022)

The consultative process involves the following:

- I. Strategic Task Force, including sub-committee meetings
- II. Focus Group Meetings
- III. Completion and Launch of the Strategic Plan

I. Strategic Task Force

The Strategic Task Force was assembled by the Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer in conjunction with Bishop Cullinan. All members of the Youth Council were invited to become part of the new Task Force if they so wished. A number of other people in key youth ministry / education roles around the diocese were also invited to be part of the Task Force.

The Ascend Task Force members (as of November 2022):

1. Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan
2. Fr John Harris *ADM*
3. Mrs Olivia Elliott
4. Ms Nodlaig Lillis
5. Mrs Shauna McGrath
6. Mrs Maura Murphy
7. Sr Kathryn Press *ASCJ*

The initial role of the Strategic Task Force was to set out the vision for the plan in conjunction with the Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer, to discern priority areas, and to support and enable the rollout of the plan over the next three years.

This task force will involve meeting every 4-6 weeks to pray, discuss, plan and review. The Ascend Task Force will form sub-committees in the following areas, and suggest others who may be suitable for inclusion in these sub-committees:

- Pope John Paul II Awards (already established)
- Youth & Young Adult Pilgrimages
- *REnewal* support for RE teachers / Chaplains
- Useful Programmes and Resources
- Continuity for Confirmation Age Onwards

II. Focus Group Meetings

As part of the consultative process, the opinions of focus groups were sought on the vision / scope for the Strategic Plan:

- Senate of Priests
- Clergy
- Lay Parishioners
- Diocesan Leadership Team
- Diocesan Safeguarding Committee
- Local Safeguarding Representatives
- Youth / Young Adults

Focus groups selected were diocesan wide and representative of many roles i.e. priest, parent, teacher, young person, religious, students etc. Groups were presented with a Strategic Plan presentation (or elements most relevant to them) after which they were asked to consider the content and ask questions or make suggestions.

The youth voice will be represented by Pope John Paul II Award Participants and young adults from Holy Family Mission.

III. Completion and Launch of the Strategic Plan

- The Ascend Task Force will review the outcome of the Focus Group Meetings and present the ratified Strategic Plan in February 2023.
- The Launch of the Plan will be prepared and circulated locally / nationally in March 2023: launch date will be 20th March 2023 (the feast of St Joseph this year).

Stage 2: Recruitment of Parish Faith Representatives (Commenced in January 2023)

Recruitment commenced in January 2023 with a target date of completion in March 2023. The Ascend Task Force supported the recruitment, and it is anticipated that all Faith Representatives will have completed initial training during April, May, June, and September 2023 to commence their role in the academic year 2023/2024.

Initial training will include the following and take place over four Saturdays, to include the following:

- Safeguarding Training including social media / Zoom Training
- Developing our own prayer life
- Understanding my own temperaments and skills

- The Pope John Paul II Awards
- Leadership & Small Group Facilitation Skills
- How to engage and walk with Generation Z / Generation A
- Alpha Youth / Selection of Faith Formation Programmes / Running a Youth Group

This list is not exhaustive and will be determined by the skills and gifts of the group presenting as faith representatives.

Commissioning of the Faith Representatives is scheduled for late September 2023.

Stage 3: Resource Development (Commenced in 2022)

Stage 3 has already commenced and will continue over the next three years, to develop the various resources as identified in this plan.

Resources to be completed for start of academic year 2023/2024:

- Calendar of Events for Youth & Young Adult Ministry
- Starter Pack for Pope John Paul II Award Leaders / information session
- Pope John Paul II participant leadership course and calendar of events
- Prayer Spaces Resource Pack for Schools / Parishes (to be updated annually)
- Ascend resources will continue to be created to cover the three-year cycle of Sunday readings
- **RE**nual Annual Conference, yearly schedule of Workshops / Retreats
- Schedule of annual workshops / formation / retreat days for Faith Representative ongoing support and formation.
- Practical Guide to Starting a Youth Group
- World Youth Day Pilgrimage to Lisbon

Other resources / initiatives to be developed from 2023 – 2026:

- Programme options for Confirmation to Junior Cycle aged students.
- St Declan's Way Youth Camino / Mount Melleray Resource for schools / parishes
- Local Pilgrimage Package
- Young Adult Annual Retreat / Outing / Pilgrimage / Camino options
- Guide to Recommended resources / programmes for parishes to engage youth & young adults (in booklet form / on diocesan website)
- Vocations: Holy Hour template, promotion initiatives, pack for schools / youth groups
- Local World Youth Day event
- Youth Pilgrimage to Medjugorje

Stage 4: Review and Evaluation

Stage 4 will commence before the end of the 2023-2026 plan and will include the following:

- Evaluation of current plan and preparation of the next 3-year plan

Suggested ideas for the next stage are:

- Supporting Faith in the Home
- Catechesis / Faith Programmes for Teachers and Diocesan Faith Representatives

However, it is envisaged that after 3 years, the Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer, together with the Ascend Task Force will have built up a strong relationship with the Parish Faith Representatives, parishes and post-primary schools. This working relationship will provide a direction for further development of resources and support tools for parishes, families and schools and a guide to the key areas to focus on.

Concluding Remarks

We know that no one plan will fit the needs of all the young people in our Diocese.

However, we believe that our young people deserve to hear the message of Christ and His love for them, and to feel like they belong and are valued in our Church. Even though the task may seem overwhelming at times, and we may feel ill-equipped, we remember that *God does not always call the equipped, but He does equip the called* and we take courage from that.

We are also aware that this plan can only succeed within a collaborative context and believe that the people necessary to carry out this work are already in our parishes, but may need to be encouraged to respond, and then supported in that response. We believe that through their generous response, many young hearts will be offered meaningful opportunities to encounter the person of Jesus, and lives will be transformed.

“If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future. To revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom. Together, we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands. (CV, §199)

We look to the future with hope and excitement as we ask God for His continued guidance and direction to do His will, trusting in His goodness, generosity and grace.

We also wish to express our gratitude to the Diocese of Ferns for sharing resources and advice on their Strategic Plan, *“The Way Forward”*, as we discerned and formulated our own diocesan Strategic Plan.

Strategic Plan Prayer

Father of Kindness,

You have created the hearts of our young people to know, love and serve You.

We thank You for blessing us

with the privilege of intentionally walking with them on their journey of faith
and offering meaningful opportunities to encounter Jesus in their lives.

Jesus, grant that we may reflect You and Your love to all we encounter.

You are the Way for those who need guidance.

You are the Light in the darkness for those who are lost.

You are the Truth that cuts through the confusion and doubt.

Holy Spirit, guide our thoughts, words, actions, and intentions,
that all we do may be for the greater glory of God.

Mother Mary, be a mother to our youth
and let them feel the warmth of your maternal embrace.

We ask this through the intercession of St John Paul II,

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati,

Blessed Carlo Acutis,

Blessed Chiara Luce Badano,

St Declan,

St Carthage,

St Otteran,

St Ita,

Our Lady of Knock,

St Joseph,

and St John the Evangelist.

Amen.



Appendix 1:

Ideas for parishes / Faith Reps to consider in each age bracket:

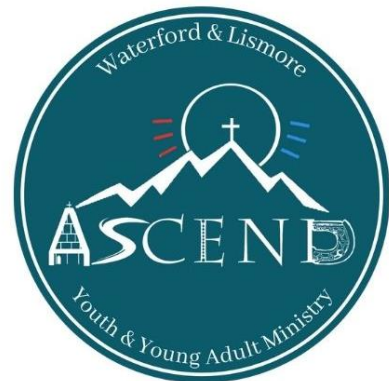
"Post-Confirmation" (12-14)	Teenager (15-17)	Young Adult (18-35)
<p><i>NOT SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular gatherings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Games or activities ○ Catechesis / formation ○ Lives of saints ○ Prayer ○ Mission! • Outings / Hikes • Youth choir (+ element of formation) • Prayer Spaces • Alpha Youth / Nua Series / Altaration Series • "To the Heights" resources • Movie & pizza night (+ element of formation) • Adoration / Liturgical Year • Links to Holy Family Mission / Pope John Paul II Award participants • Family Days • Personal invitation • Advertising • Linking with LSRs • Pilgrimage (local or national) 	<p><i>WHERE POSSIBLE, LINK TO THE POPE JOHN PAUL II AWARD</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Formation programme ○ Parish & community involvement ○ Diocesan / national events • Formation series: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Alpha Youth ○ To the Heights Club ○ Altaration Series ○ The Chosen • Youth Group • Youth Choir • Outings / Hikes / St Declan's Way • Movie & pizza night (+ element of formation) • Adoration / Youth Hour / Exam Prayer Services / Liturgical Year • Pilgrimage (local / national / international) • Prayer Spaces • Links: Holy Family Mission / Youth 2000 / Camp Creideamh / Camp Veritas / Campa Mhuire Mháthair (volunteer) • Personal invitation • Advertising • Linking with LSRs 	<p><i>BASED AROUND FELLOWSHIP AND FORMATION</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-parish collaboration • Encounter (for young adults) • Frassati Hikes / Camino / Pilgrimage (local / national / international) • Formation Series <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Run locally / on Zoom ○ Alpha, The Chosen, Anima, Sycamore, Life in the Spirit • Volunteer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lightfever ○ Christ on the Street ○ Campa Mhuire Mháthair • Movie nights (with discussion / formation) • Adoration / Lectio Divina • Links: Holy Family Mission Cherished / Youth 2000 / Evangelium / Men's Ministry / National events & groups for Young Adults • Personal Invitation • Advertising

Appendix 2:

The Ascend Logo Explained

The word "Ascend":

- Life is a great adventure: never lose hope, never give up!
- This world is not all there is: our ultimate goal is heaven; our Christian hope is in something greater and better.
- The theme of our Diocesan Pastoral Plan 2019-2024: "Go Make Disciples", the mandate given by Jesus at His Ascension.

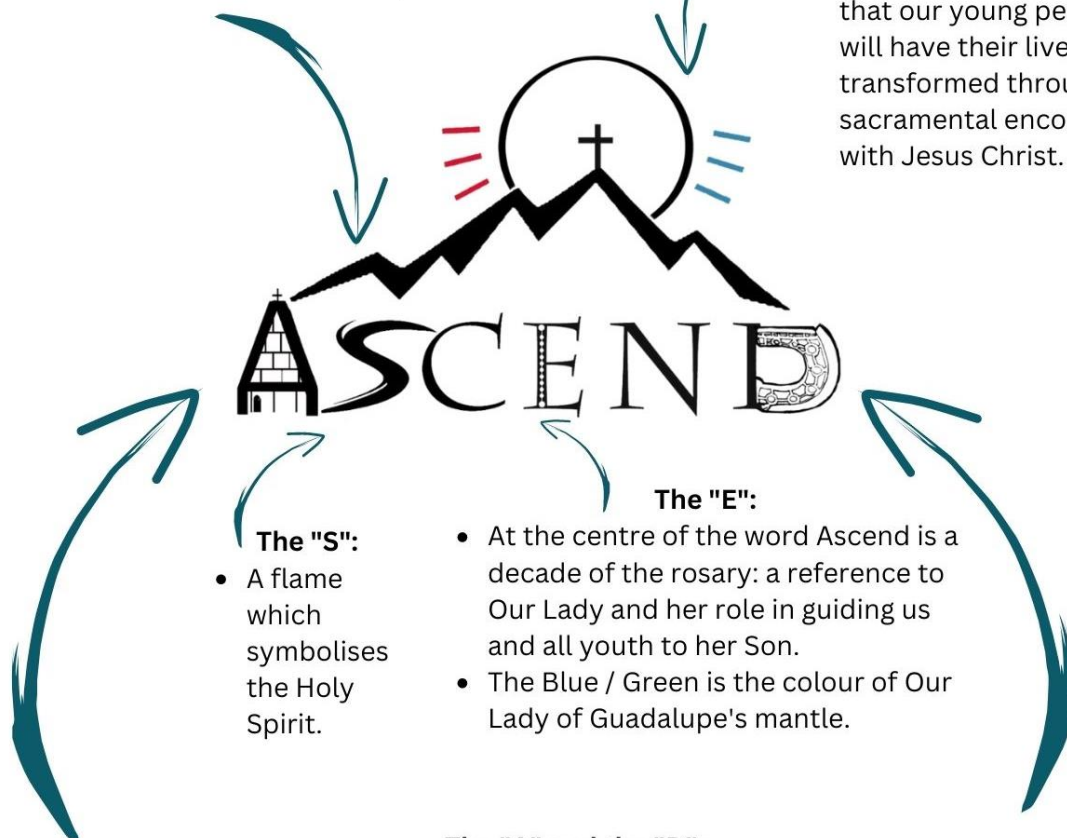


The Mountain:

- Inspired by Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati's motto: "Verso l'Alto!" (To the Heights!)
- We are all at different stages on the climb, but we must strive onwards and upwards in our faith, keeping our eyes focused on heaven! (Psalm 121:1 "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?")
- At the summit we find our hope in Jesus Christ.

The Cross, the Eucharist & the Divine Mercy Rays:

- A reminder of the immense Sacramental treasures of the Catholic Church.
- Ultimately our aim is that our young people will have their lives transformed through a sacramental encounter with Jesus Christ.



The "E":

- At the centre of the word Ascend is a decade of the rosary: a reference to Our Lady and her role in guiding us and all youth to her Son.
- The Blue / Green is the colour of Our Lady of Guadalupe's mantle.

The "S":

- A flame which symbolises the Holy Spirit.

The "A" and the "D":

- We draw on the rich heritage of faith in our diocese, symbolised by the Ardmore Round Tower and the Lismore Crozier.
- Both letters taken together also spell AD, Anno Domini.

