



29th August 2013

Bishop John McAreavey returns to the diocese of Dromore

Return to diocese

In February I began a period of sabbatical leave from my role as Bishop of Dromore. I returned to the Diocese a few weeks ago and I have now resumed my full range of duties as Bishop.

I want to thank all those who helped to make it possible for me to take this time of renewal and refreshment. In particular, I want to thank Mons Aidan Hamill, Vicar General of the diocese, who administered the diocese during my absence. I am grateful to the priests on the diocesan chapter who officiated at confirmation in the spring of 2013 and others, priests and laypeople, who continued to carry out their various roles with the usual commitment and care.

When I made my announcement in November 2012 about taking a sabbatical, I spoke of my

intention to spend time in the Holy Land. In the event, I spent nearly three months there. I am indebted to Benedictine communities in the Holy Land that made that possible: one in Abu Ghosh, an Arab town near Jerusalem, one at Tabgha on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem.

Following the period in the Holy Land, I flew to China where I was a guest of the Columban Fathers for a month. I stayed with them in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Wuhan and Beijing. This gave me an opportunity to experience life in modern China, as well as to see at first hand the vitality of the Church and the obstacles it faces.

I spent the final part of my sabbatical in the parish of St Bernardine of Siena in the archdiocese of Los Angeles. There I was able to experience the demands and energy of a parish in USA.

I returned to Ireland at the end of July and have been preparing for challenges of the diocese of Dromore and the Irish Church in general.

I am delighted to be back in Ireland and in Dromore. The experience of sabbatical has refreshed me physically, emotionally and spiritually. I have not come back with any ready-made solutions to the difficulties that confront the Church life in Ireland or Dromore. However I feel better equipped to face them.

#### Pastoral plan for the future

Among the challenges facing me in the diocese, one that is particularly important to me is the support and care of the priests in the diocese who carry heavy pastoral burdens. With that in mind, I plan to meet each priest of the diocese individually during the month of September.

In October 2012 the priests of the diocese met for a special two-day conference in Drumalis. At that meeting we took stock of the personnel resources of the diocese and the major pastoral needs that face us. Among these three issues were identified: a) the ongoing sharing of ministry between our priests and people at parish level, b) adult faith development of our parishioners and c) the pastoral care of the sick in our hospitals. I am determined to continue to work with

our priests and people in addressing these priorities.

The opportunity to take time off on sabbatical has been an important grace for me. I see it now as the beginning of a new phase of my ministry as Bishop. I pray that it will prove to be not only a grace for me personally but also for the whole diocese.

29th August 2013