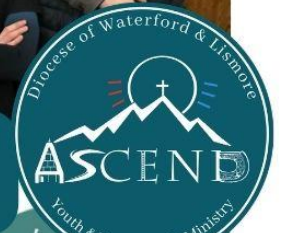
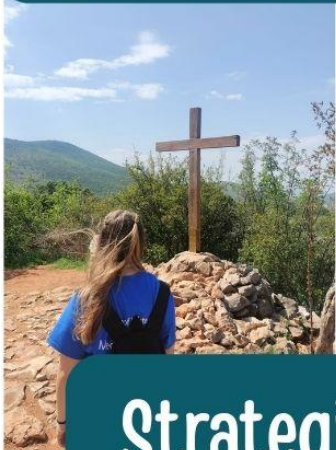


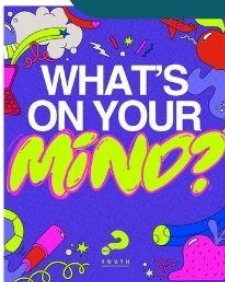
October 2026



Ascend Youth and Young Adult Ministry



Strategic Plan 2023 – 2026 Review



“The world always tells the youth that their teenage years and early twenties are the time to get ahead in the world, expand your social life, and become popular with other young people.

A young person who is willing to disregard all this, put God first, is a great testament to the importance of the Faith.

It signals our trust that God will provide all the good things of life and give us all we need for our happiness.

It is through dedicating one’s life to God that we become who we were meant to be, so that we can set the world on fire as all young people should.”

*Diocese of Waterford & Lismore
Pope John Paul II Participant 2026
Age 16*



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The Vision:

Intentionally walking with youth and young adults on their journey of faith and offering meaningful opportunities to encounter Jesus in their lives.

Review Process:

Over a number of months, a detailed and comprehensive review was undertaken by the Ascend Strategic Task Force for Youth & Young Adult Ministry, to evaluate the past three years of the Strategic Plan, and provide a foundation for the development of the next phase of planning. Feedback was sought from a number of priests, Award Leaders, Pope John Paul II Award participants, young adults and Faith Reps.

A comprehensive summary of the findings are presented here, as it is not possible to share the full depth of the review.

The plan was collaborative in nature throughout. Some areas have been less developed than others, which is acceptable as the scope of the plan was wide, and the organic growth and development of ideas and processes over three years determined where deeper roots were planted and more focus given.

This plan was just the beginning of an intentional and strategic development of youth and young adults ministry in the Diocese, which we hope to continue to deepen in the next phase of planning, as we go both higher and deeper in the Lord.

“Verso l’alto!” (St Pier Giorgio Frassati – “To the Heights!”)

The Ascend Strategic Task Force:

Current team consists of Nodlaig Lillis, Olivia Elliott, Maura Murphy, Sr Kathryn Press, Fr John Harris ADM. The team will be expanding this year.

Strand 1: Parish Faith Representatives

Recruitment:

The recruitment and training of Parish Faith Rep has been a phenomenally positive addition to Youth & Young Adult Ministry. We have been blessed with a wonderful group of volunteers.

Faith Rep recruitment promotion takes place through letters and promotional material sent to parish priests, Ad Clerum, notices / adverts sent to parishes, Parish websites, social media, noticeboards and newsletters, Diocesan website / social media and newsletters, WhatsApp groups, Mass talks, visits to PPCs by Youth Ministry Officer and/or member of the Strategic Task Force, and personal invitation. Mass talks to recruit Faith Reps have been done in more than twenty parishes, which has enabled the Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer / Task Force members to be a voice for youth ministry in over half of the parishes in the Diocese, regardless of whether volunteers have stepped forward or not.



Recommendations are also sought through active Church members and existing Diocesan appointments as well as existing Diocesan committees, PPCs, Leadership Teams etc.

Recruitment has occasionally come directly as a result of Mass talks, but personal invitation from another Faith Rep or priest in the parish has been most effective.

It is planned that Faith Rep recruitment will take place in the Diocese every two years, allowing for greater support of commissioned Faith Reps while they are beginning their role.

Role of a Faith Rep in a parish:

The decision was made to not define the role by set programmes or expectations, allowing Faith Reps more freedom to do what they are able to do with the resources, time and opportunities in their own parish and personal lives. Although this has some drawbacks, on the whole Faith Reps have appreciated the time and space to grow into the role organically over time. The role generally takes two years to really grow into, unless a team of faith reps already exists in the parish.

The specific remit of the Parish Faith Rep, for which they are trained and commissioned, is youth & young adult ministry, although they may choose to be involved in other areas of parish life and pastoral ministry.

As such, Children's Ministry / Sacramental Preparation are not within the remit of Youth & Young Adult Ministry in this diocese, whose focus is on those aged approximately 12/13 (post-

Confirmation) up till 35. Young adult ministry generally means 18 – 35 years old (or is sometimes seen as 18 – 30 within certain groups.)

Application Process:

The Application Process consists of a potential candidate first speaking with parish priest and receiving form from him; written application; checking of references by Task Force. The importance of initial selection at a parish-level cannot be overstated. Information Sessions are held in person and on zoom to clarify the role, training process, and expectations. Clear criteria for suitability in the role is shared during promotion / recruitment, and also throughout the training / discernment process:

A Faith Rep is a person of faith who:

- has a heart for young people
- upholds the teachings of the Catholic Church
- is over the age of 18 (but no upper age limit)
- can come from any walk of life, any stage of life
- supports the Ascend vision for Youth & Young Adult Ministry
- is supported by their parish priest
- can work as a member of a team
- will be trained, commissioned and supported by Diocese
- gives a 2-year commitment
- volunteers according to their own time and talents and according to the youth ministry needs of their own parish

A full outline of the role of the Parish Faith Rep can be found on <https://waterfordlismore.ie/parish-faith-reps/>

Safeguarding training by the Director of Safeguarding (Stephen Plunkett) is required and up-to-date Garda vetting is mandatory.

The Training / Discernment process:

A total of ten successful applicants is deemed necessary to run the Faith Rep training programme because of the significant amount of resources and bandwidth that goes into the programme, but also the importance of journeying with people from other parishes and the bond/link formed. In 2026, the decision was made to not offer training, as the minimum number did not apply.

Training dates are set in advance of the application process. Candidates must attend three out of the four sessions at a minimum, and attend a make-up zoom in September for any session missed.



Using the training sessions as a time of discernment allows for freedom of the candidate themselves and/or the Task Force deciding that a youth & young adult ministry role is not the best alignment of the talents and interests of the candidate, in which case they would not be commissioned by Bishop Cullinan at the end of September. This is explained clearly prior to beginning and at each training session and in follow-up emails after each session also.

Two training sessions are held in St John's Pastoral Centre, one in Glencomeragh House, and the location for the 4th depends on where the majority of the candidates are travelling from.

Training takes place on four full Saturdays in March, April, May and September. One session is dedicated to Diocesan Safeguarding Training and is facilitated by the Diocesan Safeguarding Coordinator. The other sessions are facilitated by members of the Strategic Task Force for Youth & Young Adult Ministry in the Diocese and cover a wide range of topics. Each session presents icebreaker ideas, a style of prayer, practical input and a theory-based input.

Topics covered during training:

- Understanding the Ascend Vision
- Overview of Prayer: Lectio Divina / Visio Divina / Prayer Spaces / Guided Meditation
- Addressing Fears around Faith Rep role
- Understanding Gen Z and Gen Alpha
- Walking with young people: moving from Noticed to Named to Known / listening skills / authenticity: building connection and trust / how to share your testimony / small group facilitation
- Example of a Youth Programme e.g. Alpha Youth Life Essentials
- Pope John Paul II Awards
- Suitability / Responsibility for Being involved in a Ministry
- Safeguarding Training / necessary paperwork for volunteering with U18s in parish

Time frame:

Faith Reps are commissioned for two years, with the option of being recommissioned each year after this if they, and the Task Force / their Parish Priest are happy for them to continue in that role.

Cost:

Costs of Faith Rep training have been covered by the Diocese for the past three years.

Follow up training:

Follow up training is offered for the commissioned group (open to all commissioned Faith Reps, as a way of gathering the full team together). Some of our follow-up training ideas have come from Faith Rep suggestions themselves which is wonderful e.g. exam student support

in parishes. All training material is shared digitally after sessions with Faith Reps, as well as providing hard copies on the day.

Attendance at these follow-up sessions is encouraged for fellowship, network and upskilling but is not mandatory. Faith Reps find meeting with other Faith Reps to discuss ideas, share dreams, tease out worries and so on very helpful. Where only one faith rep exists in a parish, they can feel isolated and it is difficult to make progress. Going forwards, we will be operating more on a clustering model of support and networking for Faith Reps.

An example of follow-up training is our “*Nuts and Bolts*” Session: clear training on how to work with Under 18s in a parish, what we call the 7 P’s (*1.Prayer, 2.Plan, 3.Permission, 4.Personnel, 5.Paperwork: Policies & Procedures, 6.Promote, 7.Possibilities*). This is a very practical and well-appreciated session. It is covered post-commissioning as it could be overwhelming for someone considering the role, but once they have gained confidence and greater experience, it is a very useful workshop. Information from this workshop has also been shared with the Director of Safeguarding.)



To note: Ascend Youth & Young Adult ministry was part of the 2023 Diocesan Safeguarding Audit. See report in appendix.

Ongoing support offered to Commissioned Faith Reps:

- In-person meetings individually, in parish settings
- Phone-calls and email support
- Weekly To the Heights newsletter and Ascend resources with ideas
- Website of resources (www.waterfordlismore.ie/youth-ministry)
- Faith Rep retreat / social activity: Glencairn was our venue for two years, Glencomeragh House, Ardmore Cliff Walk
- Annual Ascend Newsletter
- WhatsApp group for Faith Reps to encourage networking and prayer support
- Encouragement to attend other conferences / events relevant to their roles
- Prayer
- Specific Support with Pope John Paul II Awards
- Involvement with Diocesan led events e.g. Life Essentials, Alpha Youth, Pilgrimages (to learn through practical involvement)

What our Faith Reps have been most actively involved in:

- Youth groups
- Youth specific Noticeboards in churches

- Personal Invitations to youth
- Supporting Pope John Paul II Award
- Youth Adoration
- Assisting with Alpha Youth in schools / Diocesan Alpha Life Essentials Programme
- Pilgrimage leaders
- REvive Conference volunteers
- Exam Liturgies in parishes in May
- Leaders at Faith Camps (including post-Confirmation age & youth leaders)
- Assisting with Confirmation retreats

An unexpected and beautiful knock on effect has been the growth of confidence and deepening of faith of the faith reps themselves. We have walked with 42 Faith Reps so far with 32 remaining currently commissioned and active as of October 2026.

Nodlaig has liaised with youth ministry coordinators in Clogher, Cashel & Emly and Raphoe in the past year to explain how the Faith Rep model is working here, as part of their own discernment on the best model for their dioceses.

See Appendix 1 for Feedback from Faith Reps about their experience of their role.

Strand 2 & 3: Strengthening, Promoting and Developing Existing and new faith-based initiatives, projects and events

POPE JOHN PAUL II AWARDS

Origin of the Award

The Pope John Paul II Award is a Diocesan Award, created originally 20 years ago in the Diocese of Derry for young people aged 16-18 to encourage them to become more active in their parish and community. The award can be achieved at Bronze, Silver or Gold Level with the option of the Papal Cross for those who have successfully completed the Gold. It is non-competitive, flexible and voluntary and provides a way for young people to become visible leaders through faith-based activities in their parish and school, as well as leading or serving as a member of their community.

At least 50% of the hours required for their activities must take place outside school in their own time. This particular national standard had slipped in some areas, and is something the Pope John Paul II Award Committee have made considerable efforts to reassert through clear



**POPE JOHN PAUL II
AWARD**

promotional material, clear presentations, and ongoing follow up with Award Leaders, Faith Reps and participants.

The most popular activities for participants at parish level in the Diocese are Greeting at the Church Door, Reading at Mass (including Prayers of the Faithful), Choir, Assisting Sacristans, Participating in Adoration / Catechesis and participating in liturgical events and services throughout the year.

Diocesan Coordination of the Award

Both Nodlaig Lillis and Olivia Elliott work together to promote and coordinate the Pope John Paul II Awards in the Diocese, liaising with schools, award leaders, parishes, parents and the National Board for the John Paul II Awards. Sincere thanks for the work of Fr Michael Toomey who introduced the Awards to the Diocese in 2014 and coordinated them, and to Mary Murray, Tramore Parish for all her work in administration up until 2025. Special mention too to all the Award Leaders past and present whose dedication and hard work made these awards possible for young people in the parishes / schools.



Clarifying the vision and criteria locally

Re-presenting the original vision, criteria, and expanding areas taking on the Award has been a key part of the plan in the past three years, including annually updating and improving the Diocesan Promotional Brochure, Website Page, Diocesan Starter Pack for Award Leaders and Young People involved in the Award, creating a Parish Pack and delivering an Information / Training Zoom Session to support those who work with JP2 participants at parish level, Suggested Activities List for In-School and Out-of-School Parish and Social Hours, Presentation to potential JP2 participants and Papal Cross participants. Safeguarding policies and procedures as well as Data Protection elements have been updated here in the Diocese and shared with other dioceses as a template. In particular, the application form has been amended to include Religious Denomination. The JP2 Award is a Catholic Award but all are welcome to participate, while adhering to the criteria involved. Knowing a participant's denomination is important when determining the most appropriate activities for them to be involved in at parish level.

The need for clear induction at parish level from the beginning of the programme has become clearer in the past few years, and it can be difficult for young people to make that initial link with their parish if they are not already involved.

Promotion of the Award:

The JP2 Award is a diocesan-awarded, parish-based programme but schools are very helpful in facilitating the award particularly with Transition Year Classes. Nodlaig and Olivia make a

presentation in participating schools each year, in consultation with the Award Leader there. For those participating through parishes and schools, the presentation takes place outside of school, through the local award leader or the Diocesan Committee. As of this year, induction is now taking place at parish level, with follow up visits from the Committee to the school / parish where possible also. When possible, the Committee try to visit the participants once or twice throughout the year to encourage their participation and support the reflection process at the end.

Supporting the young people:

A huge amount of effort has gone into strengthening parish / school links and this has proved most successful where Faith Reps have been involved. Parishes have also been so good to support young people travelling on pilgrimage both spiritually and financially, with young people speaking at Masses and collecting intentions to bring with them, speaking about their experience when they come home and/or creating a display in the local parish with photos of their pilgrimage, increasing the sense of belonging and interconnection between generations.

Information about the awards is shared by Olivia and Nodlaig with teachers throughout the diocese on a regular basis and is included in the annual REnewal Conference. Initial Training for Faith Reps on the Awards is included in their training sessions, and a follow-up session for all those in parishes involved with JP2 is being piloted in 2026 to support, encourage investment and increase confidence. A short presentation to priests will be made at the Priests' Conference in 2026.

Numbers involved:

There is still a significant drop-out level each year from those who initially apply versus those who achieve the award. In parishes where the students are more supported and feel a greater sense of belonging, and where Award Leaders have more time to invest in actively checking the progress of the participant, retention rates are much higher.

- In 2023/2024: 60 participants were awarded medals (5 schools)
- In 2024/2025: 65 participants were awarded medals from 6 schools.
- In 2025/2026: 67 participants are being awarded medals from 6 schools and through 4 parish / pastoral areas which was a new and welcome development.
- In 2026/2027: two new schools and two new parishes have come on board. This year our numbers for those applying for the Papal Cross have increased, which is a positive sign of the desire in these young people to stay actively connected in their parishes. It is our hope that parishes would encourage all those completing the JP2 award to stay involved when their volunteering period is completed, regardless of whether they are involved in JP2 Award or not, so that the young people know they have a valued place in their parishes, and are supported, welcomed and hopefully continually formed by them.

Extra Ascend support for gaining parish hours:

A number of initiatives have been offered at Diocesan Level for participants to gain extra hours – our hope is that this can happen throughout the diocese in time:

- An online formation programme based on the ***To the Heights*** resource and Google Classroom was piloted but discontinued.
- ***Life Essentials*** Programme (piloted in 2026)
- ***Called to Greatness Vocations Workshop*** (three years running).
- A ***TY Day at Mount Melleray*** and two ***REvive Conferences*** at the SETU Arena were held and JP2 participants invited to attend with their schools. (See next section)
- The most fruitful offering has been the ***Pope John Paul II Pilgrimage to Medjugorje***, with young people and leaders enjoying a faith and fun-filled experience, which for a number of young people has led to their further involvement at summer faith Camps and Youth 2000 events.
- Pope John Paul II Award participants have also been invited to participate in various events at the Cathedral e.g. Songs of Praise/Songs of Hope and the Celebration of the Canonisation of St Carlo Acutis and St Pier Giorgio Frassati.

Formation for Pope John Paul II participants:

In the past three years this has taken the form of Life Essentials* (trialled in 2026), Called to Greatness workshops (2024 – 2026), To the Heights Online Club (trialled in 2023 - 2024), Alpha Youth. Further plans, particularly with Papal Cross participants are envisaged for the next phase of the plan. **Life Essentials is part of the Alpha Suite and encourages conversation with young people on matters of life and faith, with dynamic video content, fun games and hospitality and a chance to discuss matters with their peers and leaders. It was a great learning opportunity for our Faith Reps in particular as they tried their hands at different elements of leading a youth session - from hospitality / registration, to icebreakers, to leading small groups.*



Safeguarding and Information for Parishes

To complement sharing of resources, a Practical Guide to Starting a Youth Group training session and resource was created to cover the essential safeguarding, Data Protection and practical elements of running a youth group, but also to highlight potential activities, resources and options for formation for young people. Ideas for formation are shared on a regular basis with Faith Reps, and parishes with Pope John Paul II Award participants in particular being encouraged to consider options for formation as part of the experience for those teenagers.

An updated Award Leader pack and a comprehensive parish support pack have been created this year, along with zoom sessions specifically for priests, Faith Reps and other parish personnel directly involved with supporting participants.

Called to Greatness Workshop:

The Called to Greatness Workshop is an increasingly popular event each year open to Pope John Paul II Award Participants: a 2 hour workshop with games, pizza, chat and the vocation stories of a priest, religious sister and married couple culminating in a short time of prayer for the vocation of each person present using the reflection of John Henry Newman (*"God has created me to do Him some definite service..."*) Participants have greatly enjoyed the fun element, but also hearing vocation stories they may never have encountered previously, and having an opportunity to ask questions of the panellists.

"The Called to Greatness workshop was another important experience that encouraged me to reflect more deeply on my values and personal strengths. It challenged me to think about the kind of person I want to be, and how I can make a positive difference in the lives of others."
(Pope John Paul II Participant)



Reflections:

The Pope John Paul II Awards take time and effort to ensure they are fruitful and run according to their guidelines, but where parishes really invest in the young people and encourage their involvement, the young people and the parishes themselves tend to really benefit from the experience. (See reflections from Pope John Paul II Award Participants 2025/2026)

More work is still to be done in supporting and resourcing the award, which will be part of our next Strategic Plan.

SENIOR CYCLE RE CONFERENCES

Mount Melleray TY Day: 13/3/2024

Reviving the TY Retreat Day in Mount Melleray for the first time since Covid, we had 52 students in attendance with their teachers from two schools. The weather was damp, but we had a great day of music, talks, workshops, testimonies, games, a tour of the abbey, prayer spaces and a chance to join the monks for Sext prayer during the day too.

A review of the day showed that the venue at Melleray was no longer suitable for what we envisaged for a TY Day, although the young people enjoyed the walks and interactions with

the monks there. This was followed by the announcement later that year that Melleray would close and was no longer an option for a conference style event.

REvive Conferences 2025 & 2026:

Consulting with the Diocesan Advisor in the Kerry Diocese re: their Céiliúradh na nÓg large scale event for schools, we looked to the SETU Arena as a new venue for a TY Day, calling it the REvive Conference (using the name of a post-primary online outreach with Holy Family Mission during Covid).

We had a very successful first REvive Conference in 2025 with approximately 60 TYs and 5th years from De La Salle College, Waterpark College, Ardscoil na Mara and CBS Dungarvan. Our main speaker was Elma Walsh, whose late son Donal Walsh was the inspiration behind the #Live Life Foundation, promoting a message of the preciousness of life. Workshops, music, fun and games were part of the experience for the teens too. Bishop Phonsie also brought with him the relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis on the day so it was lovely to have an opportunity to introduce them to the story of Carlo as well as the late Donal Walsh.

The 2026 REvive Conference saw the roof of the SETU Arena being lifted again with music, laughter and a whole lot of fun. Students from Waterpark College, De La Salle College, St Augustine's Dungarvan and Ardscoil na Mara joined us for our 2026 Senior Cycle Conference and participated brilliantly from the get-go. Our keynote speaker was Fr John



Harris OP, Provincial of the Irish Dominicans and no stranger to speaking at youth events, being one of the most sought after speakers in Ireland and former national Spiritual Director for Youth 2000 Ireland. His talk on how we are individually known and loved by God, and made for friendship was really powerful! Fr John spoke to us about how life can be artificial and fake, but we're called to "the real" – and that's where God meets us. Róisín and Michael, Holy Family Mission Alumni, were super as our MCs and also shared their testimonies. We had two great teams leading our workshops from Holy Family Mission and a combination of David Elliott and Billy Butler from Tramore (great to see young adults and Faith Reps working together to lead teens) Bishop Phonsie, Sr Shaila (Poor of Jesus Christ), Fr Stuart McGovern and Pat Reynolds (Holy Family Mission) were fantastic on our Called to Greatness panel explaining their own vocations – the path God has called them to in life, be that religious life, priesthood or married life. It definitely opened our eyes to some of the similarities in these vocations, as well as the need for silence in our own lives so we can hear God speaking his invitation for our own "call to greatness" to each of us. Our music ministry led by Fr Patrick Cahill and the Holy Family Mission community / Alumni were so gifted, and they blended fun and more inspirational worship music too, especially during our period of adoration at the

end. We had a great team of volunteers, drawing from Faith Reps, young adults and religious communities: the sisters of the Poor of Jesus Christ, the brothers and sisters of the Home of the Mother, the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Sisters of Mary Morning Star. Along with these, our Core Team made the whole event possible in hundreds of ways from set up, music, indoor soccer and basketball, manning our Game Zone, prayer spaces, adoration and just general fun and chat too!

To watch a highlights video click here: https://youtu.be/vy8jgwtrelE?si=ERRt3aydDsEi_3fF

Future plans:

Although we have enjoyed the REvive Conferences and have seen some fruit from them, the Task Force reviewed whether or not to run one in the year ahead, and we decided against it in 2027. There is a significant cost involved, limited interest from schools, and we feel that a more intentional effort in a different way with teenagers may have more potential for fruit. We also will consider whether or not something like REvive should be offered to 1st – 3rd years instead, as teachers have commented that there are plenty of events for TYs and Senior Cycle but not for Junior Cycle. We will also research the feasibility of running an event somewhat similar to Maranatha in the Cork and Ross Diocese.

HOLY FAMILY MISSION SUPPORTING ASCEND

Stronger links have been made in the past number of years between Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry and Holy Family Mission. We take this opportunity to celebrate their ten years of life in the Diocese so far, and wish them all the best for the future!

Holy Family Mission have been involved in the following Diocesan Youth & Young Adult Ministry initiatives and we are very grateful for their support:

- Alpha Youth in post-primary schools & Alpha Holy Spirit Retreat Days
- Supporting Encounter for Young Adults in Waterford City (and Dungarvan) (MCS, servers, music, testimonies, speakers, hospitality)
- Transition Year Day in Mount Melleray & REvive Senior Cycle RE Conferences
- Assisting with Training & support of Parish Faith Reps
- Pope John Paul II Awards Ceremonies
- Pope John Paul II Pilgrimage to Medjugorje Leaders and hosting Reunion Day
- “Called to Greatness” JP2 Award Vocations Workshops
- Annual REnewal Conference for RE Teachers and Chaplains
- Working alongside teen and young adults leaders at Campa Mhuire Mháthair Faith Camps in Ardmore, Dungarvan and Tramore
- Participation at the Ascend Day of Prayer and Reflection for Youth & Young Adult Ministry in the Diocese

- Laudate Worship event - Waterford
- Hosting Inter-Diocesan Frassati Camino for Young Adults
- REvive Hike & Reflection Day for TY students in collaboration with Ascend
- Canonisation of St Carlo Acutis & St Pier Giorgio Frassati Celebration in Cathedral
- Holy Hour for Vocations on a monthly basis during the Year of Vocations to Diocesan Priesthood
- Youth Hour at the Jubilee Prayer in the Plaza

DIOCESAN YOUTH RETREAT OPTIONS

Holy Family Mission

The community at Glencomeragh House has hosted post-primary and confirmation retreats for schools within the diocese over the past number of years. Confirmation retreats in particular are a popular option, with very positive feedback and repeat bookings. The number of Post-Primary schools engaging a retreat team has dropped significantly since Covid in general, with many opting for in-house options or no retreat at all because of bus costs.



Holy Family Mission have also offered assistance with Alpha Youth Holy Spirit Days in the past number of years. Holy Family Mission's strength over the years has definitely been offering tailor-made retreat experiences delivered by experience staff members and joyful, young people who love the Lord.

TY Reflection & Hike Day:

In April 2025 Ascend ran, in collaboration with Holy Family Mission, a Reflection Day & Hike with over 60 Transition Year students from a school in Clonmel. The girls were great fun and participated well in the forest hike near Glencomeragh House, the reflection experience in the chapel, the craft activity, journalling time, games, hot chocolate and snacks. One of the community at Holy Family Mission shared her impactful testimony of her struggle with self-esteem and fitting in until she realised her true worth as a daughter of God. The weather was amazing and it proved to be a great model for a Retreat Day for a post-primary school, one which we could build on in future.

Other retreat options:

Since the beginning of the Strategic Plan, Creation Surf Retreats (run by Billy Butler, Freedom Surf School (Faith Rep) and supported by Fr Taddeo Hammerle and Fr Stuart McGovern), and the Carlo Acutis Shrine at Ardfinnan (facilitated by Fr Michael Toomey) have also become relevant options for post-primary schools within the diocese and are promoted by Ascend also.

Creation Surf Retreats for Post-Primary Schools and Community Groups are offered in Tramore, providing a natural blend between the great outdoors, reflecting on the existence of God and the beauty of His creation, and moments of prayer too. *Creation Surf have also offered Summer Camps for Teens in the past two years.*

The **Carlo Acutis experience in Ardfinnan** offers multiple options for groups: Presentation on the life of St Carlo Acutis / Blessing from a first class relic / Mass / Adoration / Confession / Prayer Service.

Local World Youth Day Event:

Plans for a Diocesan level World Youth Day event has not taken place yet. The recommended date of the feast of Christ the King has not been suitable up till now, and the priority was working with schools to build up the Pope John Paul II Award and REvive Conference, but this is still something that can be reviewed for the next phase of planning.

Reflections:

In a world saturated with noise, distractions, fake news, AI and filters, providing retreats and faith-based events as moments of encounter with God for young people is hugely important. We have heard beautiful feedback from students over the years from retreats and events like REvive, of how they met God, realised He loved them and has a plan for them, possibly for the first time ever. How to do this when schools are under pressure with bus costs and crammed schedules needs more discerning.

Further options and resources for schools given the rising costs of transport will be looked at in the next Strategic Plan.

The new Senior Cycle RE Non-Exam Framework “Made for More” will form part of the planning stage for how parishes / the Diocese can best support RE teachers and chaplains in fulfilling Key Assignments, Whole Class Assignments and Learning Outcomes particularly around pilgrimage, liturgical services, and moments of encounter with the Lord.

Options for retreat experiences / pilgrimages for teachers will also be looked at to provide them with an opportunity to “fill their own cup” e.g. Camino / Diocesan Pilgrim Trail / Medjugorje and other options.

DIOCESAN YOUTH PILGRIMAGES

The importance of pilgrimages for young people was a key aspect of our plan, knowing how they 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. We have seen clearly the often life-changing effect pilgrimages have had on our youth and even our leaders on occasion.

INTERNATIONAL PILGRIMAGES:

Pope John Paul II Pilgrimage to Medjugorje

Since 2024 we have organised three annual Pope John Paul II Pilgrimages to Medjugorje for young people participating in the JP2 awards. A number of places are offered to each school or to young people doing the award directly through their parishes, along with teachers from the participating schools, young adult leaders, Faith Reps, spiritual director(s), and the core team of organisers: Nodlaig Lillis, Olivia Elliott, Stephen Plunkett.



Schools and parishes have been very generous in helping to subsidise the cost for the young pilgrims, and we have been able to offer a fundraising raffle on two occasions to offset the individual costs based on the number of tickets they sell.

The pilgrimage has been a huge success each year, thank God, with the young pilgrims being immersed in an atmosphere of faith, fun and fellowship, with excellent leaders, in a prayerful



atmosphere. They have responded to the peace they feel in Medjugorje, the whole-hearted participation of pilgrims at Mass, the opportunity to ask questions, to see faith as something for living and not just rules.

Special commendation to the guides at Joe Walsh Tours who provide so well for our young people each year.

Post-pilgrimage, many of the young people have joined us at our reunions, and many have gone on to help at Summer Campa Mhuire Mháthair Faith Camps as young leaders, further deepening their faith and friendship with each other. A good number of these young people have attended the Youth 2000 Summer Festival in August following their pilgrimage, and regularly keep in contact with each other.

Pilgrims feedback:

"I felt God all around me when I was in Medjugorje through the walks, climbs, prayers, songs and testimonies. It is so nice to have a sense of peace and security with me wherever I go, especially when I'm in a church. I am so grateful for these opportunities as they have shown me a deeper meaning to God and have let me understand more about myself."

"I've since found it so much easier to talk with God and find him in different ways which has helped me so much."

Parents of Pilgrims:

"...I think she had one of the most meaningful experiences so far in her precious life and that is down to all the leaders/priests. Thank you all so much."

"...She really enjoyed the week. I've never seen her so positively impacted by anything so much before..."

"Thank you to all of the leaders for the amazing week [my son] had in Medjugorje. He was buzzing after it and really enjoyed the whole experience."

We recommend watching the highlights reels of our videos which can be found on the Ascend YouTube channel here:

- **2024 Pilgrimage:** <https://youtu.be/ed2V2lx6cWA?si=C4e1gXI18SU8iU7I>
- **2025 Pilgrimage:** <https://youtu.be/FCHqFH2L65A?si=rwlo2QrRdG1NqH8J>
- **2026 Pilgrimage:** <https://youtu.be/lbfOzcKBIPg?si=6MmwUTLwIMck-eu8>

World Youth Day 2023

"... what an event to see so many people show up for Jesus and celebrate together was amazing, it only confirmed what I already knew: the faith is alive and growing."
(Nathan, Tramore)

A group of 15 pilgrims from the diocese took part in WYD Lisbon 2023, joining 1.5 million other young people from all across the globe for a week of joy, laughter, prayer, music, dance and life-changing experiences.

Most of the young people have remained in regular contact with the diocese. 2 have been leaders at diocesan youth pilgrimages. One became a faith rep. Two connected in very well with their chaplaincies in university when they began. Three have been helpers at Faith Camps on a number of occasions, have linked in with Encounter (one has MCed the event, another shared his testimony.) Some have helped with Alpha Youth Holy Spirit Days.



Highlights video and testimonies from World Youth Day:

https://youtu.be/01N_NyEisNw?si=K3Rq7kg7DD_OYso3

Camino de Santiago

In July 2024 and July 2026, Bishop Phonsie travelled with small groups from the Diocese to walk the Camino - taking in the stunning scenery, opportunities for conversation and reflection

along the way. The response from the young adults and other pilgrims was very positive, despite the challenging nature of the pilgrimage.

Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage

The Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage has been running for decades before the existence of Ascend in the Diocese, but in Autumn 2024, members of the Strategic Task Force liaised with the then youth leader for the Lourdes pilgrimage to see was there any way we could be of support, particularly around promoting the option of helpers to schools.

The Youth leader needed to step down for personal reasons that year and Olivia Elliott was asked to take over the role for the 2025 pilgrimage, working with a team of leaders who had previously been involved, as well as Diocesan seminarians and a teacher.

Bríd O’Hehir, Faith Rep, took over the role from Olivia for the 2026 pilgrimage, and again worked with a team of existing leaders, along with the introduction that year of Sr Shaila PJC, Faith Rep.

It is hoped that Ascend can continue to support the pilgrimage in some way each year, and the John Paul II Awards Committee continues to promote the option to schools during initial presentations to groups each year.

NATIONAL PILGRIMAGE:

Parables Tour: Dublin

Fr Mike Schmitz is a renowned American priest, preacher and podcaster. His *Bible in a Year* podcast has had over 1 billion downloads and his regular videos on Ascension Presents have a huge following due to his sincerity and dynamic preaching style which resonates with all ages, but young people in particular.

On July 20th 2026, a group of 30 young adults, priests and faith reps travelled to his Parables Tour event in Dublin. It was a fabulous day with a real pilgrimage feel to it. We were blessed to attend Mass in St Kevin's Church celebrated by Bishop Fintan Gavin and five other Bishops, including Bishop Phonsie, at which Fr Mike preached and one of our young adults participated in the offertory procession. This was followed by the actual Parables Tour event in the National Stadium where Fr Mike skilfully and beautifully broke open a number of parables to inspire and challenge us to go ever deeper in our faith. On the bus journey home people shared their experiences of the day and expressed a desire for more events and outings like this for young adults to grow in faith and fellowship.

LOCAL PILGRIMAGES:

Frassati Camino

- We did not run a Diocesan Young Adult Pilgrimage in 2024 but our Frassati Camino for Young Adults in July/August 2025 was a great success and provides an excellent

template for a locally run pilgrimage option. Celebrating the Jubilee of Youth along St Declan's Way, inspired by the lives of local saints like St Declan and the incredible witness to faith, Pier Giorgio Frassati who would be canonised that year, our young adults spent four days together growing in fellowship and faith.

- Each morning began with 8am Mass at Holy Family Mission where we were based for our accommodation, followed by a hearty breakfast before hopping on the bus to our first stop. Each day the group walked between 15 – 22 km along St Declan's Way, praying, chatting, laughing, reflecting and capturing some epic memories.



- The bus collected the group at the finish point each day, and brought them back to Holy Family Mission for showers, supper, evening prayer and fun and games together.
- A particularly special moment was the afternoon the group spent at St Declan's Well at Toor, where they renewed their baptismal promises, were blessed by water from the well, and had an opportunity for confession or just silent prayer.
- The weekend provided an opportunity for many to reflect on their own lives right now and where God might be calling them; for others it was a chance to network and link with other young people of faith. Many of our pilgrims had a mini-reunion at the Youth 2000 Summer Festival the following weekend, and have already expressed an interest in repeating the Frassati Camino again.
- Fr Shane O'Neill and Fr Vincent Stapleton (Archdiocese of Cashel & Emly) were the spiritual directors and are to be highly commended for the way they led not just the prayer and sacraments, but also the fun and fellowship throughout the weekend.

LOCAL PILGRIMAGE: *Frassati Hikes*

In 2024, Frassati Young Adult Hikes were offered to Lough Mohra and Coumshingaun Lake. It proved difficult to generate attendees for these events. However, young adult ministry now seems to be in a stronger position in the Diocesan than two years ago, so this is an option to be explored again.

Local Pilgrimage: *Pilgrim Trails*

- The **Diocesan Pilgrim Passport** was introduced in the Jubilee Year of Hope, assisted by the Ascend Strategic Task Force, and was a great way to encourage people across the Diocese to discover the rich heritage of their own local Diocese, local shrines, holy wells and discover faith stories past and present. The launch of this was accompanied with a video produced by the Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother in association with Holy Family Mission.

Click here to view: <https://youtu.be/BSSoj7HCEyE?si=wNyEZ2FYVlzUS7I5>

- The ***Jubilee Year Light of Hope Mission*** in association with Catholic Christian Outreach (CCO) incorporated pilgrim paths at Mount Melleray on the final day of the mission. There was a great atmosphere for those who attended.
- Building on this, plans are underway for designing an ***Ascend Pilgrim Path*** option for young people / schools / youth groups, this time to include the Carlo Acutis Shrine at Ardfinnan (along with the Cathedral, St Patrick's Well, The Edmund Rice International Centre at Mount Sion and Ardmore, and space to explore their own local parish / church as a place of pilgrimage. A ***"Pilgrims of Hope: My Parish as a Place of Pilgrimage"*** project template was created in the Jubilee Year, but it is hoped that with the launch of a youth specific Pilgrim Path and in line with the learning outcomes of the new Senior Cycle RE Framework ***"Made for More"***, that this will become a useful option going forwards. There is also scope to run this type of a day pilgrimage with young adults.
- Ways to develop and promote the legacy of ***Blessed Edmund Rice*** are also underway with a new Ascend Resource pack created in 2026 and discussions with a staff member at Mount Sion CBS for options to support RE teachers in particular.

Safeguarding Procedures and Policies:

- In addition, the Strategic Task Force have assisted the Diocesan Director of Safeguarding to develop policy and procedures, including Risk Assessment Templates, Leader Role Descriptors, Codes of Conduct, Guidelines for pilgrims / parents & guardians / Leaders and also Pilgrim Diaries to record their experiences while away, to complement the Munster Dioceses' Pilgrimage Safeguarding Policy at a local level.
- Safety Statements created by the Task Force for Frassati Hikes, Frassati Camino have been used by parishes as templates for insurance for their own parish initiatives also.
- While all the relevant information is now available for Parish Faith Reps who wish to organise an away trip, a specific training day and resource will be created as part of the next plan.

ASCEND NEWSLETTERS AND RESOURCES

Weekly newsletters:

- Each week during term time, Faith@Home Family Newsletters, Let's Dive In Children's Resource, and To the Heights Youth Resource are created by Nodlaig, uploaded to the Diocesan website and emailed to hundreds of subscribers. A full three year cycle has been completed and is updated and added to regularly.

- As well as this, extra Ascend Resource Packs are created to provide more meaty resources on a variety of topics, particularly saints (Gamechanger series) and liturgical seasons.
- All of these are available to download free of charge from www.waterfordlismore.ie/youth-ministry and it's really encouraging to receive emails from teachers, parish volunteers, pastoral workers and Diocesan Advisors, locally, nationally and internationally who use these too.
- Ascend Annual Newsletters have been shared in [August 2025](#) and [August 2026](#) and can be accessed on the Diocesan Website.
- Ascend resources are shared weekly with teachers on an Ascend mailout with Nodlaig, and also by Olivia through her role as Diocesan Advisor, and Sr Kathryn in her liaising with schools.



Local and National Recognition of Resources:

- As well as presenting to our own RE Teachers at the annual Diocesan REnewal Conference, Nodlaig has also presented Ascend resources in the Diocese of Cork and Ross and the Archdiocese of Tuam in the past two years.
- It is always a pleasure to meet RE teachers from around the country and share free resources to help meet their needs, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive, thank God, with the resources being lauded as authentic, invaluable and relatable.
- Olivia Elliott was also asked to present on Liturgy in School at the Tuam Day and also received very positive feedback on her input.

Prayer Resources:

- Specific Prayer Resources created by Ascend have been shared with Parish Faith Reps and schools also e.g. Stations of the Cross display, *Heart Speaks to Heart Prayer Resources* (Lectio Divina, Audio Divina, Visio Divina, Christian Meditation, Journalling, Doodle Prayers, Adoration Guide, Guide to praying the Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet).
- A "Heart speaks to Heart" Adoration Guide for Young People has also been produced (available as pdf on the website), incorporating the wisdom and experience of a Faith Rep who leads teenagers in adoration, and has been used in some parishes already by Faith Reps offering adoration to young people.

Adoration Guide for young people



- ASCEND YOUTH & YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY (SUSSEX OF WATERFORD & LISMORE) -

- A training session on *Heart speaks to Heart Prayer Styles for Young People* was facilitated in 2026 by Nodlaig for the community at Holy Family Mission and it is hoped this can continue on an annual basis.

Supporting RE Learning Outcomes:

- A large number of these resources are already in line with learning outcomes for the new Senior Cycle RE Non-Exam Framework and have been promoted to teachers at the 2026 REnewal Day especially.
- The Gamechanger Series in particular is helpful for the Junior Cycle RE CBA1. Although Ascend resources are not specifically for schools, careful consideration will be made going forward to align as many new resources as possible with the Made for More Framework to maximise their usefulness in schools.

Researching resources:

A formal subcommittee was not established to research, pilot, promote and review relevant resources, as it was felt that Nodlaig, Sr Kathryn and Olivia were doing this informally themselves anyway and sharing findings with each other.

Along with the options listed in the plan SAOL has also been recommended to schools, and Hannah Clarke, Scripture Union, spoke at the REnewal Conference 2025/2026, while Gerard Hanley from Alpha Youth spoke at the Conference in 2024.



Ascend Social Media

- Ascend Social Media exists on Instagram, Facebook, Website and YouTube, and is used primarily to highlight events and share resources.
- Ascend YouTube / Spotify channels share playlists of specifically themed hymns / tunes relevant to different liturgical seasons, saints or other youth-relevant themes. In particular, playlists are shared with Medjugorje youth pilgrims after our return so they can continue to enjoy the music that touched their heart while on pilgrimage.

Safeguarding and Data Protection:

- Ascend have been pro-active in terms of policies and procedures around Digital Communications within the Diocese, producing training and instructional material for use by Faith Reps and parishes in consultation with the Safeguarding Director.
- Ascend also ran a training session on the use of Canva for Faith Reps, highlighting as part of it the key information that needs to be part of event adverts for U18s in particular.

Future Plans:

- It is hoped going forwards that young people themselves can help contribute to the social media accounts, to make them more attractive, with more frequent posting. This will be part of the discussion with our young adult advisory board in the future.

INTERDIOCESAN, NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL LINKS

Youth 2000 is a national Catholic movement in existence in Ireland for over 35 years and aims to bring young people aged 16 - 35 to the heart of the Church. Its motto is Youth Leading Youth to the Heart of the Church.

Youth 2000 Munster:

- A spring Munster Youth 2000 retreat took place in De La Salle College, Waterford from Friday April 5th – Sunday April 7th, 2024 for young people aged 16 – 35, with music, talks, testimonies and workshops, adoration and Mass, and a chance to make great friends. Over 100 young people from around Munster, as well as the diocese, took part throughout the weekend.
- It was particularly encouraging to have so much diocesan input into the event too with Bishop Phonsie leading a Reconciliation talk and also celebrating the final Mass on Divine Mercy Sunday, talks from the Home of the Mother priests Fr Kevin and Fr Dominic, Pat Reynolds (Holy Family Mission) and Nodlaig Lillis (Ascend Youth and Young Adult Ministry) leading workshops on Saturday, Sr Rebekah Marie from the Sisters of Mary Morning Star leading a beautiful Scripture talk on Sunday morning, as well as local priests helping with confessions on Saturday night.
- At the most recent Youth 2000 Munster retreat in Midleton (17th - 19th April 2026), we were very proud to see some of our Diocesan young adults stepping up to volunteer in everything from catering to MCing the entire event!

Youth 2000 Summer Festivals:

- In the past 3 years, numbers of young people attending the national summer festival have increased, largely due to links with the Pope John Paul II Award Pilgrimage, Campa Mhuire Mháthair Faith Camps and the Pope John Paul II Awards.
- At these festivals, Waterford & Lismore Diocese have been strongly represented at leader/volunteer level also. Holy Family Mission have presented workshops, Sr Kathryn Press facilitated workshops on Religious Life, Bishop Phonsie hosted Vocations



workshops, Sr Rebekah Marie (Sisters of Mary Morning Star) gave a keynote input on Living the Christian Life and Ascend Youth Ministry was represented by a stand at each one.

- It's always a joy to meet people and hear, "there's a lot going on in your diocese." It is also encouraging to meet people using Ascend Resources in their classrooms right across the country.
- The level of participation and volunteering among Waterford & Lismore youth who go to these festivals is also very inspiring: in August 2026 Diocesan youth and young adults were involved in catering, music, leading prayer and action songs, reading at Mass, MCing, cleaning, security duty and more, giving great witness to other young people.

Other Retreats / Events:

Young people from our diocese have also been encouraged to attend events such as:

- Assemble Young Professionals Retreat in Knockadoon, Co. Cork,
- Lumen Christi Students Retreat at Knockadoon, Co. Cork
- Ignite Conference in Dublin, in May 2026,
- Annual Abide in His Love Women's Conference in Bundoran,
- Evangelium Conferences
- CREDO Retreats and more
- Rooted in Christ – Cherished Women's Retreat
- Silent Retreats led the Institute of the Incarnate Word Priests and Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará
- Scripture Series run by Tinteán na Éireann, Dunmore East
- Camp Creideamh (Knockadoon)
- Camp Veritas, Clongowes College
- Summer Camps led by the Servant Sisters and Brothers of the Home of the Mother
- Wild at Heart Retreats at Glencomeragh House
- "More than Conquerors" Men's Retreats at Glencomeragh House
- Beloved Retreat with Women with the Poor of Jesus Christ Sisters

"Into the Deep: Building Intentional Young Adult Ministry in Ireland" 22/6/2024

Four delegates from our diocese attended the national Young Adult Ministry gathering organised by the Irish Catholic Bishops Conference in Clongowes College, Co. Kildare. Main speaker on the day was Fr Stephen Wang, creator of the Sycamore Programme (and now Bishop-elect of Arundel and Brighton), who gave a very practical and insightful input on youth ministry. His advice for those involved in youth ministry was simple but profound:

1. *Be part of a team, however small. It's very hard to do youth ministry alone.*

2. *Youth ministry must be centred on Christ and the faith of the Catholic Church, whatever your format is.*
3. *Deepen your own personal faith.*
4. *Youth ministry needs to be invitational – don't just sit around waiting for people to turn up*
5. *Effective youth ministry needs to have a focus. You need to be doing one thing well, rather than a hundred things badly. It's also better to try something and fail rather than not start anything at all.*

His input was shared with delegates at our own Day of Reflection and Prayer for Youth Ministry in the Diocese in Mount Melleray in November 2024. Over 150 delegates from all over Ireland were in attendance and it was genuinely a fantastic day, seeing so many others striving to provide opportunities for young adults around the country to encounter Jesus through a huge variety of different ministries. A lot to reflect on for our own young adult ministry here in our diocese.

Hearts on Fire Conference (25th – 26th June 2025)

Nodlaig Lillis, Olivia Elliott and a number of clergy and parish delegates attended the two-day Hearts on Fire Evangelisation Conference hosted by the Diocese of Down and Connor. It was a very run well event, with prayer being central to the whole experience, and excellent inputs and workshops to choose from across a wide range of pastoral ministry and evangelisation ideas. Meeting so many diocesan workers, parish pastoral ministry personnel, clergy and lay people from all over the country was very inspiring as to how much is currently going on in our country – so many hearts really on fire already! Fr James Mallon (Divine Renovation) was the keynote speaker. The conference provided the inspiration for a Diocesan-based Passing on the Flame Evangelisation Conference at Holy Family Mission in September 2025.

Passing on the Flame Evangelisation Conference - Sat 4th October 2025

Following the Hearts on Fire Conference in Belfast, it was felt that it would be helpful to gather priests and laity across the diocese currently engaged in key elements of evangelisation in our diocese to pray and reflect together. A committee was formed (Bishop Phonsie, Fr Mark O'Farrell, Maura Murphy, Olivia Elliott and Nodlaig Lillis) to organise the "Passing on the Flame" one day conference at Glencomeragh House. The day consisted of excellent speakers, a Q&A panel, Mass, adoration, worship and time for networking with others. 62 delegates who were in attendance were given an opportunity to see the bigger picture of what is already happening in our diocese in the area of evangelisation and be encouraged to go forwards in faith in their own parishes / areas of ministry. Mike Shortt, *An Tobar Nua* spoke on "From Encounter to Mission: Evangelised to Evangeliser" and Fr Billy Swan, *Diocese of Ferns (now serving in the Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy)* dealt with the topic "Evangelisation and Parish Renewal". People

were encouraged to network throughout the day reflect on our individual call to evangelise:

- *What is the Holy Spirit saying to your heart today?*
- *Is He Confirming something for you?*
- *Is there someone you can make a further link with?*
- *What concrete thing might the Lord be asking you to do? (Prayer / action / conversation...?)*

It was a very successful day, greatly enjoyed by all who felt a 2-day event would be even more beneficial if possible.

Future plans:

Plans are underway for a diocesan conference with renowned Catholic speaker and writer, Sherry Weddell (Forming Intentional Disciples) in Spring of 2027.

National Youth Ministry Coordinator Retreat 2026

On 13th - 14th May Nodlaig joined other youth ministry coordinators from diocese and religious movements across the country, and members of the Irish Bishop's Conference sub-council for Youth Ministry at Mount St Anne's Retreat Centre, Killenard for a retreat experience for those involved in leading ministry to *"come away and rest"*. It also provided opportunities to network with others, receive formation, and understand the workings of the sub-council and the proposals of the working group for the synod.

Overall there was a great sense of hope and excitement around the vision for youth and young adult ministry that seems to be developing across the country and it was so encouraging to hear what's happening in different regions, and be able to share our own progress too.

We were also presented with the new *"Made for More"* – Irish Bishop's framework for non-exam RE for Catholic schools, and a number of ways that youth ministry / parishes can support this practically were highlighted for us - something very much a part of Ascend Youth and Young Adult Ministry vision.

It was an important event to be part of, which led to a renewed sense of hope and excitement, and an eagerness to really discern where the Lord is calling us in our next strategic plan for youth here in the Diocese.

(See Full Report in appendix)

Munster Connect over Coffee Zooms:

As a follow-on, the Munster Youth Ministry Coordinators have also begun a monthly zoom to network, offer support and encouragement and see areas where we overlap and can work together on the 2nd Wednesday of each month called Connect over Coffee.

This has led to a much greater connection between Munster Youth Ministry Coordinators and plans are being discussed for collaborating on a Regional Young Adult Conference in the coming Spring.

Catholic Christian Outreach (CCO) / Light of Hope Diocesan Mission 2024

In Spring of 2024 the Diocese were approached by the Canadian group, CCO, with a view to collaborating on a “Light of Hope” mission in the Diocese, the week after they were involved in missionary activity in Raphoe Diocese (12th – 16th June 2024). A committee was assembled as the focus was not going to primarily be youth & young adult ministry because of the timing of the event (early to mid-June when students would be doing State exams, and colleges finished for the academic year).

Our mission had two aims: bring hope to people in the Diocese and provide training for people on how to confidently share their faith / their testimony. It was decided to focus on three locations (Clonmel, Dungarvan and Waterford) and involve the CCO team of missionaries with Lightfever, Encounter, A Diocesan Pilgrim Walk Day at Mount Melleray on the Sunday, and three workshops on *"How to share your Faith with Others"*. Accommodation for the young people was at Holy Family Mission, and the two young adult communities were able to spend some time interacting with each other and learning about each other’s mission too. People who encountered the 19 university-aged missionaries were particularly struck by their joy and enthusiasm for the faith, and they brought a real sense of hope for what is possible in youth and young adult ministry. The Diocesan Pilgrim Walk in Mount Melleray was a successful event with good feedback. The monks at Melleray themselves were very happy with the day. CCO seemed to be having good chats with people along the pilgrim trails. It was a very worthwhile experience for the team from an organisational point of view, who learned a lot through the planning and the week of Mission itself.

SEEK Conferences, USA



SEEK is a collaboration led by FOCUS, a Catholic outreach organization that shares the hope and joy of the Gospel with the world. FOCUS missionaries encounter people in friendship, invite them into a personal relationship with Christ and accompany them as they pursue lives of virtue and excellence. More info at <https://seek.focus.org/>

Delegates from the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore attended two SEEK Conferences in St Louis, Missouri in 2023 and 2024. Over 17,000 Catholic University students, Bishops priests and religious attended the phenomenal 5-day events with some of the best Catholic speakers in the world, such as Emily Wilson, Fr. Mike Schmitz, Fr Josh Johnson, Dr Edward Sri, Jason Evert, Sr. Miriam James Heidland and Sr Bethany Madonna, in a powerful witness to the joy and vitality of the Catholic Faith, especially among young

Catholic adults. Our delegates attended the Making Missionary Disciples Tracks, hearing practical and insightful advice into the reality of mission and evangelisation at parish and diocesan level.

FAITH-BASED PROGRAMMES, EVENTS AND RESOURCES FOR YOUTH / YOUNG ADULTS



Alpha Youth

Alpha Youth has been running successfully in secondary schools in our diocese since 2017. Waterpark College has run this programme most consistently. Mercy Secondary School and De La Salle College in Waterford City have also run (or are running) Alpha Youth. Alpha Youth began in Dungarvan CBS in autumn 2026.

More than 650 students in our diocese have experienced Alpha Youth or Life Essentials over the course of these three and a half years.

In collaboration with Ascend Youth Ministry, Alpha Youth creates a space for questions around life, faith, and purpose. In addition to running in three secondary schools in our diocese this autumn, we are looking to three more schools with the possibility of piloting Alpha Youth in a new form:

- Working with a teacher in a mixed secondary school who will support students to run Alpha Youth for their peers during lunchtime.
- Working with first years in a boys secondary school to utilise the new Alpha Youth Journal.
- Working with Holy Family Mission to offer Alpha Youth in a girls secondary school.



Alpha Youth works well because of the generosity of volunteers, including faith reps. Faith reps have grown in confidence, provided valuable accompaniment to young people, and created meaningful links between school and parish. We see this especially in parishes with the Pope John Paul II Award. Support from parish priests also enriches this programme and young peoples' experience of church. As a result of the commitment of one parish priest, a school has now opened a pastoral care office and provides support to staff and students one afternoon a week.

Opportunities for growth of Alpha Youth include:

- deepening relationships with schools where Alpha is currently running,
- continuing to walk with other schools for whom Alpha may be of benefit,

- and to journey with parishes in discerning how to run Alpha Youth through a parish/multi-parish youth group.

Prepared by Sr. Kathryn Press, ASCJ

*Coordinator for Alpha Youth in Schools in the Diocese of Waterford & Lismore**

* I thank Bishop Phonsie for his work with Alpha Ireland in the successful reception of the grant that funds my work (2 days/week) with Alpha Youth from March 2024 - March 2027. The Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are committed to serving the needs of the diocese, particularly in the areas of youth ministry and evangelisation. We anticipate continuing to support Alpha Youth even after the grant comes to completion.

Feedback from students about Alpha Youth:

"I was a bit shy but I liked hearing others views and opinions on things we wouldn't usually talk about."

"It's refreshing to listen to others' opinions and beliefs, especially those I don't normally listen to."

"Alpha helped me figuring out my religion, for a while I wasn't sure about if Jesus was real or not, alpha has helped me with that and now I started reading the Bible."

"It impacted me majorly as I've been looking for an answer about my beliefs for a long time now and I've finally been answered."

"It feels hopeful for me that there are people talking positively about Christianity."

See Appendix for full report and breakdown of numbers.

Prayer Spaces in Schools:

Strong links have been made with Prayer Spaces in Schools Ireland team over the past number of years.

St John's Pastoral Centre was utterly transformed on the 12th March 2024 for a day-long Prayer Spaces Experience that culminated in a training session that night led by Emma Thompson of Prayer Spaces in School, Ireland. We welcomed adults, families and post-primary students throughout the day, and enthusiastic parishioners that evening who were all very inspired by the simplicity and the depth of experience a Prayer Space can evoke.

Not to be confused with Sacred Spaces, Prayer Spaces are a particular interactive, individually directed type of prayer experience whose tangible nature, calming atmosphere, thought-provoking questions or simple activities can reach people of all ages at a level they don't expect, to help create a moment of encounter with God.



We were very pleased with how our Prayer Spaces event ran, the only complaint was that it should have run for longer so more people could come

To see a highlights reel of the event click here:

<https://youtu.be/U7uARz1TUYg?si=DBGltKvEzEOmdnAV>

- Prayer Spaces have formed part of annual Faith Rep training with hugely positive feedback from the Faith Rep candidates themselves. A prayer spaces pdf resource has been created and is available for schools / Faith reps to use.
- A selection of Ascend produced resources and advice have been implemented by Prayer Spaces in Schools Ireland, particularly in the production of their Catholic Schools Week resource.
- A number of our Faith Reps have already trialled some prayer spaces in their own parishes.
- Training has also been provided by Sr Kathryn Press to community members at Holy Family Mission on how to plan, resource, create and run Prayer Spaces activities.

Development this year:

- Prayer Spaces as a whole school / specific class group event is being piloted this year with a select number of schools, whereby a diocesan team will liaise with a school to run this either at the school or a nearby suitable venue.
- Other outreaches planned to schools in the coming year include SUMMIT (Adoration), and a Carlo Acutis Pilgrim Statue with a suggested programme of activities which can also provide a link with local parishes.

Collating / sharing Information on Programmes

A guide to Recommended Resources / Formation Programmes for parishes to engage youth / young adults / adults was created and is shared with Faith Reps and parish priests at initial meetings, to explore possible options for the future.

This was also shared with the newly formed Adult Faith Development Committee and can be included on the Diocesan Website in the future.

Campa Mhuire Mháthair Faith Camp Links

Campa Mhuire Mháthair Faith Camps have been running in the Diocese for a number of years, with Ardmore Faith Camp now in its 21st year, and Dungarvan and Tramore both beginning in 2017.

While they are not Diocesan-led camps, they are supported by Ascend through Faith Reps, young adult leaders and teens coming through Diocesan programmes, as well as the active involvement of members of the Strategic Task Force.



Although their primary focus is naturally children's ministry, they have increasingly become a vital part of youth ministry in the Diocese because of the involvement of teens and young adult leaders and the potential for fostering friendship, mentoring, faith formation and opportunities for prayer.

In July 2026, the camps in this Diocese provided a fun faith experience for over 160 children who were registered for camp, along with similar camps running in Macroom and Killarney.

A large number of our Medjugorje youth pilgrims from the previous two pilgrimages were volunteer leaders at two Faith Camps this summer in the Diocese, working with children aged 6 - 13, through catechesis, music, drama, sport, art and prayer, all while making new friends themselves and growing in leadership skills and faith. In the evening times the young (and older!) leaders gathered together for food, fellowship, games, music and very often, some beautiful times of prayer too in homes and gardens in the summer sunshine.

What a gift to see these young people encountering Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and through each other's lives, having genuine fun and games together too, and giving so generously of themselves.

Future Plans:

- Creating opportunities for 15 – 17 year olds to gather for faith-experiences will be a priority.
- Providing more concrete links to Camp Veritas, Camp Creideamh and VAKS (Volunteer at Knock) can be investigated as ways of providing young people in the Diocese with meaningful ways to experience faith with peers and encounter Jesus in a personal way.
- Developing a formalised programme for Papal Cross candidates with a mixture of leadership skills, formation and retreat experience would be desired.

SOCIAL JUSTICE / OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

Pope John Paul II Awards

- The primary ways in which young people were encouraged and offered opportunities to engage in social justice / outreach were through the Pope John Paul II Awards. Participants need to fulfil either 8, 14 or 20 hours of social activities in their community / school as part of the award criteria.
 - A suggested list of possible activities is shared with participants and their award leaders each year and we also encourage them to supplement this with options particular to their own school / area.
 - Some have been involved in activities such as Tidy Towns, Litter Picking, SVP, Fundraising for Daffodil Day, Links with local nursing homes, Peace and Justice

Societies, Mentoring Schemes, Digital Literacy for the Elderly, Laudato Si Stewardship activities, and many others.

- Mary's Meals "Small Acts, Big Differences" has been promoted with Faith Reps and schools as an option but more could be done here.

Future plans:

- Establishing links with Trócaire, Mary's Meals and SVP on a more formal basis will form part of the next phase of the plan with options for training Faith Reps / Award Leaders on specific programmes they could implement being a key element.
- Options for young adult volunteering in initiatives such as Little Nellie's Baby Bank, Christ on the Street and Lightfever will also form part of the next phase of planning.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES FOR YOUTH / SCHOOLS / FAMILIES

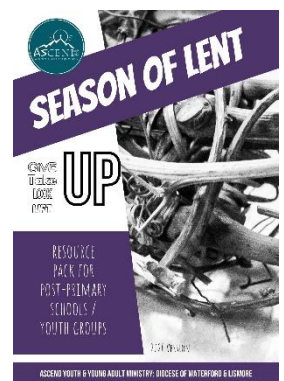
Liturgy Coordinator:

Encouraging meaningful and appropriate celebration of the liturgy and providing resources and training for those involved is the remit of the Diocesan Liturgy Committee but the Ascend Strategic Force have liaised with Mary Dee in particular in the past few years in a number of specific ways:

- Inviting RE / Music Teachers to attend Choir workshops in the Diocese
- Creating a Resource for training Pope John Paul II Award Ministers of the Word, and Church Greeters.

Ascend Resources for liturgies:

- Liturgical Resources have also been created and shared with Faith Reps, RE Teachers, Chaplains, and Priests for liturgical seasons e.g. Advent & Christmas Resources, Lent & Easter, Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Graduation & Beginning of New School Year, Corpus Christi, the Holy Rosary. These have been met with a very positive response particularly from teachers.
- A template for a Holy Hour for Vocations was produced in collaboration with the Diocesan Vocations Committee and a number of parishes took this on during the Year of Vocations to Diocesan Priesthood launched in April 2023. Efforts will be made to encourage parishes to continue using this resource.
- Spotify / YouTube playlists for liturgical seasons have been created and shared on Ascend channels. Accompanying youth friendly posters with QR codes are shared with



Faith Reps and Parish Secretaries throughout the year for display on Church noticeboards.

- Training has been provided for Faith Reps on Lenten Opportunities in parishes.
- A Heart Speaks to Heart Guide to Eucharistic Adoration was created for young people and is available for download from the Diocesan Ascend website page.
- Youth Adoration began in Tramore on a monthly basis in 2025, and other Faith Reps have found opportunities to introduce young people to adoration in their parishes also.
- The Laudate Worship event in August 2026 in Waterford, facilitated by Fr Patrick Cahill and a young adult music ministry team was a new type of outreach, primarily based on music as a form of prayer.
- Specific Prayer Resources created by Ascend have been shared with Parish Faith Reps and school also e.g. Stations of the Cross display, Heart Speaks to Heart Prayer Resources (Lectio Divina, Audio Divina, Visio Divina, Christian Meditation, Journalling, Doodle Prayers, Adoration Guide, Guide to praying the Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet). A specific Heart speaks to Heart adoration guide for young people has also been produced (available as pdf on the website) and has already been used in some parishes by Faith Reps offering adoration to young people.

Future plans:

- The opportunities to explore how relevant, appropriate and liturgically suitable music can be further shared with RE Teachers and Music Departments will become part of the next phase of planning, with investigations into the possibility of a Diocesan Choir event.
- Providing training for a youth liturgy team at school / parish level to be investigated
- Providing our youth / young adults with opportunities for adoration / worship along with ways to hear the proclamation of the kerygma going forwards will be key.

RENEWAL

Additional Support to Post-Primary RE Teachers, Chaplains and Principals by Diocesan Advisor Olivia Elliott, in collaboration with Ascend has been offered in a number of specific ways:

- Annual Diocesan REnewal Conference at Glencomeragh House has run for the past three years. Speakers have been both local and national, and sessions have included expert inputs, spaces for prayer and reflection, sharing hubs for teachers to network and share best practice, retreat options, classroom ready resources. Gerard Hanley (Alpha Youth), Hannah Clarke (Scripture Union), Michelle Ward (Chief Creator of “Made for More” RE Framework and Co-creator of



Living Love Senior Cycle SPHE Resource) have all been guest speakers. Local inputs have been delivered by Olivia Elliott, Sr Kathryn Press, Nodlaig Lillis, Maura Murphy, Fr Patrick Cahill, Annette O'Donnell, Margaret McCann (Faith Rep), Billy Butler (Faith Rep), Fr John Harris ADM, Sr Maureen Fitzgerald ASCJ, teachers Dermot Dooley, Rachel Fleming, and Fiona Bolger.

- In-service workshops offered online: Alpha Youth Training / Advent Reflection Space: Both had lower numbers suggesting format may not be the most suitable.
- Promoting and encouraging participation in Diocesan Faith formation series / retreats and events – advertised by Olivia and Nodlaig with teachers.
- Pilgrimage option of Camino in July 2026 was taken up by one teacher. This idea of a pilgrimage for RE teachers can be explored again.
- Facilitating links between ERST post-primary schools for celebration of 30th anniversary of the beatification of Bl. Edmund Rice.
- Relevant and classroom ready resources created by Ascend and shared with post-primary RE teachers.
- Training for new Senior Cycle RE non-exam and SPHE courses offered in October 2026 to teachers.
- Assisting with Catholic Schools Week resources from Prayer Spaces in Schools Ireland.

YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY

Signs of growth:

The number of young adults attending young adult ministry events throughout the Diocese over the past number of years has risen considerably and is a real sign of hope for our Church.

Ascend Initiatives:

- Young Adult options for formation / fellowship throughout the diocese are shared primarily through the Young Adult WhatsApp group / email database.

- Diocesan Young Adult Ministry is primarily anchored in

Encounter: Running since

March 2022, Encounter is our Young Adult Outreach (18 - 35 year olds) in the Waterford City region. Once a month young adults are invited to join us in St John's Church for a talk or testimony followed by a time of adoration and music, with confession available too, rounding off with some pizza and chat afterwards (and some



competitive Jenga games too!) Talks / testimonies are shared by a combination of religious / clergy / lay people and young adults themselves, all from within the Diocese. Holy Family Mission and the Sisters of Mary Morning Star provide great support each month. We also love seeing our young adults stepping up to leadership roles: as MCs, hospitality or serving for adoration. Thanks to Fr Tom Rogers for hosting us every month.

- We would love to see Encounter with its simple format spread to other areas, and it was a real blessing to host Encounter in Dungarvan for the first time in July, with a great turnout from locals as well as young adults volunteering at the Joy of Faith Camp running that week. 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. Specific training in how to run an Encounter event is a possible element of follow on training for Faith Reps in the next phase of planning.

Other Young Adult outreaches and ministry supported by Ascend

- **Lumen Christi Scripture and Prayer Group meets on a weekly basis in Waterford City** and was the result of young adults themselves asking for and establishing the group. Under the guidance of Fr John Harris ADM (Spiritual Director of Ascend Task Force) and the Sisters of Mary Morning Star, it provides a solid option for those aged 18 – 35 to develop their faith on a weekly basis.
- One of our Faith Reps is involved with supporting the Young Adult (***Light the Fire***) Group in St Oliver's Parish, Clonmel which has been running for three years now.
- Plans are underway for a Young Adult group in the Dungarvan area also. This would mean that there is an option for young adults to connect in with a prayer group near them across the Diocese.
- As part of the ***Light of Hope Diocesan Jubilee Mission with Catholic Christian Outreach Missionaries*** from 12th – 16th June 2024 across multiple locations, the Canadian teams offered *How to Share Your Faith With Others* workshops which were attended by young adults along with others.
- ***Enlighten / Pilgrims of Light*** young adult evenings hosted by the Sisters of Mary Morning Star in Waterford in 2024/2025 which has now merged with Lumen Christi.
- We investigated the costs involved in obtaining a movie license for the pastoral centre but it was felt that currently the cost was unfeasible for us.
- Young adults were invited to participate in ***Zoom Series*** offered within the Diocese, particularly by the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus e.g. ***The Chosen Series***, and ***Life Shared*** (Alpha Suite). When possible, a young adult specific breakout room was created and hosted by young adults either from Holy Family Mission, or those who have been involved in initiatives such as World Youth Day.
- Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry collaborated with the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to host a Jubilee zoom series on the sacraments, "***Power and Grace***".

Dividing the attendees into breakout groups, we were thrilled to have two young adults who have been involved with ministry in the diocese step up to lead the Young Adult breakout room themselves. The four week series offered a deeper look into the sacraments, strengthening the faith of those involved and leading them to question their own experiences and how they encounter God through the sacraments in a new way.

- Tramore based Creation Surf “**Surfing with Priests**” men’s retreats have begun this year.

Forming Leaders:

- Young Adults have been actively encouraged to take up roles of responsibility within the Diocese:
 - Four young adults (aged 18-35) trained as Faith Reps in the Diocese.
 - Leaders on our JP2 Pilgrimage to Medjugorje, trained in advance.
 - Encounter: volunteer as servers, MCs, and in hospitality roles, receiving training for each of these roles.
 - Volunteers at our REvive events for teens.
 - Volunteer at Youth 2000 retreats, both regionally and nationally.
 - Campa Mhuire Mháthair Faith Camp leaders.

Future plans:

- Establishing a young adult advisory group of some kind to liaise with the Task Force is a key part of the next phase of the plan, where ideas for more formalised formation, social activities, social media, intentional discipleship and leadership training will be discussed and discerned together.
- The establishment of Ave Maria University at Mount Melleray might open new possibilities going forward for support for young adults in the diocese.
- The establishment of an intentional men’s ministry and also women’s ministry at Diocesan level in particular would be of great benefit too and plans are currently underway for this.
- Discussion is ongoing with other dioceses in the Munster region for the running of a Regional Young Adult Conference in the coming months, and a way to bring young adults from group across the diocese together for a shared event.

CONTINUITY FOR CONFIRMATION AGE ONWARDS

Priority for the past three years has been with strengthening the Pope John Paul II Awards and establishing a young adult ministry in the diocese. While some initiatives have taken place around the diocese for the 12 – 15 age group, a greater focus will be needed on this area going forwards.

Current initiatives:

- Youth groups have been established in St Oliver's Clonmel, Dungarvan and Ballyporeen catering for these age groups, either run by or heavily assisted by Parish Faith Reps.
- Resources like To the Heights, Ascend Resources, Gamechanger Resources have all been created and made available to families and schools, suitable for this age group to benefit from.
- Family Days at Holy Family Mission are supported by Ascend Youth Ministry where possible, and cater for this age group every 6 weeks or so.
- Click here for footage from the Diocesan Jubilee Family Day:
<https://youtu.be/OoihVFopRyk?si=leXcpE3YJeZd6gkH>
- The Servant Sisters and Brothers of the Home of the Mother also run camps and regular activities for boys and girls of this age range, as do the Institute of the Incarnate Word Priests and Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matará in St Oliver's Clonmel.
- Sr Kathryn Press has been involved in the delivery of Confirmation retreats, with the support of Parish Faith Reps on occasion.
- Ascend has supported Campa Mhuire Mháthair Faith Camps, particularly providing training and resources for teen / junior leaders of this age group to keep them engaged with Faith Camps when they are too old to be participants any longer. Some of these young people have been encouraged to participate in the Pope John Paul II Award when they reach that age.
- Initial consultation has taken place regarding the creation of a parish-based Carlo Acutis themed award for this age group.



Possible ideas for the next phase of planning:

- Develop a Carlo Acutis Award for 1st – 3rd years in parishes (12 – 15)
- NUA Move is a three-part video series hosted by Scripture Union that helps students transition from primary to secondary school – this and other ideas will be looked at with Faith Reps as a practical way to support post-Confirmation children moving to Post-Primary, ideally engaging parents in some way too.
- Although the issue of altar servers not returning in all parishes has been raised with us on occasion, the remit of Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry does not encompass children's ministry i.e. the ages at which most altar servers begin in parishes.
- The possibility of a one day conference similar to REvive for 1st – 3rd year students.

VOCATIONS AND YOUTH / YOUNG ADULTS

Diocesan Vocations Committee:

The Ascend Task Force has liaised with the Diocesan Vocations Committee on a number of initiatives in the past three years:

- Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry, in association with the Vocation's Committee launched a "Holy Hour for Vocations" Initiative, encouraging parishes and individuals to commit to praying on a regular basis for vocations in the diocese of Waterford & Lismore. A suggested template for a Holy Hour for Vocations can be downloaded at www.waterfordlismore.ie/vocations

Ascend resources and events:

- Resource material for schools / youth groups specific to vocations is located on the Ascend webpage.
- The annual Pope John Paul II Award Called to Greatness workshop has grown considerably from its first run in 2024. (see Pope John Paul II Award Section for more detail). In the 2026 REvive Conference a Called to Greatness panel was held as a session, involving a religious sister, newly ordained priest, married man, and Bishop Phonsie, addressing some of the main questions young people have about their vocations today. Feedback from the REvive Conference often shows how much young people enjoy the opportunity to chat with Religious Sisters in particular and learn about their vocations, as many of them have no contact with religious any more in their schools or parishes.
- Encounter events have regularly featured speakers sharing their vocation stories and / or how they found meaning and purpose in life.
- Tinteán na hÉireann ran a Day of Reflection on Lay Consecrated Life in February 2026 which was promoted to young adults around the Diocese also, as are Come and See Days for Diocesan Priesthood.
- Holy Family Mission were hosts to the Laetare Vigil in Lent 2026, which saw ladies of all ages (18+) from around the Diocese and beyond join with religious sisters from communities all over Ireland to pray together. During the day, the ladies had two opportunities to sign up for a session with two different sisters to chat about life, purpose, prayer intentions or whatever was on their hearts. It was a wonderful event which would be greatly appreciated again. Sr Beatrice from St Mary's Abbey, Glencairn was one of the keynote speakers on the day.

Future plans:

Going forwards, we will continue to liaise with the vocations committee, religious orders and other individuals / groups to discern more ways to support our young people as they discern God's call for their lives, through intentional prayer support and active engagement.

INTENTIONAL PRAYER SUPPORT FOR YOUTH / YOUNG ADULTS

Diocesan Prayer

- Specific prayer events were organised both online and in person for the launch of the Strategic Plan in 2023, but unfortunately both were poorly attended. However, copies of the Strategic plan prayer cards have been distributed throughout the Diocese at events and in mailouts over the past three years; Mass talks have always primarily asked people to pray for youth and those who work with them; prayer groups and religious communities are regularly asked to support Youth initiatives in their prayers, particularly pilgrimages.
- Adopt a Parish prayer initiative had limited but spiritually significant support. People were personally invited to intentionally include a particular parish in our diocese in their daily prayers, remembering especially the priests, youth, Faith Reps (and Faith reps to come), schools and vocations. This was particularly highlighted at the Light of Hope Jubilee Diocesan Mission too. Plans are underway to relaunch this in a different format this coming Spring as a Lenten initiative to pray for one parish in the diocese each day of Lent.
- The importance of prayer for the success of any work with young people can never be underestimated, and will be of primary importance going forwards again

Prayer Team

- A WhatsApp Prayer Team was established to pray specifically for upcoming youth related events and is a great source of spiritual support. The Faith Rep WhatsApp group provides a way for Faith Reps to seek prayerful support from others in the group for their planned activities:

“Being a Faith Rep means you are no longer on your own in some far off satellite parish isolated from the wisdom and experience of the Diocese. I had many confidence issues starting into a project with our local school... I put up a prayer request into the Faith Rep chat in the week before it started. I got a raft of best wishes and prayers and salutations back, especially from the Task Force but many others too. That kind of support builds graces and confidence into an individual especially when you are pushing the boundaries of your comfort zone. It feels like you have a team of well wishers rooting for the success of the endeavour.” (Faith Rep)

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

Ongoing consultation, advice, feedback and suggestions from relevant stakeholders around the diocese has been crucial in evaluating and tweaking this plan as it progressed in the past three years.

Methods for consultation:

- A **weekly Ascend email goes to priests** with updates on youth and young adult ministry around the diocese, information re: Faith Reps / Pope John Paul II Awards / upcoming events and so on, and always includes an offer to help in whatever way we can and requests for feedback.
- A **weekly email to parish secretaries** was established in January 2025 and helps with communication between the Diocesan Offices, Youth Ministry and the parishes. Before establishing this, Nodlaig was able to present to parish secretaries and communications personnel from around the Diocese, again highlighting key ways that youth ministry and parish secretaries can work together to get good news to young people in our parishes. Both provided a welcome opportunity to personally thank people for their support for young people on the ground in parishes. Working together collaboratively is a key aspect of Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry.
- **Formal feedback from Faith Reps** is sought each summer.
- **Feedback** from priests and faith reps was always welcomed, as was the wisdom of other Diocesan workers, parents, and of course the young people themselves.
- It was a privilege for Nodlaig to speak at each **Local Safeguarding Representative Training Sessions** in 2024 to provide an update on what is currently happening in Youth Ministry in the diocese, and highlight key areas where the support of an LSR is so important to supporting young people in our parishes.
- **Informal feedback** from young people, parents / guardians, teachers, Faith Reps and Award Leaders is sought on an ongoing basis.

Day of Reflection and Prayer

- On 9th November 2024, a specific **Day of Reflection for Youth & Young Adult Ministry in the Diocese** was organised in Mount Melleray, culminating in a well-worthwhile Conversations in the Spirit. A fantastic day with just under 50 in attendance: the first of this kind in the diocese specific to youth and young adult ministry: a mixture of people invested



in youth ministry in various groups and movements: Neocatechumenal Way, Latin Mass, Jesus Youth, School Teachers, Young Adults, Prayer Ministry Groups, Religious Communities, Deacons, Faith Camp Coordinators, and Faith Reps. It was an uplifting day for all present, with lots of networking and a time of prayer for the intentions of all present and for our diocese. We had a very fruitful afternoon session using the Conversation in the Spirit model encouraged by the Synodal Process and it led to some encouraging and hope-filled sharing on the questions:

- How can we walk intentionally with young people on their journey of faith and provide meaningful opportunities for them to encounter Jesus?
- What is the Spirit prompting us to?

See Appendix for full report

Future plans:

- Going forwards we hope to develop the structure of **cluster meetings** for Faith Reps, providing a concrete and regular way for Faith Reps to share ideas and feedback to the Task Force as a group, rather than just individually. Conversations in the Spirit with Faith Reps will be encouraged in future training events / retreat days.
- We also hope to create a **young adult advisory group** who will be a representative voice for youth and young adults and offer their prayers, support, feedback and ideas on a regular basis.
- It is also hoped to develop more formally a **network** between all those working with youth ministry in the diocese through regular gatherings to pray, network, collaborate and share ideas.
- Improved email marketing system within diocese to aid with mailouts

Concluding Remarks

We knew at the outset of our plan that no one plan or strategy can fit the needs of all the young people in our diocese. However, we believe that great things have been achieved through the prayer and efforts of many of the past few years. Faith Reps in parishes have stepped forward for a new programme to try to make a difference for young people in whatever way they can, and what they have accomplished and how they have responded personally has been truly inspirational.

At the re-commissioning ceremony for Faith Reps this year, Youth & Young Adult Ministry Coordinator Nodlaig Lillis asked those present to pause and reflect, and that reflection serves as a summary of where youth ministry is at now because of the efforts of those who have stepped forward to make a difference in their parishes, schools and communities.

The most important part of any of our roles is praying for young people – think of all the extra prayers being raised for youth and parishes since you came on board?

Think of the young people who are struggling or alone, and whose hearts and minds have been lifted and protected by the prayers of people they might never even know.

Think of the young people whose lives have been and are being affected by Alpha Youth, Alpha Life Essentials, REvive Conferences, Pilgrimages, Local Youth Groups, the Pope John Paul II Awards, by Youth Adoration, Encounters, Surf camps and retreat days, Catechesis, Exam Prayer Services, Confirmation retreats, ...

Think of the young people who see a poster and realise, the church actually has a place for them too – that other young people have faith as well!

Think of the young people who meet a friendly face and feel welcomed and encouraged, supported and included – maybe for the first time in their parish. You help them feel noticed, named and known!

Think of the young people who never realised they could play an active part in their parish, that they could make a real difference, until you helped to show them the way.

Think of the parents, grandparents and parishioners who have wanted to see someone do something for young people for so long, and then you came along as an answer to those prayers.

Think of the priests who feel less alone in their mission to reach the youth of the parish, because they know someone else cares enough to step up and has their back.

Think of the teachers and principals who are finding new or stronger ways to connect their school with the local parish.

Think of the Task Force who knows there is a team at grassroots level in parishes who were willing to be trained and step up to do something when so many just sit on the fence or criticise

the inaction; the task force who see candles being lit all across the diocese rather than people just cursing the darkness; the task force who take calls and emails from faith reps about ideas, hopes and plans, asking for support and advice... what an absolute joy! You're keeping us on our toes!

Think of the Bishop who sees a growing youth ministry in his Diocese because of good people who are open to the voice of the Holy Spirit!

Without a doubt, there is a lot more to do and accomplish, a lot more young people to reach. We are hopeful for the future, excited about what has been achieved so far, and looking forward to discerning what the Holy Spirit wants for the young people of our Diocese going forwards. Through collaboration across the diocese, nationally and internationally, the Holy Spirit has already been at work in our Diocese. We just need to continue to be open to that Voice, and to have the courage to respond.

Please pray for our young people, our priests, our Parish Faith Reps and all those who walk with young people on their journey of faith, providing meaningful opportunities for them to encounter Jesus.

Appendix 1: Feedback from Parish Faith Reps

Challenges Faith Reps face:

- Connecting with young people: established choirs / music groups and reader rotas in the parish often don't allow for young people in some parishes
- Being able to organise activities on a consistent basis
- My biggest challenge was actually deciding if I wanted to be a faith rep or not. I think my mind ran away with itself and fear of the unknown was very much putting me off and that I'd have nothing to offer when I can't public speak. How wrong I was! Thank God I listened to the Holy Spirit to give, all be it, a reluctant yes at the time!
- At the beginning, the biggest challenges were getting to meet with the PP and organising events. However as time went on communication with the PP improved and more faith reps came on board which made it easier to get tasks started.

What they have enjoyed most about the role so far:

- The trust, enthusiasm of the other Faith Reps.
- Being able to share the love of God with others. Working as a team and brainstorming and organising events. Fellowship with the youth in my parish and in the diocese.
- You definitely feel a lot more confident approaching the priest with new ideas. You also don't have to do anything you aren't comfortable with. It's such a blessing to see even little and simple ideas planted coming to fruition.
- Meeting other faith reps, getting to know the parish priest better and being able to support my parish priest more.
- I am more active in the church and have helped at school retreats. Our parish asked me to join the pastoral council which I have.
- The program is great. It's wonderful the level of support that is offered especially with designing posters etc. I wouldn't change a thing!
- It is an important role, can take time for progress however it is fulfilling when you see the results of your time and effort.
- Every little effort helps. Sometimes you would feel like you aren't making any difference and then you see some young person taking interest in a poster on the board, and even this shows that it's worth it.
- Meeting new people from different parishes was lovely and making connections. I am now also on my parish pastoral council which I really enjoy.
- The joy of seeing youth engaging with the parish.
- Seeing a young person who you know has never come to any faith encounter and turning up at an exam mass and still wearing the wristband with "Come Holy Spirit" on it months later. God is always working and it's when we rely on His grace it is so joyful and surprising.

Recommendations made (and being accounted for in considering our next Strategic Plan phase):

- Formal introduction in parish post-commissioning e.g. at Mass / role explained in parish newsletter / mentioned on parish website
- Scheduled meeting with Parish Priest when possible –
- Clustering with other areas to support each other – this is our biggest area to focus on going forwards.
- Faith Reps assisting with Mass talks for recruitment where possible.
- Full day retreat experience / appreciation day for faith reps
- Further involvement of faith reps in diocesan-led events to increase sense of purpose, confidence, fellowship

Appendix 2: Experience of Pope John Paul II Award Participants 2025/2026

-I gave a short talk and my testimony at my parish church after Mass. While every bit of me did not want to stand up and talk before all of those people, the thought came to me that most of the predominantly older people in my parish probably haven't ever heard from any young person living the faith. Therefore, I felt as though the Lord was asking me to show them Him through me and to be a witness to the faith.
- The world always tells the youth that their teenage years and early twenties are the time to get ahead in the world, expand your social life, and become popular with other young people. A young person who is willing to disregard all this, put God first, is a great testament to the importance of the Faith. It signals our trust that God will provide all the good things of life and give us all we need for our happiness. It is through dedicating one's life to God that we become who we were meant to be, so that we can set the world on fire as all young people should.
- When I started doing the leaflets at Mass I wasn't sure what to expect. I was told that everyone would be so appreciative and I was thinking that I am only opening the door and giving out a mass leaflet – why would anyone care about that? I was of course wrong because on the first morning I went down to Mass the amount of smiles and thank you's I got was amazing. It was totally unexpected and the feeling of happiness I got after Mass was incredible. One of the things I valued most ... was the sense of belonging to the parish and the community. I got to know all the sacristy volunteers and of course Fr X – they couldn't have been more helpful.
- When beginning this award I was distant from God and didn't think much of him in my day to day life, but my perception has completely changing now after completing it. What I understand now is young people do not need to wait until they are older to strengthen their faith when they could just do it now.
- Adoration allowed me to have a safe place within school to sit with my thoughts and have a conversation with God.
- By reading at Mass I was encouraged to participate more fully in parish life in the future.
- I helped set up the school crib at Christmas, which reminded me of the importance of the nativity story and the true meaning of Christmas. Simple tasks like decorating a display can create a positive environment within the school and encourage others to reflect on their faith.
- I got involved a lot in my parish, every week – sometimes even twice a week I read at Mass. I felt closer to God by doing this.
- All these experiences have taught me that when we serve our community, we aren't just helping others, we are living out the values of kindness and compassion that Jesus shared.
- It made me realise that even if you are nervous, it is important to show up and contribute.
- I felt God present every time I read at Mass and when I was praying. I felt God all around me when I was in Medjugorje through the walks, climbs, prayers, songs and testimonies. After all the efforts put into the JP2 I feel God all the time around me. It is so nice to have a sense of peace and security with me wherever I go, especially when I'm in a church. I am so grateful for these opportunities as they have shown me a deeper meaning to God and have let me understand more about myself.
- Completing the award has shown me that age doesn't matter when it comes to faith and worship.
- I also think that throughout the Award helping the Church has made me aware that small things such as showing up is really appreciated. I feel that it is very inspiring seeing older people show up to Church everyday and some even do readings.
- I met so many lovely people at my church that I would've never talked to if it wasn't for my direct involvement there.

- The award allowed me to talk to the priest of my church more and get to know him, which made me feel like I belonged there more every Sunday and made it feel less like an assignment every weekend and more of something to look forward to.
- I greeted people at the door of the church and it was lovely to see the smiles on people's faces as I greeted them.
- I liked meeting the people of my parish and having chats with some of them after mass. It also gave me a motivation to go to Mass, something I struggled to find before starting the Pope John Paul II Award. But now after going for twenty weeks, I have found I really enjoy going to Mass and I will definitely continue going.
- I think the days where I had to sort of push myself to get out the door were the days I actually learned the most about my faith. It was also on those days that I actually enjoyed being at Mass the most.
- Welcoming people into Mass and handing them a newsletter can make them feel like they belong. I would often be the first person they saw on their way in and whether they come every week, or it's their first time in Mass, or coming to Mass in a long time, the small smile and greeting I would give can make them feel comfortable if they were nervous.
- Taking on different responsibilities has shown me that young people can be leaders and dedicated.
- I feel more connected now. Being part of the church group has helped me see that the church values what young people do and needs them to keep doing its work.
- I learned that faith is not just a personal matter, but also something I can live out by helping my community on a weekly basis. Balancing school, parish duties, and scouting was not easy. There were days when I wanted to stay at home, but I chose to go anyway. However, these moments taught me perseverance, time management, and sacrifice, and they made me stronger.
- Assisting at Mass has also taught me a lot about responsibility and respect. It requires focus, commitment, and an understanding of the importance of each role. Through this, I have gained a deeper appreciation of the structure and meaning of the Mass, and I feel proud to contribute to it.
- Counting the money with my Nanny also showed me how much others appreciate the work of the church community and how much members of the local community are willing to support it.
- The sacristans were so kind this year. They've made us all feel so welcomed and they're so kind. Their kindness, attitude and marriage is so inspiring and they are great role models. I'm so glad I got to meet them. I believe I've also got to know the priests better: each one of them were so kind and patient with us all and they all make Mass feel so special.
- When joining JPPII I had no idea what it was and was out of touch with my faith. I didn't go to Mass and I prayed when I remembered. When I joined JPPII and went to my first Mass I got a feeling of community like no other. I felt so welcome by everyone. The sacristans were absolutely lovely and the same with the priests. When I would sign in the chat with them felt so friendly and inviting. I loved seeing how happy people were being greeted at the door before Mass and seeing all the people who go was great too.
- Before I got involved, I mostly thought the parish was just a place people went to for Mass or religious ceremonies. But after helping out at different events and activities, I realised it is much more than that. It is a community where people support each other and try to help those who are struggling. Through these experiences I learned a lot about kindness, responsibility, teamwork and being more aware of the people around me.
- I realised that reading at Mass is not merely about speaking clearly, but also about aiding people in reflecting on God's message.
- Through this experience, I learned how crucial teamwork is within the Church community. Many individuals work quietly behind the scenes to ensure that services run successfully, and I felt proud to contribute in this manner.

- I discovered that helping others isn't solely about financial support; sometimes just listening, being supportive or being there for someone can truly make a difference.
- Before I got involved in the award, I mostly viewed the church just as a place to worship, but through my experiences I came to see that young people actively keep parish life lively and inviting.
- I felt that greeting people warmly helped to create a positive atmosphere. I also thought that people were very surprised but happy to see young people coming to Church. Some of them even expressed how nice it was for them to see young people being a part of the Church community.
- I think that reading at Mass also helped me to truly understand what I was reading and this helped me to strengthen my faith.
- I learned that being part of a community means more than just attending events and it means actively contributing.
- When young people show up, I believe that it makes the church feel more alive and welcoming for everyone. It also helps to connect different generations, which I think is important to create a loving community.
- I was at Mass one Monday and I was nervous about my reading – what if I made a fool of myself? Then someone said to me, “I think of it as God’s words I am speaking for him. So say it loud and proud.” This actually changed my perspective a lot. I was not saying lines off a script like I would in drama class. No, I was speaking God’s message. If I could capture his passion and love and say it clearly I would hopefully be doing God a good service.
- Before completing the award I mainly viewed volunteering as something positive but optional. However, through my experience I realised how much small actions can affect people and strengthen a community.
- By taking part in these activities I understood how much effort is required behind the scenes to support a parish community.... I learned that the Church depends on people of all ages working together.
- The Called to Greatness workshop was another important experience that encouraged me to reflect more deeply on my values and personal strengths. It challenged me to think about the kind of person I want to be, and how I can make a positive difference in the lives of others.
- I also began to appreciate how the Church supports young people in growing their faith.
- Participating in the JP2 award I have learned so many new things I would never have known before. I never knew how to do adoration before I learned so much about it. It showed me that during adoration you don't ask God for anything, you just tell him what's going on at the moment, for the want of a better word, it's just like talking to your friend and saying what's going on in your life and you never ask him for anything from him, you always just talk to him.
- I also realised that faith is not only about praying or going to Mass. It is also about how you treat people and whether you are willing to help others when they need support. It helped me connect faith with actions instead of just saying I will.
- If this experience taught me anything, it's that there are people who do believe and are really close to their religion and I have developed my respect for them.
- I think the one obstacle I had to overcome was finding going to Mass an enjoyable place as when I was younger I used to find mass very long and I was not really able to understand what was being said, but since going to mass more since taking part in JP2 I have been able to understand the gospel, readings and hymns etc. I think my faith has become stronger from taking part in Jp2.
- Over time my confidence grew and I even decided to join the choir that our JP2 team founded. I would go to practise any Friday it was on and try my best to learn the songs and just do my best even though I am not the best singer. But I was doing it for the Church so it didn't feel as uncomfortable or out of the ordinary when it usually would if I sang outside the Church.

- Through these activities I have learned more about my religion and what it actually means. Mass before was routine, but being involved made it more meaningful. I have started paying more attention to the readings and think about how they apply to real life.
- The biggest take away from this is how both the parish, SVP and homework club are all connected. Helping others leads to a better you.
- I have seen how welcoming the Church is. I have seen first hand how young people contribute to the atmosphere and a sense of community. I felt like I showed other young people not to feel embarrassed about their religion, to feel welcomed by the church and feel like that have a place in it.
- I felt a sense of pride to be part of the fundraising for the Jubilee Clock. It felt amazing to help the parish raise the funds, as I felt like I was giving back after they had been so kind and welcoming when we started the JP2 award.
- There were of course times when I felt nervous and didn't really want to do a particular activity, but I didn't want to let anyone down and by God's help I did it.
- I think young people can make such a huge contribution in the church. I felt that we made a big difference in our parish: for one, there were a lot more younger faces in church. In my case, a few of the children who I teach in my stage school saw me at Mass during their communion prep Masses. I think this is important for young people to see other young people in Mass as it can inspire other young people to continue going to Mass.
- Knowing that I played a small part in contributing to something that will last for years made me feel proud.
- Completing the award has honestly changed how I see young people in the Church, including myself. Before, I always thought most of the important roles were for adults, and that people my age just showed up with our families and followed along. But after getting involved, I've realised how much young people actually contribute, and the difference it can make to the whole parish. It really helped me see how faith brings people of all ages together.
- Being trusted with roles made me feel more connected, like I actually belonged instead of just attending out of habit with my family. For me, especially growing up in the Catholic Church, this means a lot.
- I really enjoyed going back into the church to regain my own relationship with God again.
- The biggest challenge for me was to just show up. There were evenings I was tired, but I knew people were counting on me, and once I showed up the hardest part was done.
- I now know more people in my community than ever before because I volunteered.
- I love using the talents God had given me. I have seen first hand how a little bit can make a big difference.
- Our school now has a new community, made by us!
- I will admit I didn't know what I was getting myself into before signing up for this award, but I am so glad I did. One of the most important things I can take away from my participation in this award and apply it to my faith in my everyday life is the personal growth I've experienced.
- On the 25th January I attended the Ordination of Deacon David Cooney. At this Mass I served as an usher, and welcomed the families, friends and members of the community into the church. This was my first time ever attending an ordination and I found the whole process very interesting.
- It helped me see that being a member of the parish is not just about attending Mass or performing duties; it is about striving to be the best version of myself and using my talents to help others.

Appendix 3: Day of Reflection for Youth Ministry in the Diocese: Mount Melleray 9/11/2024

On 9th November 2024, a specific Day of Reflection for Youth & Young Adult Ministry in the Diocese was organised in Mount Melleray, culminating in a well-worthwhile Conversations in the Spirit. A fantastic day with just under 50 in attendance: the first of this kind in the diocese specific to youth and young adult ministry: a mixture of people invested in youth ministry in various groups and movements: Neocatechumenal Way, Latin Mass, Jesus Youth, School Teachers, Young Adults, Prayer Ministry Groups, Religious Communities, Deacons, Faith Camp Coordinators, and Faith Reps. It was an uplifting day for all present, with lots of networking and a time of prayer for the intentions of all present and for our diocese. We had a very fruitful afternoon session using the Conversation in the Spirit model encouraged by the Synodal Process and it led to some encouraging and hope-filled sharing on the questions:

- *How can we walk intentionally with young people on their journey of faith and provide meaningful opportunities for them to encounter Jesus?*
- *What is the Spirit prompting us to?*

Conversation in the Spirit : How might the Holy Spirit be prompting us?

World Youth Day:

- Friendship, fun, challenging but gave a focus towards God
- Like-minded people, a support group and community
- Help from the parish to go.

Give more time to youth: more meaningful opportunities

- Pray for his intercession: prayer groups, safe spaces, use our roles
- Bring the Lord to others – needs more time. Show Christ to youth, no matter where we are.
- Put our ministry into our daily lives and every encounter with people.
- Bring an event to the youth here in Waterford & Lismore: together in unity - a Faith Festival
- Organise activities.

Work together in unity. Put something in place, even something small: work together on this and let it grow. Take the risk, surrender to the Lord and let him lead.

- Part of a body.
- Not an alone action.
- Brought together for a reason.
- Commitment and consistency with how we reach out

Step out from the safe-space.

- Even in persecution the Church survives.
- Be protagonists about the living faith. Start small and grow.
- God believes in us and we can do it and speak out where we are.

Appendix 4: National Youth Ministry Gathering REPORT

Mount St Anne's Retreat Centre: 13th – 14th May 2026

- The event was attended by a number of youth and young adult ministry coordinators from Dioceses around the country, as well as those involved in leadership in movements and religious communities, members of the sub council for Youth Ministry working with Bishop Fintan, a number of whom are also on the working group for youth ministry within the synodal process in Ireland.
- The purpose of the 2 days was to provide a retreat experience for those involved in leading ministry to “*come away and rest*”, as well as network with others, receive formation and understand the workings of the sub-council for Evangelisation and youth ministry, and the working group for the synod.
- The feedback from previous gatherings (*Into the Deep*, Clongowes 2024), *Dare to Hope* (Knock 2025) and *Manresa Gathering* (Jan 2026) were shared and time given on the Thursday for individuals to process them, before sharing in small groups through Conversations in the Spirit.
- Overall there was a great sense of hope and excitement around the vision for youth and young adult ministry that seems to be growing in the country, aligning with the Sub-council's vision and ongoing work.
- We were also presented with the new “*Made for More*” – Irish Bishop's framework for non-exam RE for Catholic schools, and a number of ways that youth ministry / parishes can support this practically were highlighted for us.
- ***(For Ascend this is a further opportunity to see where our current and planned resources can fit into this new framework too).***
- Mass was celebrated both days, and we also had reflection time through Prayer Stations and Taize prayer – all focused on the work of youth ministry, as well as social time for the group on Wednesday night. We were encouraged to reflect on the past year of ministry ourselves, and “write a report for Jesus” – just like the apostles gave a report to Jesus on their mission before the miracle of the loaves and fish. The Lord showed the apostles they couldn't feed the people on their own – they needed him.

SYNODAL WORKING GROUP PROPOSALS (Draft)

- Create a youth coordinator role and youth council in every diocese (can look different from diocese to diocese)
- Pathways to leadership: training, supporting paid and voluntary youth ministers in a sustainable way
- Youth Discipleship Pathways: follow on resources to Alpha etc, to help young people go deeper – intentional discipleship
- Run annual pilgrimages / regular regional gatherings
- Develop a coordinated national digital strategy and produce youth focused content – bringing skilled young people together to envision how to move forward with this.

KEY POINTS FROM INPUTS:

BURNOUT:

- Are we working from an empty well or from the overflow?
- The importance of recognising when we are in survival mode and how this is not fruitful for us or ministry;
- the struggle to say no;
- the need to recognise the long game – and put boundaries in place;
- looking at our own lives to see what is blocking us from fully flourishing.
- The Lord wants you to operate out of a place where you're able.
- We can believe the lie that we're not good enough, we don't have the answers, that we'll never catch up – but the Lord has us in ministry for a real reason.
- Our minds need to be renewed too. Dream with the Lord – do the simplest things, and do them well.
- Our tree of life needs its roots to be in the blood of Christ – that's when things bear fruit.
- A slow steady fire that doesn't go out. Your body will tell you if you're close to burnout.
- Am I loving myself the way the Lord loves me?

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR OUR DIOCESAN SITUATION

- The need to go deeper, both personally (spiritually) and also with ministry initiatives, particularly around intentional accompaniment.
- Affirmation that every diocesan situation is different
- Renewed sense of purpose
- Many of the visions in the diocese already aligning with national proposals
- Reminder to keep focused on the individuals not just the end product / project
- Need to be more informed, go deeper in prayer – individually and collectively
- Youth Ministry needs to be visionary and strategic
- Need to call people to prayer in the diocese for youth ministry
- Can we run a similar day / weekend for Faith Reps / priests (formation, prayer, conversation in the Spirit)?
- We won't always see the fruit of our work
- Can't isolate youth evangelisation from evangelisation of adults
- PEER SUPERVISION:
 - Look at the Munster regional team – arrange zooms regularly to just touch base and offer support to each other. Prayer, chat, support.
 - Plan initiatives together?

Appendix 5: Passing on the Flame Evangelisation Conference Report



Glencomeragh House – Sat 4th October 2025

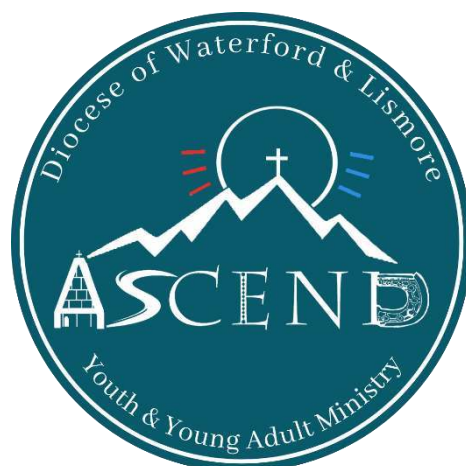
- The day consisted of inspiring speakers, Q&A, prayer and time for networking with others. Those in attendance were given an opportunity to see the bigger picture of what is already happening in our diocese in the area of evangelisation and be encouraged to go forwards in faith in their own parishes / areas of ministry.
- Good atmosphere on the day. Nodlaig gave a presentation on what had been happening in the diocese over the past 12 months, and was part of the panel discussion representing youth ministry, along with Mike Shortt (*From Encounter to Mission: Evangelised to Evangeliser*), Emily O'Shea, Fr Billy Swan (Evangelisation and Parish Renewal). Began with Mass at 10am, Holy Hour in the afternoon and a Q&A Panel to finish.
- Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry had a stand at this event too, sharing resources and ideas.
- Music throughout the day by Fr Patrick, similar to Hearts on Fire Conference in Belfast.
- Networking encouraged across specific areas of evangelisation (colour coded to help people identify others with a similar area of interest) – a lot of people very enthused.
- Attended by 62 delegates: (invite only to ensure good representation of groupings across the diocese)
- People encouraged to reflect on our individual call to evangelise:
 - What is the Holy Spirit saying to your heart today?
 - Is He Confirming something for you?
 - Is there someone you can make a further link with?
 - What concrete thing might the Lord be asking you to do? (Prayer / action / conversation...?_)
- No official follow up afterwards however but groundwork there for another similar conference in the future?
- A 2-day event could be even more beneficial in the future.

From this conference, Maura and Nodlaig recommended Mike Shortt speak at the National Ignite Ireland Conference in Dublin in May.

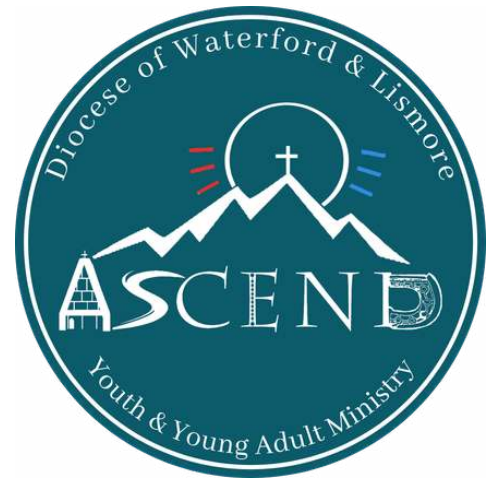
Appendix 6: Ascend Resources

- 1% Rule (New Year) [Lk 3:15-16, 21-22]
- 3 x 5 Daily Examen (Lk 9:28-36) / (Matthew 17: 1-9) / Blank Template
- A Future not our own (Oscar Romero)
- A Guide to Confession
- A Saint? Who? Me?
- Advent / Christmas Resource Pack
- Are You an Influencer (Mt 23:1-12) | (Mark 9: 30 - 37)
- Arms Open Wide (Prodigal Son Resource Pack)
- Ascend Youth Adoration Booklet
- Ascension Sunday
- Attitude of Gratitude [Luke 17:11-19]
- Be a cheerful giver! [Mark 12:38-44]
- Be Present to God (Matthew 4:12-23)
- Beginning of School Year Resource Pack
- Bible Passages in Times of need
- Bl. Chiara Luce Badano (If you want it Jesus, so do I!)
- Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice
- Bored by Mass? [John 6:24-35] | I don't get anything out of Mass (Jn 6:51-58)
- Cardinal Van Thuan (Hope and Joy!)
- Cast the First Stone [John 8:1-11] [Using a mirror not a magnifying glass!]
- Choose Joy [Matthew 5:1-12] | [Luke 6:17,20-26]
- Christ the King
- Christmas / New Year Resources
- Cloud of Witnesses (All Saints / Saint Protector Projects)
- Consecrating our school / our youth group to Our Lady
- Corpus Christi
- Dealing with Interruptions (Mark 1:21-28)
- Divine Mercy
- Do you have what it takes to be a superhero? [Mark 10:35-45]
- Do you like surprises? November (Final Judgment) (Year A: Matthew 25:1-13 (Year B: Mark 13:24-32)
- Do you struggle with faith? [Mk 10:46-52]
- Doodle Prayer: Remain in Me
- Easter Resource Pack (including Divine Mercy and Ascension Sunday)
- End of Year Reflection ideas
- Ephphatha! Be Opened! (Mark 7:31-37)
- Ephphatha! Be Opened! (Mark 7:31-37) [Receive God's love for you!]
- Eucharistic Miracles, Mystics and Martyrs
- Exaltation of the Cross (Mark's Gospel) (John's Gospel)
- Exam Liturgy Resources
- Exam Prayer Service
- Eye-Opening, Life-Changing (Lk 24:13-35)
- Faithful in the Little Things [Lk 16:1-13]
- Fill Up on God's Love (Jn 14: 15-21)
- First Fruits (Luke 9:51-62) (Is God the Centre of your life?)
- Fr Emil Kapaun (Servant of God: From farm field to battle field)
- Frustrated? Try a Reality Check (Mt 20:1-16)
- Give God His Due (Matthew 22:15-21) [Where is God in your life?]
- God's Providence [John 6:1-15]
- God's Timing [Mark 5:21-43]
- Good Shepherd Sunday | Vocation (Good Shepherd) Sunday
- Graduation Liturgy Resource Pack
- Growth Mindset [Luke 4:21-30]
- He is Who He says He is (Jn 6:41-51)
- Hear and Respond (John 10:10)
- Hear and Respond (John 10:27-30)
- Heart speaks to Heart Prayer Resource Pack
- Holy Family (Family Prayer)
- Holy Hour for Vocations template
- Holy Spirit Bunting
- Holy Week Prayer Time
- How to Face Temptation Year A: Matthew 4:1-11 | Year B: Mark 1:12-15 | Year C: Luke 4:1-13
- How to Pray
- How to share the Good News (Ascension, Year A)
- Humility and Confidence (Luke 18:9-14)
- I thirst for You (Mother Teresa)
- Immaculate Conception
- In my opinion... [Luke 6:39-45]
- Is God a Genie or a Good Father?
- Know Your Heart! [Luke 5:1-11] [Struggling to motivate yourself]
- Learn to love (John 13:31-33,34-35)
- Leaving 99 (Does God love some more than others?) [Luke 15:1-32]
- Lectio Divina Guide
- Lenten Resource Pack 2026
- Let God and Let God reflection
- Let's Get to Work (Mark 1:14-20) [God has a mission for you!]
- Letter to my Future Self
- Life Goals (John 1:29-34)
- Litany of Humility
- Little Nellie of Holy God video
- Living in the Present (John 14:23-29)
- Living Water (Woman at the Well)
- Love Generously (Matthew 5:17-37)
- Love is more than a feeling [Mk 10:2-11]
- Love those who are difficult to love (Mt 5:38-46)
- Mexican Martyrs (Blessed Miguel Pro, St Louis Sanchez del Rio)
- Nativity of Mary Ideas / Titles of Mary Word search

- Need to declutter your life? (Mark 6:7-13) | Mark 10:17-30
- No Couch Potatoes Allowed (Pope Francis Reflection)
- Our Lady of Sorrows
- Padre Pio
- Pentecost Resource Pack
- Philosophy 101: Truth (Jn 14:1-12)
- Pier Giorgio Frassati Litany
- Pilgrims of Hope Parish Project
- Prayer Spaces in Schools Pack 2022
- PRAYER: Litany of Humility
- Praying the Rosary
- Presentation of the Lord in the Temple
- Provide the Loaves and Fish (Luke 9:11-17) [God's Providence]
- Psalm 18 (Katie Taylor's Psalm)
- Pushing Through when you don't feel like it! (Mt 21:28-32)
- Rosary (Month of October)
- Saint Carlo Acutis Resource | Carlo Acutis Novena
- Salt and Light (Matthew 5:13-16) [Being the salt of the earth]
- Season of Creation
- Setting Boundaries (Matthew 18:15-20)
- Seven Sorrows of Mary
- Spiritual Blind Spots (John 9:1-41)
- Sr Clare Crockett (All or Nothing!)
- Sr Clare Crockett Pack
- St Bernadette of Lourdes (I want my whole life to be inspired by love)
- St Brigid of Ireland (presentation) | Handout
- St Faustina (Divine Mercy)
- St Francis of Assisi
- St Maximilian Kolbe (Martyr of Auschwitz)
- St Patrick
- St Pier Giorgio Frassati Resource
- St Therese of Lisieux
- St. Carlo Acutis Pack
- Stations of the Cross Resource Pack
- Stations of the Cross Youtube
- Striving for Excellence
- Take Up Your Cross Daily (Mt 16:21-27) / Mark 8:27-35
- The Angelus
- The Battle of Prayer
- The Call of Matthew
- The Chosen Resource Guide (Season 1)
- The Immaculate Conception
- The Real Jesus (John 6:60-69)
- The Rosary
- The Test of Three [Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48] (Gossip)
- Time, Talent, Treasure (Matthew 25:14-30) [How can you use your gifts and time to serve others?]
- Trinity Sunday / Trinity Bunting
- Trust the Process (John 11:1-45) [God's ways are not our ways]
- Vanity Check [Luke 14:1,7-14]
- Venerable Nano Nagle Resource
- Water to Wine [John 2:1-11]
- What do we mean by faith? [Mark 6:1-6]
- What forgiveness means [Luke 6:27-38]
- What is a Vocation?
- What is Forgiveness (Mt 18:21-35) | [Luke 6:27-38]
- What should I do? (Discernment)
- What's your burden? [Mark 6:30-34]
- Who do you spend your time with? [John 6:60-69]
- Why God Became Man [John 3:14-21]
- Witness to Mercy
- Woman at the Well [John 4:5-42]
- Worship 101 (John 2:13-25)
- You shall be my witnesses (Ascension, Year A) [Being a Joyful Christian Witness]



Diocese of Waterford & Lismore



POPE JOHN PAUL II YOUTH PILGRIMAGE TO MEDJUGORJE

REPORT
2024



VISION & SCOPE

On 18 – 25 April 2024 the Diocese of Waterford & Lismore brought their inaugural Pope John Paul II Youth Pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Places on the pilgrimage were offered to TYs and 5th years in the five schools who were running the Pope John Paul II Awards in the diocese. Ten students came forward from three schools, many of whom fundraised hugely at a local level to meet the cost of their fare. Our Spiritual Directors were Bishop Phonsie Cullinan and Fr PJ Breen (chaplain to one school), and they were joined by ten leaders: the Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer, the Post-Primary Diocesan Advisor, the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, a member of the Strategic Task Force for Youth and Young Adult Ministry, a teacher from one participating school, three Parish Faith Reps, a Mission Team member from Holy Family Mission and a young adult who had been to World Youth Day with us. Leaders were deliberately selected with a number of criteria: *to foster links with local parishes and Holy Family Mission; to train and encourage Parish Faith Reps**, and *to encourage young adults who showed great potential leadership potential*.



THE PILGRIMAGE ITSELF

The pilgrimage was a wonderful success. The young people were an amazing credit to their schools, their parishes and themselves, participating fully in all faith-based activities, fun activities, music, mountain climbs and so on. On one particular day, Bishop Phonsie celebrated Mass at St James' Church and our group were responsible for assisting with the liturgy. The reverent and enthusiastic way our young people participated genuinely brought many to tears, and they received overwhelming praise from the liturgy team in the church as well as many pilgrims who continued to meet them throughout the week, even treating them to ice-creams as a thank you! It was a strong example too of the training and practice they had received as readers in their own local parishes.



The pilgrimage was a real testament to the power of immersing young people in an atmosphere of faith, mentored by good leaders with strong faith and a good sense of fun! All of the young people said it was an experience they would never forget, that they would cherish the memories and many hope to return again.

FOSTERING LINKS

The pilgrimage also helped to strengthen links:

- for the Pope John Paul II Awards in schools
- with parents
- for teens in the diocese with Holy Family Mission as well as with Ascend Youth Ministry
- the highlights video has been used in gathering with RE teachers, Faith Reps and Local Safeguarding Reps also as an encouragement as to why we do the necessary safeguarding work in our parishes.



PILGRIMAGE FRUIT

Since coming home, one boy has started attending a prayer group regularly, one returned to weekly Mass and brought his father with him, two of the teens assisted with a local Summer Faith Camp for children, three are pursuing the Pope John Paul II Papal Cross Award... and that is just the fruit we know of. Two of our pilgrims spoke about their experience at the Diocesan Pope John Paul II Award Ceremony afterwards, one commenting that he learned for the first time that you can pray through song and sharing about a moving experience he had in Medjugorje during the hymn "Who you say I am" where he really connected with God on a personal level, as a Child of God, for the very first time, despite years of involvement as a nominal Catholic. Our leaders were also hugely encouraged by the week and at how open the teens were to the experience of faith.



GRATITUDE

A huge amount of planning and preparation went into making this trip a success, as well as fundraising at local and diocesan level and we are very grateful to all who assisted in anyway, including TNET. Huge thanks is due to the team at Joe Walsh Tours who went above and beyond to create a welcoming, caring, fun and faith-filled atmosphere for our group.

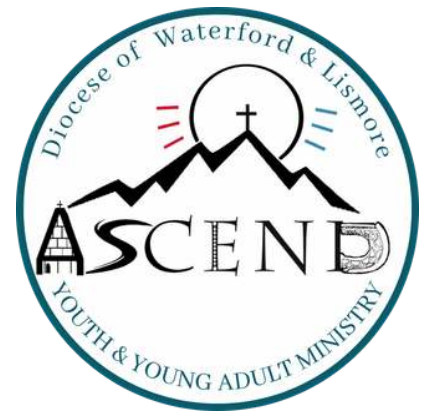
Plans are underway to bring 24 students to Medjugorje in May, building and learning from last year's pilgrimage.

To watch the short 5 ½ minute video of highlights on the Ascend YouTube Channel please [click here](#):

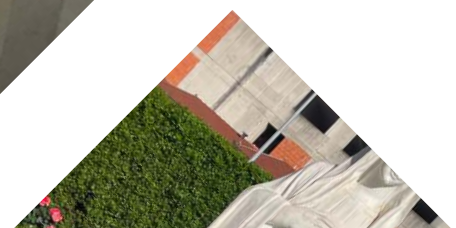


*** Parish Faith Reps:** As part of the Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry Strategic Plan for 2023 - 2026 volunteers at Parish have been recruited, trained and commissioned for two years with the option of staying on for longer if appropriate. No academic qualifications are sought, rather people who have a heart for young people, who have strong faith themselves, are willing to work as a member of a team and buy into the Ascend Vision for Youth & Young Adult Ministry. To date 32 Faith Reps have been commissioned since the initiative was launched in March 2023 and plans are currently underway for the rollout of the next applications process. It is hoped over time that we will see Pope John Paul II Award participants and young adult leaders step up into that role in time.

Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry Diocese of Waterford & Lismore



POPE JOHN PAUL II YOUTH PILGRIMAGE TO MEDJUGORJE 2025 REPORT



VISION & SCOPE

On 3rd - 10th May 2025 the Diocese of Waterford & Lismore led their second Pope John Paul II Youth Pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Places on the pilgrimage were offered to TYs and 5th years in the five schools who were running the Pope John Paul II Awards in the diocese. Thirteen students came forward from three schools, including four students undertaking the Papal Cross Award. Many of the students fundraised hugely at a school and local level to meet the cost of their fare. Our Spiritual Directors were Bishop Phonsie Cullinan and Fr PJ Breen (chaplain to De La Salle College) who joined us for a second year and grew even more into his role this year. They were joined by ten leaders: the Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer, the Post-Primary Diocesan Advisor, the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, a teacher from one participating school who runs a prayer group in her school, a school Chaplain, two Parish Faith Reps, and two young adults who previously travelled to WYD 2023 and have been growing in a leadership role in the diocese since. Leaders were deliberately selected with a number of criteria: to foster links with local parishes; to train and encourage Parish Faith Reps*, and to encourage young adults who showed great potential leadership potential.



At the top of Apparition Hill

THE PILGRIMAGE ITSELF

The pilgrimage went beyond our expectations and even our experience of last year's trip. The young people were an amazing credit to their schools, their parishes and themselves – displaying an openness to faith, prayer, and group fellowship from day one which made the dynamic very special from the beginning. Asking for their feedback, which you can see in our short video, a large number of them were really touched by Adoration and by climbing the Hills praying for the intentions they had brought with them; a number of them even decided to climb barefoot too! A new activity we introduced this year was Compline at the end of the day in our accommodation, followed by praise and worship music, games and a Q&A session with Fr PJ who was never stumped by anything thrown at him! We were also privileged to be there for the Conclave and election of Pope Leo XIV, a very special memory for all of the group, who had the whole process explained so well to us by Fr PJ also.



Climbing Apparition Hill



Masses for our Group in various chapels



Climbing Cross Mountain



The journey home - a bright and early start!



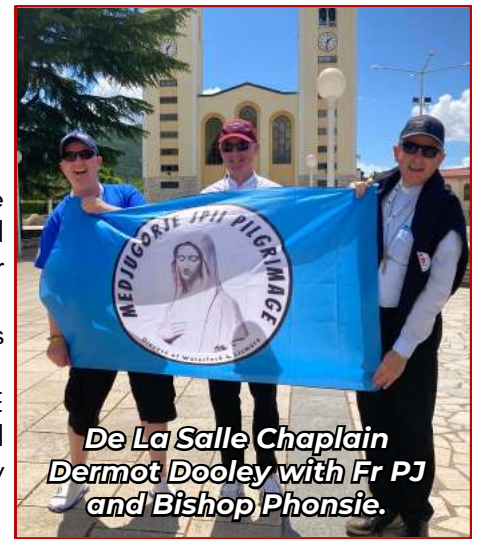
Writing out prayer intentions at the Cenacolo Community.

The pilgrimage was again a true testament to the power of immersing young people in an atmosphere of faith, mentored by good leaders with strong faith and a good sense of fun! The young people who came had heard of last year's pilgrimage and were excited to be part of this year's one, and all left with incredible memories and a deepened sense of God's presence in their lives.

FOSTERING LINKS IN THE DIOCESE

The pilgrimage also helped to strengthen links:

- for the Pope John Paul II Awards in schools
- with parents who were very involved in the preparation for the pilgrimage and received daily updates and photos / videos from Medjugorje – we still receive messages of thanks from the parents and stories of how their children's faith has been impacted.
- for teens in the diocese with Holy Family Mission (at our Reunion in June) as well as with Ascend Youth Ministry
- the highlights video has been created to use in gatherings with RE teachers, Faith Reps, a Diocesan Evangelisation Conference and with Local Safeguarding Reps, as an encouragement as to why we do the necessary safeguarding work in our parishes.



PILGRIMAGE FRUIT

Since coming home, we have seen beautiful fruit. A week after our pilgrimage, a good number of the young people responded to an invitation to partake in a special youth hour as part of a Jubilee Year 24 Hours Adoration outside the Cathedral. At the reunion, we heard how some of the boys in particular have continued to pray the rosary and be accountability buddies for each other. Eight of the young people went on to volunteer at the Tramore Good News Faith Camp for Children, leading children in catechesis, prayer and action songs. Three of the youth attended the National Youth 2000 Summer Festival and more have plans to do so for the Youth 2000 Christmas Retreat. They formed a group chat and keep each other informed of upcoming events. Some have continued to support a monthly local Youth Adoration initiative in Tramore.



GRATITUDE

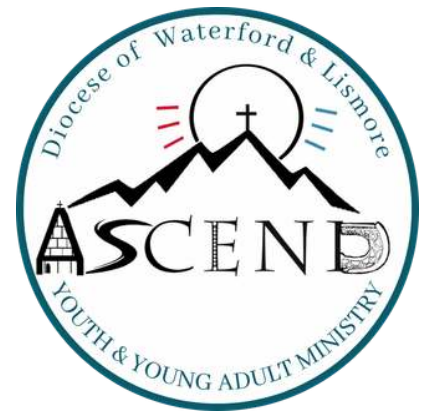
A huge amount of planning and preparation went into making this trip a success, as well as fundraising at local and diocesan level and we are very grateful to all who assisted in anyway, including TNET. Huge thanks is due to the team at Joe Walsh Tours who went above and beyond to create a welcoming, caring, fun and faith-filled atmosphere for our group. Plans are underway to bring 25 students to Medjugorje in May 2026 plus leaders, and we have extra schools and parishes involved in the Pope John Paul II Awards this year to encourage their participation also.

To hear the young people and leaders share their experiences, watch our 5 minute highlights video on the Ascend YouTube Channel - click the image or scan the QR code.



*** Parish Faith Reps:** As part of the Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry Strategic Plan for 2023 - 2026 volunteers at Parish have been recruited, trained and commissioned for two years with the option of staying on for longer if appropriate. No academic qualifications are sought, rather people who have a heart for young people, who have strong faith themselves, are willing to work as a member of a team and buy into the Ascend Vision for Youth & Young Adult Ministry; they can come from any age bracket as long as they are over 18. To date 41 Faith Reps have been commissioned since the initiative was launched in March 2023 and plans are currently underway for the rollout of the next application process in January 2026. It is hoped over time that we will see Pope John Paul II Award participants step up into that role in time, and have just this year commissioned two young adults who have been at the receiving end of young adult ministry in the diocese in the role.

Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry Diocese of Waterford & Lismore



POPE JOHN PAUL II THIRD ANNUAL YOUTH PILGRIMAGE TO MEDJUGORJE

2026 REPORT



VISION & SCOPE

On 15th - 22nd May 2026 the Diocese of Waterford & Lismore led their third Pope John Paul II Youth Pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Places on the pilgrimage were offered to TYs and 5th years in the six schools who were running the Pope John Paul II Awards in the diocese, along with young people who were doing the award through their parishes this year, rather than through schools. Fifteen students came forward from four schools, including one student undertaking the Papal Cross Award and returning to Medjugorje for her second year, even though her school was not offering the award this year. We also had one student from a homeschooling background join us. A number of students were not undertaking the JP2 Award but were selected by their teacher because of their participation and example in their school. Many of the students fundraised hugely at a school and local level to meet the cost of their fare, and spoke at Masses, collecting petitions to bring to Medjugorje from their parishes which was a very popular outreach. Our Spiritual Directors were Bishop Phonsie Cullinan, and Fr PJ Breen (Chaplain to De La Salle College) who joined us for a third year. They were joined by ten leaders: the Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry Officer, the Post-Primary Diocesan Advisor, the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, a teacher from one participating school who runs a prayer group in her school, three Parish Faith Reps, and two young adults, one of whom was joining us for his third year, who previously came back to his faith through the Diocesan WYD 2023 pilgrimage. Leaders were deliberately selected with a number of criteria: to foster links with local parishes; to train and encourage Parish Faith Reps*, and to encourage young adults who showed great potential leadership potential.



At the top of Apparition Hill



**Parish Prayer
Petitions at the
top of Cross
Mountain!**

THE PILGRIMAGE ITSELF

Each year of our pilgrimage has a very different dynamic but we are very blessed with those who come. The young people were very open from the beginning, and many on the first evening there commented on the peace they felt. They mixed as a group from early on in the pilgrimage, and displayed a real openness in particular to the Q & A sessions with Fr PJ every evening, asking very insightful questions. Asking for their feedback, many of them were very touched by the peace they experienced, the dynamic in the group, and the climbs in particular. Three of our young people sustained some minor injuries on the climbs, but their enthusiasm and acceptance of their limitations for the rest of the week were an inspiration to the rest of the group, as was the care they received from their peers and leaders. One of our Faith Reps was visiting Medjugorje for the first time and had a profound personal experience of faith and reconciliation there, and an experience of peace which has not left her since. She came home fired up and ready to kickstart the Pope John Paul II Awards in her parish.



**Enjoying some
soccer together!**



Masses for our Group in various chapels



The fun on our bus journeys!



Praying on the mountains



**Remembering families,
friends and benefactors**

Every year we go, we see how important it is to be able to immerse young people in an experience of faith like this, surrounded by peers also open to the faith, mentored by adults who balance fun and faith in an attractive way, and good spiritual directors able and willing to answer any questions they might have. Feedback from their parents has been overwhelmingly positive, with some seeing very profound changes in their children on their return. A particular highlight this year was being able to livestream a prayer session / candlelit procession with those at home in families and our parishes as the young people led the Mysteries of Light for all those who had asked us to remember them.

FOSTERING LINKS IN THE DIOCESE

The pilgrimage also helped to strengthen links:

- for the Pope John Paul II Awards in schools, including two new schools that came on board with the pilgrimage this year after years of involvement with the award itself.
- in the parishes where the young people (and faith reps) spoke about their experience, fundraised and gathered prayer intentions to bring, and who were very touched when they joined in the zoom candlelit procession with us.
- with parents who were very involved in the preparation for the pilgrimage and received daily updates and photos / videos from Medjugorje – we still receive grateful messages for the care their children received. One parent has since started volunteering in her parish along with her daughter.

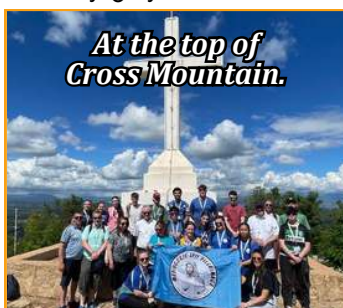


Music at prayer on our last night at the Blue Cross

- for teens in the diocese with Holy Family Mission as well as Ascend, as we were joined by a First Year Community member this year who shared his testimony too, and we had our reunion again at Glencomeragh House, where we spoke to them about the origins and purpose of HFM in forming young people in their faith and identity
- the highlights video each year is used in gatherings with RE teachers, Faith Reps, Diocesan Evangelisation outreaches and other gatherings to highlight the work Ascend does, and the openness of young people today to an experience of faith.

PILGRIMAGE FRUIT

Since coming home, we have heard and seen great fruit again this year. Many of the young people (from this year's group and last year's group) went on to volunteer at the Tramore Good News Faith Camp and St Declan's Faith Camp, Ardmore, leading children in catechesis, prayer and action songs. A number of them attended the National Youth 2000 Summer Festival where they happily led actions for the music session on the Sunday morning! A number of them have signed up for the Papal Cross Award and have expressed interest in attending World Youth Day 2027. One Faith Rep has started the John Paul II Award in her parish this year so that young people there can have the experience of travelling to Medjugorje too.



At the top of Cross Mountain.



Our Awards Ceremony at the end of the week - everyone's a winner!



Enjoying each other's company...and the good food too!



Praying together for those back home!



Quiet moments to reflect



Group games together in the evening!

GRATITUDE

A huge amount of planning and preparation went into making this trip a success, as well as fundraising at local, parish and diocesan level and we are very grateful to all who assisted in anyway, including The New Evangelisation Trust.

Huge thanks is due to the team at Joe Walsh Tours who always go above and beyond to create a welcoming, caring, fun and faith-filled atmosphere for our group.

Plans are underway to bring even more students to Medjugorje in April / May 2027 and to continue to walk with the young people who have journeyed with us so far, particularly those who will be participating in the Papal Cross Award.

*** Parish Faith Reps:** As part of the Ascend Youth & Young Adult Ministry Strategic Plan for 2023 - 2026 volunteers at Parish have been recruited, trained and commissioned for two years with the option of staying on for longer if appropriate. No academic qualifications are sought, rather people who have a heart for young people, who have strong faith themselves, are willing to work as a member of a team and buy into the Ascend Vision for Youth & Young Adult Ministry; they can come from any age bracket as long as they are over 18. To date 41 Faith Reps have been commissioned since the initiative was launched in March 2023 and plans are currently underway for the rollout of the next application process in January 2026. It is hoped over time that we will see Pope John Paul II Award participants step up into that role in time, and have just this year commissioned two young adults who have been at the receiving end of young adult ministry in the diocese in the role.

FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

"I felt God present every time I read at Mass and when I was praying. I felt God all around me when I was in Medjugorje through the walks, climbs, prayers, songs and testimonies. After all the efforts put into the JP2 I feel God all the time around me. It is so nice to have a sense of peace and security with me wherever I go, especially when I'm in a church. I am so grateful for these opportunities as they have shown me a deeper meaning to God and have let me understand more about myself."

"I've since found it so much easier to talk with God and find him in different ways which has helped me so much."

"Jesus said in John 14:6, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.' That verse meant little to me as a line on a page, but standing on Cross Mountain or sitting in Mass at St James' Church, I began to understand it differently. The pilgrimage was essentially an attempt to find the way to cut through the noise of everyday life and get closer to something true. I think that is exactly what Jesus was pointing to."

"I got the privilege of going to Medjugorje with the Diocese, where we attended three Masses in St James' Church and I got the honour of reading a prayer of the faithful at one of the masses. I was very nervous but I was so lucky to have such a good group of people around me to help me fight the nerves. One of our leaders told me to think of someone you are doing this for and just picture them in the crowd, so when I looked up and saw my Nanny standing in the pews it relaxed all my nerves instantly. After the mass I had a priest come up to me and tell me how excellent I read and that he could tell I didn't just read it, I really believe in what I was sayingit wasn't the same feeling I got from reading in my parish, this feeling was the greatest feeling I had ever felt, it was a mix of accomplishment and pride."

FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS

"...I think she had one of the most meaningful experiences so far in her precious life and that is down to all the leaders/priests. Thank you all so much."

"...She really enjoyed the week. I've never seen her so positively impacted by anything so much before..."

"Thank you to all of the leaders for the amazing week [my son] had in Medjugorje. He was buzzing after it and really enjoyed the whole experience."

"...She had the most wonderful time. It was really good for her..."

"...She really enjoyed being on this new adventure. She is so happy that she got a chance to go..."