



*“That you may have life
And have it to the full”*

*A Pastoral Letter
from
Bishop Kieran O'Reilly SMA*

October 2011



YOUR WORD IS TRUTH
John 17:17

“THAT YOU MAY HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT TO THE FULL...”
JOHN 10:10

Dear Friends,

On the occasion of the first anniversary of my ordination as bishop of Killaloe, I take the opportunity to write this letter to you, the people of the Diocese of Killaloe. The past year has been a new, very interesting and exciting part of my life. Coming from a Missionary Society I have, for the most part, lived my priestly ministry outside of Ireland.

The past year has been a time of getting to know the people of the Diocese - visiting parish communities the length and breadth of the diocese, engaging in many conversations with the priests, individuals and groups - hearing people's concerns and anxieties as well as their hopes for the future.

Our Diocese

During my pastoral visits I have seen signs of grace and hope but also a keen awareness of the challenges we face as Church at this particular moment in our history.

Over the past year a number of events highlight for me the vibrancy and life in the Church in the Diocese:

The wonderful ordination ceremony in the Cathedral in Ennis, on Sunday August 29th 2010, was a celebration full of colour and hope, drawing together the many people with different talents and gifts from within the diocese and also from the different cultural communities that now form part of our Church in the diocese.



Visitation of parishes and the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation have given me an insight into the makeup of the parishes. Meeting with active and committed Parish Pastoral Councils, Finance Committees, Apostolic Work groups and others supporting parish life. I noted how much women contribute to the life of the parishes.

To all involved in parish life I want you to know that your involvement and work in so many different ways, but especially, in preparing children and young adults for the sacraments and organising liturgies, is valued and appreciated.

I have heard it said, when I am present in a parish for Confirmation, that many of those receiving the sacrament may not be in the Church again for some time. This “flight” from the Church is a challenge to our faith communities. This fact

challenges us to raise questions about how the formation of our young people and their parents can be developed and improved.

Coupled with this reality is the obvious decline in numbers now coming to Church on a regular basis. Recent Diocesan Statistics show a decline in attendance at Sunday Liturgies. This is a situation that calls for discussion and reflection over the coming months.

Visitation of the primary schools throughout the Diocese and meeting with the children and the various groups associated with our School system – Teachers, Principals, Boards of management and other parent volunteer groups and workers in the education system has been a positive experience for me. It is wonderful to see the children happy in their school environment and to note the commitment and dedication of so many to ensure this.



In June of this year, I accompanied the Diocesan Pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, in France. The Pilgrims - the sick, the young helpers, the medical volunteers, the choirs and the able bodied, together formed a great Diocesan presence in this most loved of Marian shrines. It was a great experience getting to know the young men and women who act as volunteers to assist the invalids. The afternoon trek to a small village, near Lourdes, where St. Bernadette stayed on two occasions during her youth, with the young volunteers, was one of the high points for me personally.

The Diocese was blessed with the ordination of two new priests this year. The commitment of the two young men to the service of the Gospel in the priesthood is a sign of hope for the Church in the Diocese.

I also noted that a further positive aspect of many parishes are the groups who meet for Lectio Divina and Eucharistic Adoration and the other prayer groups active in the Diocese.



My recent visit to the priests of the Diocese working on Mission in Peru and Ecuador and meeting there also the Religious Sisters of different Institutes from the Diocese, highlighted the important missionary links that the diocese has built up over many years, building bonds of friendship with communities in the Diocese and communities in these two countries. We can indeed be rightly proud of our missionaries.

Our Country

The most dramatic feature of Ireland that I have noticed is the growing spectre of unemployment and emigration facing many people, especially the young and the newly qualified who may now have



to build their lives elsewhere. This is a great loss to the country but also to the families and communities that they leave behind. Time and again I ask myself, is the country about to lose a generation of young and not so young gifted people as we did in the past?

We read and hear daily reports of what the cuts in public spending mean to many people struggling to meet their financial commitments, of how the sick, the handicapped, the elderly, the unemployed and the low paid seem to be the people to suffer most from these cuts. One outcome of this is the increasing number of marginalised people.

Many families have financial commitments that they can no longer honour because of the economic situation, this is putting serious strain on families, and is a crisis that calls for a just resolution in the interest of the well being of our society. Hopefully, a strengthening of family ties and community solidarity will be an important factor in assisting people in such situations.



The Catholic Church in Ireland is facing many challenges on its pilgrim journey.

In recent years members of the Church have been traumatised, discouraged and dismayed by the revelations in the Reports into how abuse allegations were processed and handled by the leadership of the Church in Ireland. This has contributed to many choosing to exit from the Church.

Following the publication of the Cloyne report I circulated a statement to the people of the Diocese in which I stated that the Diocese of Killaloe has complied fully with all the requirements in relation to child protection. I would like to assure you that this will continue - observing the agreed code of conduct concerning the reporting of all allegations of abuse to the relevant authorities.

I am grateful to the many hundreds of women and men who are working in the Diocese on different committees and as child protection personnel at all levels - ensuring best practices are followed in all areas of Child protection.



Invitation to reflection

In this letter, I am sharing with you some of my thoughts and reflections on the past year, so, also I invite you to reflect individually and in groups on the past year in your lives. I would like to invite Pastoral Councils, various groups in the parish to gather and reflect, to read this letter and let it become a starting point for discussing important

aspects of church life and what is happening in our church and country.

A process of Reflecting, Listening and Conversing together about present Church and Society Realities – the issues and the challenges - and how we move into the future together will get underway in the diocese over the coming weeks.

It is planned to hold a “conversation” among those interested and committed to the Church. A further challenge in this process is to reach out and listen to those who have left the Church to give them a voice, to hold an “inclusive conversation”. It is important that we reach out to our young people to hear their views.

Over the coming weeks you will receive further information about this conversation. I invite you to begin the process through reflecting on what have been for you the significant events in the religious, political and economic areas that have affected your life and faith over the past year. Equally, to reflect and share what has been for you moments of grace and hope.

In doing so, I pray that this conversation will take place in a spirit of hope and confidence as we journey together towards the future. We are a people of hope, we do not remain at the Cross but rejoice in the Resurrection of Our saviour and the promises it brings.



Pastoral Areas - Clustering

The organisation of the Diocese into pastoral areas – Clusters – has now become an essential feature of our diocese. Many challenges lie ahead to develop this aspect of our Church life. The future is very much about working together. This new arrangement calls us to new ways of being Church involving Priests and laity, parishes and clusters working together - sharing gifts and talents, resources and programmes.

A further aspect of clustering relates to the care of the priests at all stages of their ministry. There will be fewer priests in the future and it is important that those in ministry have the support that they will need to carry out their ministry.

Many Religious Sisters and brothers offer invaluable service and ministries in many parishes. I hope that the Religious engaged in our parishes and Diocesan programmes will continue to be an integral part of our planning for the future.

A recent feature of pastoral life is the emerging role of the Pastoral Worker, a role that has produced positive results in one of the pastoral areas of the Diocese and offers scope for further development over time.

More members of the community will be called to share their talents and gifts with their communities and become co-responsible for the local church.



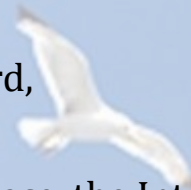
The call to proclaim the Risen Lord



The challenges before us in these times are many but the most important challenge remains our commitment to preach and live the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the mission given to each generation of Christians - to live the Good News as handed on to us through our Church, our families - our parents, grandparents, neighbours and friends - that it may become the centre of our lives and communities.

I have been asked, on a number of occasions, what is my vision for the Church in Killaloe. I give below some aspects of what I consider important elements of that vision:

1. On our pilgrim journey of faith we form communities striving to become more committed to the Word of God. We commit to deepen our knowledge of the Word so that we may nourish our lives of faith and serve our communities.
2. Our faith communities, nourished on the Word, become Spirit filled praying communities committed to a credible witness to Justice, Peace, the Integrity of Creation seeking out opportunities to be missionary and become bearers of the Good News to our world.



It is together that we will build our common vision for the Church in our Diocese over the coming months and years, this is an exciting invitation, and we embark on the journey under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

There is one central statement that sums up what the coming of Jesus Christ means, it is found in the Gospel of St. John **“I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full”** (10:10). To bring the fullness of life to each one, in particular the weakest, was the mission that the Lord handed on to the disciples and which in turn is handed on to us. We are called to live the present moment as a gift and to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of God that Jesus established.

My thanks to all who extended a warm welcome to me in my first year in the Diocese.

With trust in God’s abiding love, together we continue on our Pilgrim journey of faith and reflection under the protection of Muire na nGael.

+ Kieran
Bishop of Killaloe

