**Statement of Bishop Tom Deenihan,**

**Bishop of Meath,**

**Chair of the Council for Education of the Irish Bishops Conference**

**and**

**Chair of the Catholic Education Service (CES)**

**On the appointment of Rev. Dr. Paul Connell as**

**Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise.**

**April 5th 2023.**

I warmly welcome the appointment of Father Paul Connell by Pope Francis as Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise today.

Father Paul has the experience, the ability, the dedication and the faith to undertake this important appointment at this time.

Father Paul has served the Diocese of Meath willingly, totally and loyally in several roles since his ordination in 1982. He will be remembered in this Diocese particularly for his time as President of the Diocesan College, Saint Finians, in Mullingar. His leadership there was visionary and he steered the development of the Diocesan Boarding School into a vibrant and successful co-educational post-primary school. Just recently, he has been leading an ambitious though necessary expansion programme there to cater for a growing local need.

In more recent times, he undertook, within the Diocese, the role of Diocesan Chancellor. I very much appreciated his support, advice and work in that role and my congratulations are tinged with personal regret at his loss to the Diocese of Meath. I will very much miss his judgement, loyalty and commitment.

Fr. Paul also has that generosity of spirit and, despite his punishing work schedule, has also undertaken the role of Administrator of Multyfarnham parish and acts as chaplain to Saint Mary’s Hospital in Mullingar where he has offered Mass each Sunday for the residents over many years.

He has a keen interest in local and church history, obtaining his Doctorate from the NUI Maynooth for his work on Bishop John Cantwell (1830-1866). That local knowledge and expertise will be a loss to the Diocese of Meath also.

Fr. Paul has spent his life in the service of Education. In more recent years, he has served as Secretary to the Council for Education of the Irish Bishops Conference and as Secretary to the Catholic Education Service. In those roles also, as Chair, I very much appreciated Fr. Paul’s knowledge, support, wisdom and work ethic. He has been very much involved in the negotiations in relation to the divesting of Catholic Primary Schools and in discussions on policy and partnerships with Education Training Boards and Catholic Trustees in relation to Community Schools and Designated Community Colleges. He is also a Director of the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) and a Director and former President of the Secretariat of Secondary Schools (AMCSS/ JMB).

While his appointment as Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise means that the Diocese of Meath will be without his presence and expertise, it is to be welcomed that his knowledge and experience will continue to be available to the Council for Education of the Irish Episcopal Conference and to catholic education in general.

From working with Fr Paul in his role as Diocesan Chancellor for the past four years, I know him to be a man that is ‘synodal’ in his approach to people and situations. That attribute will benefit both him and the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise in the years ahead.

We live in a time of change and it is a challenging time to be a priest or bishop. Fr. Paul goes with the prayers, appreciation, congratulations and good wishes of Bishop Smith, with whom he also worked closely, the priests and people of the Diocese of Meath and myself.

May the Lord continue to bless him and bless his new ministry in Ardagh and Clonmacnoise.