



NEWSLETTER

We can engage young people in parish activities: Look at what's happening in Shankill!

ONE HUNDRED young people aged from 12 to 17 years are registered members of the JP2 youth group in Shankill parish. They meet every Saturday evening between 7.15pm and 9.15pm in the parish centre. The average attendance on any given night is between 30 and 45 and sometimes goes as high as 50. Three trips away from the centre have been organised over the past three years. This year 38 young people travelled with eight leaders to Knockadoon, a Dominican centre in Cork.

As far back as 2013, a small group of young people met as part of Youth 2000. Fr Jaimie Twohig, a curate in the parish, had a group of ten in 2018 and numbers gradually grew. Post Covid the numbers greatly increased to what they are now. Cillian Kenny (21) is a leader in the JP2 youth group. He started out as a member. He describes his involvement with the group as a very significant and hugely enjoyable part of his life. His mother, Sarah Kenny, is also a leader. Jackie Williams, Parish Safeguarding Representative for Shankill parish, is the safeguarding officer for the group. Cillian, Sarah and Jackie all identified Fr Jaimie as the moving spirit behind the group.

Jackie works in close consultation with Garry



Fr Jaimie Twohig with a group of youth leaders

Kehoe of CSPS and best safeguarding practice is followed in all aspects of the operation of the group. Cillian observed that young people of his generation do not always see the importance of safeguarding but that as they develop an awareness of the past, the need for it becomes more apparent to them. Cillian acknowledged that the safeguarding requirements can seem a

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Shankill: Prayer is central

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bit daunting initially, but pointed out that people take on different roles. He and Sarah spoke with gratitude of the huge contribution made by Jackie in her safeguarding role. Good safeguarding practice, they all agreed, reduces risk.

Prayer is central to the what the group is about. Saturday meetings begin with Adoration and end with Benediction. In between, there are games and activities and sometimes they have a speaker address the group. The young people have fun and build friendships. It is a faith-based group that is open to anyone who wishes to come along. It is for boys and girls of all abilities and nationalities. Sarah remarked that some of the young people come from regular Mass-going families, but not all of them do. The group fundraises for trips away as a means of keeping the costs low and within the reach of less well-off families.

A newer group, the JP2 Squad, was formed last year for primary school children from second to sixth class. Described as an invitation to 'pizza, pray, play' this group meets earlier on Saturday. A relationship has developed with the local Deis school. The teachers and parents have gotten to know about the group from bringing the children to the church for sacramental preparation. More than 20 children attend the group meetings where, among other things, they learn to pray the Rosary.

Asked what advice they would offer to other parishes considering such an initiative, Jackie, Sarah and Cillian made a number of points. Someone has to take the initiative and, in Shankill, that was Fr Jaimie. It is not simply that he started the groups. It is his commitment to turn up each week for the meetings. It is

important, they agreed, to start out small with modest aims and allow things to grow at their own pace. What works in one parish may not be appropriate in another one. Sarah remarked that giving the young people themselves responsibility for the group has been important. Sarah and other parents are there to help out, but they try to keep in the background and allow the young people the space to do things for themselves. The young people in the youth group now help out in the group for the younger children. They do so alongside the adult group leaders. All three emphasised that prayer is central to both groups.

There are codes of conduct for both groups and members are reminded of the behavioural expectations, as required. Because the groups who have gone away together already knew each other, they were all familiar with what was expected of them. Jackie, Sarah and Cillian said that issues such as bullying and sexual harassment have not arisen within the groups so far. Separately, a representative of the Dominicans who hosted the youth group earlier this year remarked on what a pleasant and well-behaved group of young people they were.

The parish of Shankill has found a way to engage with young people. That engagement enriches the life of the parish. It is clearly doing something important for the young people involved. They come of their own accord. They come and pray. ■



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Important lessons from report into abuse in religious schools

THE REPORT OF THE Scoping Inquiry into Historical Sexual Abuse in Day and Boarding Schools Run by Religious Orders does not make for easy reading. It contains descriptions of appalling abuse and the trauma it caused, and continues to cause, in the lives of thousands. More accounts have come to light in the wake of the publication of the report. It is a shameful story, and the implications for us as a Catholic Christian community are addressed by Archbishop Farrell in a television programme made by EWTN, which can be viewed on YouTube by searching for 'Abuse in Irish Catholic Schools'.



Archbishop Farrell in the EWTN programme, viewable on YouTube

There is a positive aspect of the report, which is worth commenting on as it provides a model of good practice which hopefully will be carried forward into the commission which the government plans to establish. It also has lessons to teach all of us whose work brings us into contact with survivors.

The publication of similar reports in the past has sometimes been followed by criticism by survivors and those who represent them who struggle to see where the evidence that they had provided was reflected in the published report. This has not been the case this time and this can be explained by the care taken in the manner in which the accounts of the survivors were taken and recorded. All of those who conducted interviews with survivors were training in 'trauma informed practice'. Trauma informed practice, in this context, is a way of meeting with survivors to hear their accounts of abuse in a manner that gives them control of the process and minimises the risk of re-traumatisation that can often accompany the recounting of atrocious events. Many people who work with survivors of abuse on behalf of dioceses and religious orders follow

trauma informed practice, sometimes without thinking about it in those terms. However, that has not always been the case. Those survivors who participated in the consultation process that formed part of the Synod spoke of 'secondary victimisation' when they came to disclose their abuse to church authorities and received a response which was unhelpful and sometimes hostile. The National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland has undertaken to provide training in trauma informed practice for those whose work in dioceses and religious orders brings them into contact with survivors of abuse.

A lot has been done to make our parishes and diocesan agencies safer places for children and that is one part of our response to the scandal of the abuse of children in the Church. Another part of our response must be a commitment to learn better ways to engage with survivors so that we can be messengers of healing and hope. This Report has some important lessons to teach us and we should acknowledge with gratitude the good work of all who contributed to the Inquiry, most especially the survivors themselves. ■

Supervision of released prisoners

IT IS RIGHT THAT those who harm others are made accountable for their actions and face just punishment, including imprisonment. For serious offenders, such as those who abuse children, imprisonment is not simply a punishment, but also a way in which the vulnerable are protected. Nonetheless, at some point, the prison term ends and the offender is released back into the community. It is important to consider how this can be done in a way that minimises the risk of further offending.

Those who have abused children are usually subject to some form of post-release supervision by the Probation Service or the Gardaí. While it is understandable that communities will be fearful if they learn of the presence of convicted sex offenders in their midst, vigilantism is counter-productive. It is better that such offenders live in locations chosen for them by the those responsible for their supervision than that they try to hide themselves away where no proper supervision is possible.

From time to time parish communities face a dilemma when they learn of, or suspect, the presence of someone who has offended against children. Everyone has a right to practice their faith. The manner in which they do so has to take account of legitimate concerns for the safety of children and vulnerable persons.

The Child Safeguarding and Protection Service can provide advice and assistance in such situations. There have been agreements made in the past with those who have been released from prison after having served sentences for offences against children, including former priests. Such agreements have typically involved the former offender being required to avoid family masses or other services that involve children, coming to Mass as it is beginning and leaving at the end.

If you have any worries that a person, who is attending your church or is seen in the vicinity of the church or a school, may be a risk to children or vulnerable persons, please contact either CSPA or local Gardaí. ■

Towards Peace Spiritual Support Service



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Towards Peace is a spiritual support service for survivors of physical, emotional, sexual and spiritual abuse.

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