

ARCHDIOCESE OF CASHEL & EMLY

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LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF CASHEL AND EMLY.

Dear Friends,

We have recently celebrated a number of important Feasts in the Church - Pentecost, Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi. The readings at mass for these feasts told us of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early Christian communities. Now, we the disciples of our time journeying under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit, are planning and organising the pastoral life of our diocese. Planning to ensure that we and future generations will always celebrate these feasts in the life of the church with joy and thanksgiving on into the future.

Since the lifting of the pandemic restrictions parishioners are returning to regular Church life, in particular, the Sunday Eucharist, which is the centre of parish worship. The Sunday Eucharist is, and always will be, the main focus for our parish life.

The Diocesan plan, "**Seeds of Hope**", was launched in September 2021, on the Feast of St. Ailbe, in Holy Cross Abbey. Many of you will recall that before we launched "Seeds of Hope" we had several years of listening and gathering to share our experience of Church life in the here and now while also sharing our hopes and dreams for the church in our diocese.

I am writing this letter to highlight the present reality regarding the number of priests ministering in the Archdiocese today. Currently, we are blessed with 68 diocesan priests ministering in the diocese including associate priests, they are also assisted by other priests living in the diocese. It is clear that this staffing level will not continue. As with the other dioceses in Ireland we are moving into a new way of being church in our country. This new way will in fact, open new possibilities of participation for members of our faith communities.

It is standard practice in the church worldwide that when a priest reaches seventy-five years of age that he requests to step aside from full time ministry. A significant number of priests will be over seventy-five years of age in the coming years - over the next five years a further sixteen priests will reach the age of 75 and, at that time, there will also be a maximum of 35 priests under the age of seventy-five. The current average age of priests in the diocese is 67 years. It is a matter of importance to me and to you that all our priests, whatever their age, are valued and cared for.

Presently, the diocese has one candidate for the priesthood in the major seminary. I ask you to continue to pray for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and religious life in our diocese and the church in Ireland.

Faced with this reality I must tell you that change is coming soon in how we organise parish life in the Archdiocese. These changes will concern all parishes and the way in which pastoral ministry is undertaken in the future. Future organisation will call for the formation of different pastoral units – encompassing several parishes functioning together to serve the pastoral needs of their communities. The organisation of these units will involve priests and lay people working together in a spirit of co-responsibility. The formation of Parish Pastoral Teams in parishes, now underway, is central to the implementation of our plans for the future.

One important aspect of this development will be the rearranging of mass times, in particular Sunday mass times. In the new arrangements the celebration of masses will be organised in coordination with other parishes.

I am sure as a people of faith, we will face these challenges with hope and courage under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, searching out together God's plan for us in our Archdiocese as missionary disciples of the Risen Lord. It will call from each and all of us an openness to change as we face and plan our church life for the future.

Hand in hand with the reorganisation of parishes, the Archdiocese has begun the process of training pastoral workers - women and men who will be an important part of the pastoral life of the diocese in the future - encouraging parishioners with different gifts to place them at the service of the parish communities to which they will be attached.

The model of church that we have known is being replaced by a new reality. In future, it will be essential to have lay people more involved and engaged with their priests and with one another in building witnessing communities of faith.

I invite you over the coming weeks to engage in the discussions about future pastoral units in our diocese, together, we pray to the Holy Spirit to guide us on our journey of discernment.

It is planned that the Archdiocese will inaugurate these new pastoral units at the beginning of Advent 2022.

We ask Mary our mother to journey with us as she journeyed with the first disciples. May the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ keep all of us and our families safe in these challenging times as we continue to proclaim the Good News of hope and salvation to our world.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Kieran O'Reilly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

+ Kieran O'Reilly

July 20th, 2022