



The Pope John Paul II Award

Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin writes of the John Paul II awards, a popular initiative among young people.

When Pope Francis wrote to the young people of our world in 2019, he titled his exhortation *'Christus Vivit' – 'Christ is Alive'*. It was a no-holding-back response to what he heard at the earlier Synod on Young People in October 2018. Young people expect the same authenticity and clarity around Church and faith. Sometimes they may be uncomfortable around a teaching, and they may challenge the norm, but they respond with joy and enthusiasm to whatever the Church offers them. I find the Pope John Paul II Award, now in its thirteenth year in Kildare & Leighlin Diocese, a super way of engaging with young people and seeing Christ fully alive in each of them.

On 13 October last we celebrated the extraordinary achievement of 300 young people – all recipients of this year's Pope John Paul II Award. Because of the pandemic, the awards ceremony in the Cathedral of the Assumption, Carlow was restricted this year solely to the 43 Papal Cross recipients who were all present, while the 204 Gold, 28 Silver and 25 Bronze recipients joined in the celebrations through Instagram and Facebook.

The Annual Awards ceremony tells



the story of parish and school and the key engagement that both have in the lives of young people. 29 parishes were represented on the night, as well as 27 schools. The master of ceremonies, Fr David Vard, welcomed the families of the Papal Cross recipients along with their award leaders. I am always chuffed to see the principals and priests who make it their business to be present on the 'Oscars' evening. It shows the appreciation and value of the two or three recipients to the smaller parishes, just as it does to the twenty plus recipients in some of our more populated parishes.

It was a most unusual 'pandemic year' for the recipients of the awards to achieve their goal and merit their



award. I was most intrigued to see the kind of creative projects that have brought about new ministries and ways of being involved in the parish community, such as knitting sensory mittens for residents of nursing homes, praying the Rosary with those in hospital, writing letters and sending greeting cards to the elderly, and when all services were closed, doing their grandmother's hair! There were other specific ministries that spoke particularly to the unprecedented times such as helping with the ticket system for Mass, designing seating plans allowing for social distance, completing online training to become ministers of Holy Communion, and helping to stream Masses from the

church to parishioners at home.

Why not a word from some of those on the night who shared what participating in the award has meant to them?

Tomás from Newbridge parish shared, 'I found myself going to Mass more and discovering my faith on a deeper level which in turn helped me discover more about myself as a person.' Rebecca from Ballon parish said, 'I formed long-lasting, positive relationships with lots of different types of people – young and old. I learned a lot about myself and gained a lot of respect for the contribution that so many make to our parish, especially the elderly.' And Ruth from Graiguecullen parish said, 'This award has given me an abundance of experiences through my involvement in the community and in parish ministry. I have created so many positive memories and have personally gained so much from those experiences, especially regarding my personal faith journey, that I will keep with me as I go forward as a more active adult member of my parish.'

The awards don't happen without a committed team of thirty-one award leaders, principals, contact teachers and priests and of course most of all our very gifted diocesan coordinator Cathriona Kelly and her team who ensure a memorable night that shows young people in Kildare & Leighlin 'fully alive'.

Next year we look forward to returning to a full attendance that shows so many of our young people's creativity and adaptability at their best. 