

# MEITHEAL INFORMATION BOOKLET



**A Youth Leadership Training Programme**

*Run By*

**The Kildare and Leighlin Diocese**

[www.kandle.ie](http://www.kandle.ie)

## Meitheal Prayer

Dear God,

Help us to learn,

That it is okay to make mistakes.  
That we are each unique,  
And that, above all, we are all  
Equal in your eyes.

If, then, we can learn these things we would truly,

Act justly,  
Love tenderly,  
and walk humbly with our God.



# **MEITHEAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME.**

## **Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin.**

Meitheal is a leadership programme which operates in 19 secondary schools in the Kildare and Leighlin diocese.

The name Meitheal was taken from an old tradition in the west. Farmers living in the same area would have a Meitheal every year, the whole idea being that they would work together to bring in their crops. This built up strong friendships and respect among the people involved in the Meitheal.

Our Meitheal programme is designed to educate and empower young people in their schools. The students, leaders and others educate each other through leadership, taking action, liturgy, reflection and evaluation.

All students who participate on the programme have to attend a week's training course. This course will give the students all the skills they will need to work as a Meitheal team in their school.

We challenge people to look at themselves, to believe that they are worthwhile and that they have a special contribution to make. We focus on the gold within and encourage people to discover some of that gold. The young people who participate on Meitheal come from all walks of life and different situations. On the training week the young people are treated as equals and discover that they have got something to offer and that (others) their own peers can see good things about them and its okay to be ME.

Meitheal is also about the people in my group knowing who I am, knowing that I care. People experience the warmth, friendship and encouragement I have to offer and know that I am honest with them.

We ask people to step beyond their own needs and to act on the needs of others. On the training week we give the students the skills to identify needs in their school and how to act upon those needs. Meitheal is also about looking out for the people in your group and maintaining the spirit of Meitheal. We also encourage Meitheal students to use their learning in everyday life with their friends, family and parish.

There are many people involved with the programme in different ways, parents, teachers, students and volunteers who work as leaders each year.

The Meitheal programme is the start of a process, the development of young people, it is envisaged that students involved in the programme would later become leaders in their own parish and community.

Meitheal is very much about transformation, it's about trying to make a difference, to make your school a better place for all.

We don't look for standards, numbers or results from our groups; we look for groups of young people doing their best, caring for each other and the students with whom they work. Growing as individuals and believing in their own true potential.

# MEITHEAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAMME

## THE BEGINNING

In 1989 a Youth Programme was piloted in Mount St. Joseph's, Tullow. Six diocesan schools took part in the residential course. This was the catapult that launched the Meitheal Programme. It was a programme designed to empower young people in their schools. It also showed young people their own worth and that they had a contribution to make not only in their schools but also in the wider community.

Over the last ten years Meitheal had many homes – to host its training.

### *1989 – 1994 Mount St. Joseph's, Tullow:*

This is now a Golf Club, Mount Wolsley. This venue was once a training school for the Patrician Brothers, just a mile from the then Youth Ministry Headquarters, Teach Bride. It was ideal for Meitheal. The Mount was very basic and isolated and for two weeks in June the place became alive. Everything was simple, such as accommodation and food. It was also said at the start of the week that the food might not be great but there would be loads of it. The Patricians who lived there at the time were very supportive and always willing to help. By 1994 we had 14 schools participating on the programme.

### *1995:*

The Mount was sold and we had to find somewhere else. At that time Ballyfin College was in transition, the last of the boarders were finished. So with the space available we held the programme in Ballyfin College. If you're looking for space and beauty Ballyfin has it all in abundance. We were well looked after, again by the Patricians Brothers, especially Br. Matt whose support has always been there from the start. I reckon we had the hottest week of the year there in 1995.

### *1996:*

Development started in Ballyfin for full-time educational purposes soon after we left that summer. So in 1996 we went back to Carlow and took over Knockbeg College for the two weeks. This I think was the first time everyone had a bed to sleep in and not just a mattress on the floor. In many ways it was appropriate Knockbeg should host Meitheal as the main Founder and motivator behind the programme came from the College.

### *1997 – Present date:*

Castletown has been the training venue for Meitheal for the last five summers. Unlike the other venues, this is a purpose-built building to cater for the training and development of

young people and adults. The Centre has now established itself as the home for Meitheal and please God will remain so in the future.

There are now 20 schools participating on the Meitheal programme.

The venues have been important for Meitheal and play an important part in our memories.

The hardest question to answer is - what makes Meitheal work, why has it been so successful and important to the Secondary Schools in which it operates?

There are many elements of the programme that make it work, it can be attributed to the schools, the leaders, the training and many other things. I personally feel that it is the spirit of Meitheal which makes it so special and unique in its own way. The Meitheal spirit is generated on the training weeks and it's this spirit that the students take with them when they go back to their schools, homes and community. This spirit is the essence of Meitheal and is instilled through the training, reflections and Liturgy that are experienced by all who are involved in the Meitheal Programme. I feel the spirit of Meitheal cannot be named or bottled but can be seen in the individuals and the groups through their work and commitment to trying to make their schools a more caring place for all. It tells people it's good to be me. Meitheal creates awareness among its leaders. Meitheal leaders are more aware of the needs of others and through planning, action, reflection and evaluation, they work together to answer these needs.

At the end of the day, we can honestly say the Meitheal Programme gives us the skill, confidence and belief that the society we live in is a wonderful place. It also makes us aware that there is a lot of injustice in our society and that as human beings we have a duty to help change the injustices we encounter in our everyday lives.

The Meitheal journey from 1989 to now has been far from sweet sailing. The programme has had some tough times, the groups have struggled, some schools left, some teachers, and contact teachers, have had their hearts broken. Though year in and year out, the spirit has brought the groups through. We've had many volunteers who have been part of the success of Meitheal and it's these people who make it happen.

Without these people the programme would be nothing. We feel that this journey has a bit to go yet and that Meitheal has a lot more to offer our young people in the Millennium.

**ACT JUSTLY  
LOVE TENDERLY  
AND WALK HUMBLLY WITH YOUR GOD.**



## ***The Idea***

Meitheal is about a group of 10 senior cycle students who will work to make the school a more caring environment. In the process taking actions on real felt needs in their school and learning about their own individual potentialities.

In most schools the benefits for both staff and the student body have been most significantly felt in the Meitheal groups working towards the integration of 1<sup>st</sup> years and the response to bullying.

### **How to move into a school** (Kildare and Leighlin's approach):

1. To begin to run the Meitheal programme there must be full support from the school authorities. This in reality means the Principal of the school.
2. The next step is to find a Teacher.  
*Role of the Teacher:* The technical term for the teacher's role in the group is the 'Silent Facilitator'. The teacher sits with the group as a supportive adult who will advise about the workings of the school and maybe inform the staff of the running of Meitheal. However for many teachers this is a simple way by which to get to know students by being involved in much less formal activities. The teacher's commitment is very important to the success and the dynamic of the group.  
There should only be one teacher working with the group.  
The teacher should attend all Meitheal meetings unless the group and teacher decide that every two weeks or once a month is sufficient.
3. Once both the Principal has given permission and the teacher has agreed to be involved the programme will begin.

### **STEP ONE:      **Launch****

The programme is advertised by the Meitheal co-ordinator coming into the school and promoting the programme. Application forms are given out and students have to consciously apply for the programme.

### **STEP TWO:      **Interviews****

Each student has a 5 to 10 minute interview again by an outsider. The interviewer records the first impressions and then passes these on to the teacher.

### **STEP THREE:   **Selection****

The Meitheal Co Ordinator will then select the team for the school.

## **Criterion by which to choose a group:**

Age: About 16 or at least that level of maturity.

It is for people who are not necessarily the top of the class but who have a positive attitude and maybe need a chance to discover their individual talents.

The process by which the group is chosen is structured so that the group is comfortable for the teacher to work with and that those who become involved in the programme have made a choice to be involved and therefore a commitment is made.

## **STEP FOUR: Parents are informed**

An evening is set aside to inform parents what will be going on, why their son/daughter was chosen and to give them a face by which to identify Meitheal. Above all this evening should be a chance for parents' fears to be put at rest.

## **STEP FIVE: The Training** (see training programme)

The training is if at all possible residential. This should give the young people a sense of community. They should feel they are part of something that is bigger than them and which involves everybody working together to learn and also having a good time. There is a very tight structure organized during the training.

These different areas of work are separated out as follows:

There are different teams who are represented by their coloured dots. Each team has a co-ordinator in charge. The amazing part of Meitheal is the number of people who are prepared to give their time to work as volunteers. Only for these people the programme could not happen. All volunteers are trained and prepared for the programme.

The co-ordinator of each team is responsible for their team and ensures that the role of that team is carried out to its best ability. The overall co-ordinator is responsible for the programme and its smooth running, this person also has the responsibility to receive information and act upon this information in different ways. Part of the success of the Meitheal training week is the tight structure of the programme.

The different areas of work are separated out as follows:

### **OVERALL CO-ORDINATOR**

**Blue Dot**

**Red Dot**

**Yellow Dot**

**Co-ordinator**

**Co-ordinator**

**Co-ordinator**

**Maintenance**

**Training**

**Training**

**Liturgy**

**Students**

**Students**

**Entertainment**

At the end of training Bishop Moriarty or his representative comes to commission each group to be Diocesan Youth Leaders for the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin. His support for Meitheal is invaluable to the development of the programme.

‘Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.’  
Nelson Mandela.



## COMMITTEE ROLES

### *Meitheal Member*

1. You must attend all Meitheal meetings.
2. You must participate to your best ability.
3. You must respect all members of the group.
4. You should attend and participate in all Meitheal events and activities.

### *Chairperson*

1. Always be present for each meeting.
2. Give direction to meetings without domineering, etc.
3. Start and close meeting punctually.
4. Keep to agendas.
5. Call meeting to attention.
6. Sign minutes of previous meeting.
7. Presents each item for discussion and ensures that everyone gets an opportunity to speak and very importantly that each person is listened to.
8. Calls the meeting to order.
9. Helps the process of decision making by rechecking/recapping on input and contributions.
10. Decides on date/time for next meeting.

### *Secretary*

1. Record accurately the minutes of each meeting.
2. Insists on checking the minutes with the chairperson and keeps an account of each meeting.
3. Uses the same book each week for minutes and reads the minutes of the previous meeting at the beginning of each meeting.
4. Writes up the minutes immediately after each meeting.
5. Records attendance, excuses for absenteeism etc.

### *PRO*

1. Responsibility for publicity of each meeting and contacting each person regarding time/date/venue for each meeting.
2. Responsible for all publicity of events etc.
3. Looks after designing and presentation of poster or delegates someone else to do it.
4. Together with the chairperson meets principal, contact-teacher and co-ordinator regarding upcoming events/decisions/activities etc.
5. Acts as liaison person between the group and other link people.

### *Contact Teacher*

1. As a supportive companion to the group.
2. As advisor to group re school structures etc.
3. As a stimulation to group and motivation.
4. As a liaison person with Meitheal Programme, Diocesan Co-Ordinator.

## ACTIONS

The Meitheal Group tries to identify the different needs in the school and by listening, discussion, taking action and evaluation; they then try to answer these needs. Here are some examples of the actions the Meitheal Groups have carried out.

### *1<sup>st</sup> Years*

The Meitheal Group plays an important role helping the new first years settle into the school. The integration of young people from national school to secondary school can be a very daunting experience. For first years to be met by senior students on their first day in secondary school helps the young people to settle in a lot quicker. The Meitheal Group introduce them to their new school, give them a tour and explain the running of the school. The Group talk about Meitheal and let them know that the Group is there for them should they ever need them.

### *Bullying*

Bullying is always a constant threat to our schools. Meitheal groups do not tolerate bullying in their schools. Meitheal groups have been very successful in identifying and dealing with bullying issues. Their presence and contact with the students have made it a lot easier for students to settle and a lot harder for bullies to bully.

### *Activities/Sports*

Meitheal Groups work hard all year to organise different activities and events for the students in the school. Some activities might be to raise money for charity or their own school; others are just purely to have fun. Here is a taste of what Meitheal Groups organised this year:

- Football Leagues
- Basketball Leagues
- Non-uniform Days
- School Table Quizzes
- Day Trips to Dublin
- Cinema
- Bowling
- Christmas Party for 1<sup>st</sup> Years
- Discos
- Valentine Events
- Social Nights/Theme Nights/Talent Shows
- Sing Songs with 1<sup>st</sup> Years
- Class Liturgies and Prayer Services
- Advent Calendars
- Tennis
- Social Visits to 1<sup>st</sup> Years – dealing with any problems that arose
- Halloween Party for 1<sup>st</sup> Years incorporating Fancy Dress Competition with prizes
- 1<sup>st</sup> Year Retreats
- Youth Mass for young people in the town
- Lunch-time Activity
- Condolence Book for September 11<sup>th</sup>
- Meditations
- Welcoming incoming 1<sup>st</sup> Years and parents of incoming 1<sup>st</sup> Years

Tour of school  
Fundraising  
Mural with 1<sup>st</sup> Years  
Organising Sports Day  
A Thought for the Week  
And many more

It is important to remember that all the actions carried out by the Groups, no matter how big or small, take a lot of skill, planning and commitment.

Sometimes it is the actions we don't hear about that are the most important, for example a lot of the Meitheal Groups would be in contact with the students on a daily basis all year round, it is this contact that builds a strong relationship between the students and their Meitheal Leaders which therefore creates a safer and more caring environment in our schools. **This is the biggest action of them all.**

In conclusion, the actions taken by Meitheal Groups have helped the younger students integrate into their new school, a school where they will soon be role models to others.

Through various types of actions Meitheal Groups have created space for friendships to form, for confidence to grow and to encourage all to participate. To achieve all of this the Meitheal Groups must devote a lot of their own time. Groups would meet once a week to plan, 'Evaluate' their work and assess their own skills. It is at these meetings where they decide on the actions they will carry out in the true Meitheal spirit.



# SKILLS LEARNED IN A MEITHEAL GROUP

- Meeting Skills
- Decision Making
- Listening Skills
- Teamwork
- To lend a helpful hand
- Communicating with hierarchy
- To tackle problems
- Patience, co-operation
- Planning Skills
- To stand up for ourselves and others
- Being aware of inclusion and exclusion
- More diplomatic
- Effort and hard work
- More responsible
- Leadership
- Delegation and organising
- Reflection and evaluation

# **EXPERIENCE OF A MEITHEAL GROUP**

- **PROBLEM SOLVING**
- **CONFIDENCE BUILDING**
- **WORKING WITHIN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM**
- **DEALING WITH FAILURE AND SUCCESS**
- **WORKING WITH CONFLICT – ACHIEVING AN ACTION RATHER THAN DOING NOTHING**
- **WORKING WITHIN A GROUP – GAINING A FOUNDATION IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

# **A Meitheal Term**

- **Approach school**
- **Launch programme**
- **Interviews**
- **Summer training**
- **Work in school**
- **Further training weekends**
- **Achievements night**

## **COMMENTS FROM STUDENTS AT THE END OF TRAINING**

“I think the entire programme is unbelievable. The strength and energy of the leaders is inspirational. I have never enjoyed a week as much in my life. The organisation is perfect and I love that we are not told what is happening next – it adds to the entire atmosphere!! The spirit that has formed within our entire group will last and that is a rare thing to have. Thank you for everything – you are stars!”

“At first I was very nervous but the leaders really helped me enjoy myself and feel relaxed. I just loved it, I thought I wouldn’t but I really did. Great place to meet friends and I got to know my group really well. Thanks for everything. Really, really enjoyed myself.”

“I had a fabulous time and really appreciated what the week has done for me. I have learnt great new skills which will not only benefit me (us) in the next year but all through my life. I don’t believe that I would have the honour of being chairperson without having learnt these new skills. I can’t wait to come back for the training, would like to take this opportunity to thank you all and promise to store the memories forever.”

“I had an absolutely brilliant time here in Meitheal and I wouldn’t have changed anything on the Meitheal Programme. The thing that made the experience so exciting was the high spirits of the leaders. They were all so brilliant and really, really nice. I just can’t describe how much fun I had here and how much I learnt!! I loved all the games and exercises and keep up the good work everyone. I hope to come back here in a couple of years to become part of the Meitheal family as a leader!! Thanks for everything.”

“I had a brilliant week. No bad comments to make at all. Everyone is so friendly, happy, helpful and pleasant. Thanks a million for helping me see that I must think about myself and what I hope to achieve in this. The Liturgies and Thought for the Day were great for that. It was brilliant craic, I would advise anyone unsure about going to go as it was a wonderful chance to meet new friends and at the end of it all I’m going home knowing that I’ve learnt things that are going to be of great value to me in the future!! If I get the chance I would like to do anything to come back as a leader as it would be lovely to be looked up to as much as I have looked up to my leaders this week. Thanks a million for the great week, keep up the good work.”

“It was an absolutely brilliant week!! Everything will always remind me of this week and so many memories that we’ve shared. Keep up the work I’ll always remember you all, for the encouragement and courage you gave me and the team to achieve our goals. I hope you had the time of your lives cause I have, it has been the best week of mine because of all your work.”

## **COMMENTS FROM STUDENTS AT THE END OF TRAINING**

'I really enjoyed my Meitheal experience. It really helped to get to know my friends better.'

'This was one of the best weeks of my life. It gave me a feeling of being accepted here'

'Excellent week, will never forget my experience'

'The unbelievably relaxing liturgies and thoughts for the day'

'We will make you proud'

'At first I was nervous coming here; the leaders made me feel happy and made me enjoy the course'

'Thanks for giving us great leadership'

'Probably the most enjoyable and enlightening experience ever'

'Can already say – the best week of my life'

'The discussions were helpful and really helped prepare us for September. They gave us a good foundation'

'It's tough going at times but you get through it. Our group sessions in our room brought the best out in us and we all pulled together'

'The week has given all members a great experience and has shown them the path to travel to become successful and motivated'

'Made I learn about leadership and teamwork, I feel I am a better person'

'I learned a lot about how to improve the students' school lives'

'The leaders were brilliant, it's great the way they always have a positive attitude and they are always encouraging you'

'All the craic I had and the amount I have learned is unnatural and I am so much closer to my group'

'It's a privilege and an elite honour to have been chosen to take part in Meitheal'

'The liturgies were really helpful, they gave us a chance to relax and reflect'

'It really gave everyone more confidence and allowed us all to open up and be ourselves without worrying what others thought of us'

'By the end of the week we are an excellent group and work well as a team'

'Best memory of the week was the commissioning ceremony and getting the badge'

## A STUDENT'S REFLECTION OF A MEITHEAL TRAINING WEEK

We began a journey apprehensive, afraid of what lay ahead.  
We huddled in our groups of ten anticipating what would be said.  
Afraid to break out we played games with an element of suspect.  
We linked together, a puzzled few, and went to bed quite wrecked.

Strange faces surrounded us all around the yard,  
Thinking each one that making friends would be hard,  
Midway through the day we saw this was not so,  
Forgetting about the act for a while, not putting up a show.

Being who we are was now within our grasp,  
It became a little easier to discard our old mask,  
We saw it was okay to be ourselves, we saw that we were worthy,  
We realized when leaving this place, it would not be in a hurry.

We awoke to music and travelled on, experiencing a Meitheal spirit,  
We had a little crash along the way but regained our group and received our true merit,  
We pondered on the reason, why we were here, so different and unique,  
Each with a vision, we had a meeting on what a group should seek.

We stopped to have a look around and carefully listen,  
Strong feelings evident, we shared our stories and understood when eyes began to glisten,  
We played our games and entertained and even sang a song or two,  
We all began to see how everyone has a special flare, a gift to share, just like me and you.

No going back, we battled on, but this time to something new,  
We travelled down a road less travelled – planned some action of what we could do,  
As a group we reached decisions of what came next,  
We remembered the Meitheal spirit and figured out our own ideas with a little bit of zest.

And just before we leave, we have one final thought;  
One final message sealed with hope,  
That you have found what you truly sought.

**Act justly,  
Love tenderly and  
Walk humbly with your God.**