

ARCHDIOCESE OF CASHEL & EMLY

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To the people of God in the Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly

Dear Friends,

I write to you all at a very difficult moment in time for our country.

Firstly, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought death, pain and suffering to many families in our Diocese and country. I wish to express my deep sadness and solidarity with all those affected by the Pandemic. We have also seen the courage, dedication and superhuman efforts of the frontline staff in nursing homes, hospitals, the public services, and, indeed, in every parish throughout our Diocese. What amazing lessons of *Christianity-in-action* we have seen and what an example these workers have set us, and especially for our children and young people. I pledge, and I ask you humbly to join me, to continue to pray daily both for all those affected by the virus but also to pray for continued health and strength for all frontline staff. I encourage all parishioners throughout the Diocese to keep regular contact, in the safest ways possible, (e.g. phone, social media) with those who live alone or with those who might be vulnerable in any way to the virus or to loneliness or depression.

Secondly, the publication of the report on *Mother and Baby homes* has saddened me greatly. The abuse and lifelong suffering inflicted on innocent mothers and children by many of those in authority at that time, including church leadership, was the total antithesis of the faith we claim to profess. It must be acknowledged that there were quite a large number of families and individual members of the clergy and religious who railed against the status-quo of the time, thereby ensuring that families remained together. I readily acknowledge that the practices outlined in this welcome report supporting the status-quo of the time, have blighted the lives of many fragile and innocent people in our communities.

Our response in the Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly must be to listen to, and really hear, the stories of the women and children in our Diocese who suffered, and are still suffering the effects of their childhood and young lives. I wish to offer a personal listening ear to any person who wishes to tell me their story. We will offer supportive services if they are required. I would ask that all Catholics throughout the Diocese would also listen compassionately to any person who wishes to tell you their story.

As you are aware, we, the people of the Diocese, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Council of Priests and myself, have been engaged over the past number of years in '*reimagining what the church in Cashel and Emly could become*'. This process continues and the present

pandemic notwithstanding, we will move ahead with our plans for the Diocese in the coming months.

The report on 'Mother and baby homes' reminds all of us that, working together, we must create a Church in our diocese which truly listens to, and respects, womanhood; a church which promotes a full and deep engagement with the voices of women; and which listens, and acts upon, equally, to the care, concerns, hopes and joys of both women and men in our Diocese. I pledge to do all that I can to ensure this happens through clear leadership in this regard.

This week 18th- 25th January, we celebrate in our churches the week of Prayer for Christian Unity. In the popular hymn "They will know we are Christians by our love" we express the central desire in our hearts that we are called by our Lord to bear witness together to his abiding love in our world. That love is needed now more than ever in our response to the pandemic, the listening and care for those who have come through "the world" of the Mother and Baby homes. We carry out our mission in cooperation with our fellow Christian sisters and brothers.

We are called to bear common witness to the unity that our Saviour desired and to working together to build a world where all can flourish. The simple actions I am encouraging in this letter both with regard to Covid 19, and to the Report on Mother and Baby homes, should be seen as merely scratching the surface in response to those who are suffering in any way in our Diocese. Each one of us needs to decide to show that we are Christians by how we respond to those who are in need of any kind. It's not an optional extra of being a member of the Church; it is an essential part of being Church in the world today.

May the Blessed Trinity, Mary, our Mother and St. Ailbe be with us and protect us.

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+ Kieran O'Reilly

20th January 2021