

Alex McEvily (18) and Ben Stuart (16) from Mullingar

My name is Alex, I am 18. I've been part of the Cathedral House youth team in Mullingar since June 2014. This is Ben and he's been with us for the last 12 months.

We help out at Cathedral House on weekdays from 7:30pm until 9pm. There are five of us who come to the house during the week. Under 18s work together in teams of two. We answer phone calls. We answer the door when people come to the house. We take messages and we like to think that we are the 'behind the scenes crew' in the parish.

Some evenings can be very busy. In Mullingar we're not really dealing with rowdy parishioners but it has its moments! When we're not busy, we do our homework and study and then we chat and drink endless amount of tea!

Our parents fill out a consent form once a year. We sign up to the code of good behaviour. We have a meeting once a year when one of the priests and the parish safeguarding reps brings us and our parents together to talk about being part of the youth team. We sign in every evening when our work begins.

One of the challenging parts of what we do is meeting people who come to the door if they are distressed or upset or seem to have problems. We try to be professional, respectful and patient in dealing with all people. At first this was a kinda new experience for us and we used to feel unsure about what to do. But in fairness the priests have been very helpful to us and they always make sure that we are all right and doing ok. Working at Cathedral House I have to say I'm surprised to see how busy priests have to work, especially being called out to the hospital, meeting couples getting married and dealing with a big number of funerals. Just being at Mass on Sundays I wouldn't have known what their lives are like.

I have to admit, I enjoy working there as it gives me a chance to talk to people from different walks of life. For example, in the summer of 2014 there was a young priest from Burma called Fr. Francis. He was great craic altogether. One day I remember we played the video game FIFA with him in the parochial house. (Not many people can say they were beaten in FIFA by a priest!). Ben and I, as well as our friends Jack, Andrew and Sam would like to thank Fr Pdraig for the opportunity to be part of the youth team and for the good experiences which we really enjoy.

Sean Savage (15) from St Mary's Parish, Drogheda

Hi, my name is Seán and I am a third year student in St Mary's Diocesan school Drogheda. I have been reared in a Catholic family that have attended Mass on a weekly basis and was an altar server in my parish of St Mary's Drogheda for approximately 5 or 6 years. In our sacristy we signed in to a book before we served Mass.

A couple of years ago, a youth choir was set by some parents in our parish along with our deacon Bob McGivney, now Father Robert McGivney. We must have done something correct since he got ordained. We sing on the 1st and 3rd Sunday each month at the 12 pm Mass. At each of our practices we sign in and each year we renew our consent form. If we go

way on trips, which we have done, we also fill in with our parents a permission slip.

I think at least once a month we should have a youth Mass where we have the youth choir sing, read and even distribute Holy Communion. I do appreciate that some parishes have some of these events already. Maybe we should look and see if others can reach out and try.

I do appreciate the efforts that our local priests make in Fr Phil Gaffney and Fr Joe Campbell and I thank them for their efforts both in our parish and in our school and for been supportive.

I want to finally thank Bishop Michael and all of you for inviting me here to represent young people and for allowing me to share. I also want to thank you all for providing opportunities for our youth within the Diocese of Meath. Many thanks for listening.

Aideen Tansy-Moran (18) from Delvin

Hello, my name is Aideen and I've been a part of different youth groups for over five years now. When I started getting interested in my faith and questioning a lot of different things about it, I volunteered at a summer camp in Delvin Parish. That's what really brought my faith to a different level. I had a passion for it and I wanted to learn more about it on my own account.

The main thing that attracted me to the summer camp was the fact that, the people running it were not from Delvin; both of the girls were from America and it meant that it was a fresh start for the kids attending. Once those girls left our parish we started to host NET missionaries in the parish. They were groups of five people, usually between 18 and 22 years old, and they would live in the parish for a year running a parish youth group every week. They created a great atmosphere for us that kept us going year after year.

Every year for three years, each team would get more intense in our faith and by the end of the three years a handful of us were now able to lead our own youth group. We went to extra nights during the last year to learn how to write talks, act out skits and how to play the music to do praise and worship. We still have the youth group running today and every year the summer camp gets bigger. We wouldn't have any of this if it wasn't for our parish priest, Fr. Seamus Heaney and the volunteers that helped us with child protection. They wrote out forms with us, talk us through the code of behaviour and supervised evenings to make sure we always had 2 or more over 18's present.

We also started going to Youth2000 retreats which are still the highlight of my summer holidays. Every summer over 800 young people meet for four days in Roscrea and it really is the Catholic version of Oxygen. You connect with people on a level you don't get to experience outside of the retreats and make friends for life. Before I thought about what I was going to say to you this evening, I asked people that go to these retreats "what makes them come back every year?". I got a huge amount of replies all underlining the same thing, the love and the friendship. They all found that there was a healing presence over the weekend, especially at confession and adoration. Being a teenager today isn't the easiest thing in the world, we are constantly bombarded with different views and opinions, and the majority of them don't follow the church's teaching. When we go to the retreats, we're surrounded by

people that love their faith and the beliefs that come with that. We feel supported by each other and our faith is something that we wouldn't give up for anyone or anything now.

It's the people like you running everything behind the scenes in the parish that deserve all the credit for everything you've done. We couldn't have a retreat or youth group if we didn't have you, willing to give up your time to help us and to make sure that everything runs smoothly and we feel valued as young parishioners. Because of this really positive experience as a teenager in the church, I am definitely going to play my part in the church in the future.

Thank you.