

DIOCESE OF KILMORE

Tel: 049-4331496
Fax: 049 4361796
Email: bishop@kilmorediocese.ie
Website: www.kilmorediocese.ie

Bishop's House
Cullies
Cavan H12 P5W6
Co. Cavan

My Dear People,

I write to you with mixed feelings to share with you the news that Pope Francis has accepted my retirement as bishop of Kilmore on grounds of health and in the light of medical advice.

You are aware that, over the years, I have had frequent bouts of illness and hospitalization, but thank God for the medical care that I received and the support of colleagues, staff and many others that has enabled me to continue in my ministry relatively unimpeded up to now. Although I am some months short of the age at which bishops are obliged to submit a letter of resignation to the Holy Father, I have been conscious for some time that I am no longer physically or mentally equal to the task of a very demanding and sometimes stressful role. For that reason, earlier this year I wrote to his Holiness informing him of the medical advice I had received, and requesting permission to retire before reaching the normal retirement age. I am most grateful to the Holy Father for accepting my request and allowing me some months to complete a number of tasks that were still outstanding.

It is now twenty two years since I was appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Kilmore by Pope John Paul II on 12 November 1996. I was ordained bishop on 2 February 1997 and installed as Bishop of the diocese on 15 November 1998 upon the retirement of Bishop Francis MacKiernan. It has been a wonderful privilege to have served you, the people and the priests of Kilmore, during two very challenging decades in the life of the Church here in Ireland. It would not have been possible to do so without the generous co-operation I have received from the priests, deacons, religious and lay people of the diocese over the course of those years. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your generosity and encouragement and above all for the support of your prayers.

I thank especially those who worked most closely with me in Bishop's House and in the Diocesan Pastoral Centre. It has been a great pleasure and privilege to work with them and they have been extraordinarily diligent, understanding, patient and supportive throughout my ministry. I want to pay tribute and express my gratitude to the great number of volunteers who took on heavy responsibilities working on diocesan committees and who freely give their time and talents to the work of the Church in the diocese.

I want to express my gratitude also to our priests who have been at the coalface of ministry throughout these difficult decades. I want to thank the many priests who, in addition to their parish duties, took on roles in the administration of the diocese - the Vicars General past and present, the diocesan secretaries, the Vicars of the Deaneries and the Vicars Forane, those who served on a variety of committees including the Priests' Councils and the College of Consultors. Recent decades have been a particularly trying time for priests as they watched scandals unfold in the Church, saw congregations grow smaller and vocations to the priesthood decline. The rapid secularization of society, exemplified by the introduction of divorce, same sex marriage and abortion, has created an entirely new context for

preaching the Gospel and formidable challenges for those who preach it. I compliment our priests on their faith, their fortitude and their resilience in the face of these challenges. We are blessed in the diocese with an excellent team of dedicated priests, and this is something that visiting lecturers, retreat directors and others have frequently commented on and confirmed.

I have been blessed in having family members and close relatives who have always been a wonderful support and place of refuge for me. I have been fortunate in having many good friends over the years in whom I could confide and on whom I could depend. I owe them a great debt of gratitude and I thank them all for their love and care.

The College of Consultors plays an important role in advising the bishop, but an even more important role when the bishop retires. Within a matter of days the College will meet to choose an Administrator to govern the diocese while the Apostolic Nuncio begins the consultation to find a new bishop to lead the diocese into the future under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I wish the new Administrator every blessing in his demanding role. I have spoken of the great kindness, encouragement and support which I have received from you, the priests and people of the diocese. I know that you will be equally generous and supportive of the Diocesan Administrator and, in time, of your new Bishop.

It's time for me to take my leave. It has been a privilege to serve you as bishop for the past twenty years and as Coadjutor for two years prior to that. Being your bishop has been a great learning and enriching experience for me as I got to know so many people around the diocese and discovered the many different aspects and challenges of the ministry of a diocesan bishop. It has also been a sharp learning curve at national level where I was involved in several committees concerned with Catholic education both at primary and secondary levels and several bodies on which I served as a trustee.

As I prepare to retire I am conscious of the many things I failed to do, of many intentions that were never realized, but I'm grateful to God for giving me the strength and grace to do the things I did. I offer my apologies and ask forgiveness from anyone, priest, religious or lay, whom I have failed or hurt in the course of my ministry. I leave with a heart full of gratitude for the many blessings I have received from God, but especially for the people He has given me as colleagues and co-workers.

Tomorrow, Monday 31st December, I retire as your bishop from the many responsibilities that come with running a diocese. You will notice that my name will no longer be mentioned in the Eucharistic Prayer of each Mass celebrated in the diocese. From tomorrow I will be Bishop Emeritus of Kilmore. I thank God and I thank you for my time as bishop of Kilmore. I ask you to continue to remember me in your prayers and I will continue to remember you. May God bless you all.

Leo O'Reilly,
Bishop of Kilmore.

30 December 2018.