

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2026

**Subject: Advent Youth Retreat**

Dear Parent/ Carer,

Following the success of our 2025 Advent Youth Retreat which saw 29 young people from across the Diocese taking part in a weekend of: prayer, reflections, outdoor activities, and lots of time to spend with friends, and to make new friends too I am writing to invite your child to take part in our 2026 Retreat. This year's retreat will take place from 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> November at Gowanbank SU Centre, just outside of Darvel.

**When is it?**

The retreat will run from Friday evening, with arrival at the centre possible from 5.00 pm. It will then conclude at 4.00 pm on the Sunday afternoon.

**What is it?**

Over the weekend young people will take part in a wide range of activities, intended to help them to get to know one and other, and to encounter God through the various spiritual opportunities:

- Outdoor Activities – including tree climbing, archery tag, archery and more – this will fill much of the day on Saturday and be supervised by trained and certified instructors.
- Games and Activities – led by the Youth Office team such as icebreakers and favourites from our other events.
- Prayer and Reflection – including talks and witness from various speakers.
- Mass – on Saturday and Sunday, drawing on the themes of the talks and reflections.
- Time to relax and socialise – the centre has extensive facilities for games and break out rooms to sit and chat with friends and relax.

The aim of the retreat is to give young people an opportunity to grow in faith, relax, enjoy a weekend together, and to have fun. We're very conscious however of the demands placed on young people today and so the majority of the time will be spent in activities and with time to relax.

**How much does it cost?**

The weekend costs £160 and is all inclusive so there won't be any additional costs beyond this, there is also an **early-bird rate of £140** being offered for any young people registered before Easter. This includes: transport from Kilmarnock/ Dumfries, food, accommodation, activities, and any other costs for the weekend. When registering, you will be asked to pay a £50 non-refundable deposit, with a further £50 due in June, and the final £40 due in October. To ensure all young people who wish to take part can we also have bursaries available – please contact us for details.

*If you have more than one child wishing to participate please get in touch – we are happy to provide financial help to support all children in participating and would not want any one family to be disadvantaged by having multiple children attending.*

**Who will be supervising?**

The weekend will be led by Margaret McGrath and myself supported by other members of the Youth Office team. Overnight, there will be five leaders on site with this number rising to up to nine during the day, in addition to the Gowanbank instructors and staff on site during the day. All of our leaders are PVG checked and safeguarding trained to ensure the safety and security of all of the young people involved.

**Who can take part? Who will they be with?**

The weekend is open to all young people in P7-S4.

- During the day – young people will be split into groups around friends, age and region to encourage them to get to know other young people and building friendships within their area.
- Overnight – young people will be accommodated in rooms of between 4 & 7 shared with friends and others of the same or similar age (within one year group above/ below).

In the Autumn, we'll send a questionnaire out to parents which, as well as asking for necessary medical and emergency contact information, will also ask who your child would like to share a room with to ensure that they are with at least one friend they know already.

When we're not doing activities (in the evenings and during any other downtime) young people will be asked to remain in the communal areas. Gowanbank has a range of indoor and outdoor spaces to allow young people to relax and socialise. We're keen that the retreat is an opportunity for them to meet others and to make new friends, and so we wouldn't expect any young people to be staying in their rooms during the day.

**Where is it? How will we get there?**

The centre is located on the Darvel Road, just outside of Darvel itself about a 15-20 minute drive from Kilmarnock. You're welcome to drop off your child at the centre if you want to see it for yourself, or alternatively, we will be providing free transport from St Joseph's Church (Kilmarnock) and St Teresa's Church (Dumfries).

**I'd like to chat to one of the Youth Office team to find out more and to meet the team.**

We run Youth Evenings for young people in P6-S4 throughout the year, our next evenings take place on Sunday 15th February, and you can speak to Margaret or myself at the evenings in Dumfries and Ayr. In March, our Youth Evenings take place on Sunday 15th March and Margaret and myself will be in Kilmarnock and Ardrossan.

**Where can I see details about the centre itself?**

You can see pictures and videos of the centre on their website, just search for 'SU Scotland Gowanbank' online. Please note that whilst the centre capacity is 48 we will only be taking a maximum of 40 young people.

**What does my child have to bring with them?**

We will provide a suggested packing list closer to the Retreat, however we would recommend warm clothes for the outdoor activities during the day. In the evenings, they're welcome to wear their usual weekend clothes.

**Can my child bring their mobile phone?**

We recognise that for some young people, they may not have done activities like these before and will want to take pictures, as well as wanting to keep in touch with parents at home. Your child is permitted to bring their phone with them, but in keeping with the purpose of the retreat they will be asked to use it in the public spaces where our leaders are. While young people may use their phones in their rooms, they can only do so as long as those they're sharing with are comfortable – if there is any suggestion of phones being misused, we reserve the right to take the young person's phone off them, at which point we would also notify yourself,

and return it to them either during or at the end of the retreat at our discretion. Young people should not bring larger electronic devices (tablets etc.)

We will have a group phone available which your child can use to call home if required and so there is no requirement or expectation for your child to bring a phone with them.

**Is there WiFi available?**

Wifi is not available on the retreat.

**My child requires medication, what support is available for them?**

We are conscious that some of the young people participating in our events may have varying medical needs. Margaret McGrath is a fully certified First Aider and, should your child have any medical needs, she will contact you directly to discuss these. In Autumn, we will send a questionnaire to parents/ carers to establish any medical needs, and, where there are any, Margaret will speak to yourself to ensure we put in place a suitable care and support plan to facilitate your child's involvement.

**Code of Conduct**

All young people participating in our events are expected to adhere to our code of conduct, this explains what we expect of them, and also the disciplinary procedures we will follow in the event of any incidents. The code of conduct can be downloaded from our website.

**I'd like to register my child to take part.**

We'd be delighted to welcome your child along. To register, please go to our website: [youth.rcdg.org.uk](http://youth.rcdg.org.uk) and click 'Advent Youth Retreat' (under 'Youth (P6-S4)').

If you have any questions, please feel free to be in touch. I look forward to welcoming your child to one of our events soon.

God bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Rennie', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Fr Kevin Rennie

Youth Chaplain  
RC Diocese of Galloway