

A cyclist wearing a grey hoodie, grey pants, a black helmet, and sunglasses is riding a blue road bike on a wet asphalt road. The road is wet and reflects the surrounding greenery. To the right of the road is a wooden fence and a grassy field. In the background, there are bare trees and a building. The overall scene is a rural landscape in Ireland.

# STANDING OUT IN IRELAND



*Evan K. is the only member of the Church in his school—but he's never alone.*

**By David Dickson**  
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**EVER HEARD THE** saying “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence”? Fifteen-year-old Evan K. of Ireland probably won’t be saying that anytime soon. “Our grass is very green!” he says.

There’s a good reason that Ireland is sometimes referred to as “The Emerald Isle.”

“It’s beautiful here,” Evan says. He also makes the most of that beauty, often while riding his bicycle. “I love going for cycles down some of the many quiet roads around us.”

Emerald green grass and other natural beauties are all around him. What’s in short supply, however, are other members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints his own age. Evan and his younger sisters are the only members of the Church in their school.



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### The Odd One Out

In Ireland, many of the schools are religious schools. Evan and his sisters attend the local Catholic school along with the other youth who live in their part of Ireland.

When it comes to lifestyle choices, there are some definite areas where Evan stands out. “It’s difficult at times because everyone else swears,” he says. Swearing is quite common there, Evan explains. But there’s a part of Irish culture that Evan says can be an even bigger challenge.

“The lads like to meet up and go out for drinks,” he explains. “I’m always the odd one out.”

He’s talking about school friends his own age. Drinking alcohol at a young age is common where Evan lives. These social outings happen so frequently that Evan says he sometimes thinks of going

along so he’s not always left out. But each time, he stays home.

“I think, ‘What’s going to happen if I do go with them?’” he says. “I know that if I choose not to go, I’ll be blessed because of it. The blessings of keeping the commandments are far greater than the pain of being the odd one out.”

Evan relies on the Holy Ghost to help him through daily choices. In addition, he also has other sources of strength to draw on.

His Irish friends in the Church are only a text away.

### Online Friends and Daily Strength

Where Evan lives, because the youth in the Church are spread far and wide, they do a lot of virtual meetings. For one thing, they meet in seminary online.

“Weekly seminary is so good,” Evan

says. “Not only do we get to learn about Christ and the gospel while we’re doing seminary, but afterwards the teacher leaves the Zoom call open for us.”

In that open call, they get to hang out, joke, play games, and just *be friends* with others who share their same values. For Evan, some of his closest friendships have formed through these Church contacts.

One of those connections is his good friend Rob. “We find loads of things funny that are similar,” Evan says. “Rob will find something funny on social media that he knows I’ll like, and he’ll send it to me. Then we’ll text back and forth a bit. A few hours later, I’ll find something funny and send it to him.”

Pretty normal stuff, right? But these small interactions are a big help throughout the week. “It’s good because we can share each other’s laughs, but

there doesn't have to be any swearing or anything else involved." They can also text each other anytime they just need a little extra strength in the gospel.

## An Irish Get-Together

Even though the Latter-day Saint youth in Ireland are a bit spread out, they still try to get together physically throughout the year—sometimes involving youth from the entire country.

These activities have involved everything from service projects to renting inflatable sumo wrestling suits. "They're a lot of fun!" Evan says.

Occasionally at the end of the activities there will be a disco (a dance). These are very different from the school and community discos that take place nearby. For example, at a community disco, if a boy asks a girl to dance with him, it's almost like asking her on a date—or even to be his girlfriend. Again, it's just part of the culture there.

Things are different at the Church discos, however. There, Evan says, "we can ask someone to dance and they

wouldn't think we were asking them to be in a serious relationship with us. It's a lot better."

These get-togethers with other Church youth in Ireland have a lasting effect throughout the year. They continue their friendships by playing online games, sending texts and talking on the phone, and supporting each other until they can gather again in person.

## Growth and Gospel Light

Evan has a bit of advice for other youth in a situation like his. "If you feel like you're the only Church youth at your school, don't change your standards to try and fit in. If you swear, drink, or smoke to fit in, you'll miss out on a lot. The blessings are a lot better than the satisfaction of trying to fit in!"

And just in case you fear that Evan is lonely at school because he chooses to live differently, think again. He says that people are aware of his beliefs and respect him even though he's from a different religion. "I'm accepting of their beliefs, and they're accepting of mine,"

he explains. "I'm great friends with everyone at my school."

In the end, Evan might not be surrounded by Church youth on a day-to-day basis, yet he lets his gospel light shine all the same. Besides, who knows how many gospel seeds he's planting just by being such a good example? After all, things tend to grow just fine in Ireland! 🌱

## EVAN'S TESTIMONY

"I know that the Church is true. I know that Joseph Smith did translate the Book of Mormon—and Helaman is one of the best bits in all of it! Because I have faith, I know I can live again with Heavenly Father. I know that Jesus Christ will walk the earth again. And I know that if we do as Nephi says, if we go and do, we will be blessed."



*Evan loves spending time with his family, including going cycling together and singing hymns at home.*