



Dear Priests and Parishioners in the Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly.

Greetings in the Lord Jesus to you and your families as we enter into the Advent Season..

I write to inform you that on the 1st Sunday of Advent this year, December 1st (next Sunday)– the beginning of the New Church Year, the diocese will launch a new ministry. This is a **Lay-Led Funeral Ministry** that will work in association with the priests of the diocese and is a ministry of consolation and accompaniment to the bereaved. It will involve the celebration of funeral rites – involving leading prayers in the family home/funeral home, receiving the departed into the church and conducting the rites of commendation and committal.

In the account in St. Luke's Gospel (Ch. 24) of the disciples on the road to Emmaus we read how the two disciples travelled with heavy hearts away from Jerusalem filled with grief, after they had witnessed the death of their friend and leader – Jesus. Then Jesus draws into their company on the road and through his presence and words brings consolation and new hope to their lives. This is the aim of this new ministry where members of the community would be trained and prepared to lead the funeral rites in their parish bringing the gift of spiritual companionship to the bereaved.

Within our funeral traditions in Ireland the ministry of accompaniment at funerals has been celebrated at an informal and neighbourly way. The support of friends and neighbours at the time of bereavement is a great consolation to those who are mourning the loss of a loved one. This informal and important accompaniment is now being extended more formally to the funeral rites in our parish communities and churches.

In preparation for this new departure, groups in a number of Parish Pastoral Combinations have been undergoing training with a view to participating in this important and sensitive ministry. I thank all who are partaking in this new ministry and those who have prepared and given the courses. Further training is planned in the other Parish Pastoral Combinations in the coming months.

May I wish all a Blessed and Hope-filled Advent season as we prepare for the birth of Emmanuel – God with us.

Yours sincerely,

Most Rev. Kieran O'Reilly, DD,

Archbishop of Cashel & Emly.

