

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2014

One of the highlights of the past year in our diocese was the Kilmore Diocesan Assembly. It was held in St Patrick's College on 25th and 26th of October. That gathering brought together six lay delegates from every parish, the priests and deacons and the religious of the diocese, as well as representatives of all the apostolic groups working in the parishes. They were days of listening, reflection and discussion on a wide range of themes related to the mission of the Church in our diocese. The fruits of a two-year long process of listening in small groups around the diocese were shared with the delegates and added impetus and urgency to the discussions. Words of inspiration in a message from Pope Francis encouraged us to embrace the Gospel of Joy and be bold in sharing it, especially with those on the margins. The Diocesan Pastoral Council has now begun the task of drawing up a five-year Pastoral Plan based on the fruits of the discussions at the Assembly.

One of the most hopeful features of the Assembly was the strong representation of young people present. It is no surprise then that the most urgent call from the Assembly was for a new energy to be given to youth ministry in the diocese. This is timely in the light of the growing impact of the Pope John Paul II Award in recent years. Some weeks ago 33 young people received the 2014 awards for involvement in Church and community activities. The recipients each received a certificate and awards that ranged from bronze, silver and gold medals to the top award, the Papal Cross. The prospect of World Youth Day in Poland in summer 2016 will also provide a focus and a goal for youth activities in the years ahead. We hope that we can build on these initiatives in the future so that all our young people will have the opportunity to experience the joy of the Gospel in their lives and have the confidence to share the good news with others.

The ordination of our first permanent deacons was another highlight of 2014. Damian Kivlehan from Cootehill and Andy Brady from Crosserlough made history on 5th of October when they were ordained in the Cathedral of St Patrick and St Felim in the presence of their wives and families and a large congregation from the parish and the diocese. Andy has now taken up his diaconate ministry in Cavan and Damian in Bailieborough. I wish them both happiness and fulfilment in their ministry.

Another good news story this year concerns Fr Rafal Siwek, the young priest in Cavan who has been on loan to the diocese for the past six years from his native Poland. Fr Rafal came at our invitation to provide

ministry and pastoral care for the member's Polish community and others from Eastern Europe in our diocese. He now speaks English fluently and can manage the cúpla focal in Irish as well as most of us. He is known to everyone in Cavan and in several other towns where he ministers and greatly loved and respected by all.

The good news is that Fr Rafal has decided to join our diocese permanently. His bishop, Bishop Janiak of Kalisz, agreed to release him and he has now been officially incardinated as a priest of the diocese of Kilmore. I want to take this opportunity of welcoming Fr Rafal into the diocese, of thanking him for joining us and for all the work he has already done here. I thank his bishop for his generosity in releasing him to work here and I wish Fr Rafal many years of happy and fruitful ministry among us. Céad míle fáilte romhat, a Rafal. I wish you a long and happy ministry in the diocese of Kilmore.

Christmas is almost upon us once more. I hope we can find time these days to reflect on the heart of the Christmas message - that God became man; the Word became flesh and lived among us. He shared our life in order to give us a share in his life. He came among us as a weak and vulnerable child. He was born in a shed. As we remember his birth this year, we cannot but remember also those who are poor, vulnerable and homeless. As sharers in Christ life we are also sharers in his mission to bring good news to the poor.

I wish you all a peaceful and joyful Christmas.

**+Leo O'Reilly,
Bishop of Kilmore**