

Bishop John McAreavey announces his intention to take a temporary break from administering the diocese of Dromore

• Statement given at a pastoral conference of the clergy of the diocese at Dromantine Retreat and Conference Centre, Newry, County Down, Diocese of Dromore 12 November 2012

As I enter the fourteenth year of my ministry as Bishop of Dromore I have decided to take a period of sabbatical leave from early February until September 2013.

During this period I plan to spend time in prayer and study in the Holy Land. While there, I shall follow courses on the Sacred Scriptures. I look forward to this time as a period of spiritual and personal renewal, which will enable me to fulfill the ministry of bishop with greater energy in the years ahead.

The years since my ordination as bishop in September 1999 have been both fulfilling and challenging. In recent times, along with my family, I have' experienced great sadness and tragedy. Having consulted with colleagues and friends, I have now decided to undertake this period of personal renewal.

Today I am making my intention publicly known in order to be able to plan appropriately for the period of my absence, and also as a courtesy to the priests, religious and faithful of Dromore diocese.

I have informed the Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Charles Brown, and, through him, Cardinal Ouellet, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops. I have also spoken to Cardinal Sean Brady and other bishops. They have given me their support and encouragement for my decision.

Monsignor Aidan Hamill, the Vicar General of the diocese, will administer the diocese during my absence. I thank him for this. The consultative bodies that support me in the administration of the diocese will support Monsignor Hamill: these include the Council of Priests, the diocesan finance council and the committees that relate to child safeguarding. The diocesan office in Newry will remain open and staffed as normal.

I have asked the members of the diocesan Chapter (the canons) to confer the Sacrament of Confirmation in 2013. The schedule of dates agreed for confirmation next year will remain as planned.

I ask the faithful for their prayerful support at this time. I am deeply grateful for the love and care that they have always shown me. I look forward to this time of prayer, study and renewal and to returning to continue my ministry as Bishop of Dromore in September 2013.

+ John McAreavey, Bishop of Dromore