Statement by Bishop Deenihan on Report of Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes

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Attn: Newsdesks, Photodesks and Religious Affairs Correspondents

Statement by Bishop Tom Deenihan on the publication of the Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes

Yesterday's publication of the report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes in our country casts a necessary light into a painful episode in our social history. This report covers two such institutions in the Diocese of Meath, one in Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath and one in Dunboyne, Co Meath. What I have read in the report is a cause of great sadness. I know that those sentiments will be shared by many throughout the diocese and country.

In too many cases, the experience of those who resided in institutions, which were managed by religious congregations and State funded, is a cause of shock and shame. The brave testimonies of those who entered seeking care but who subsequently endured emotional suffering are bleak and shameful. Like others, I found the details of the high infant mortality very distressing.

While a lack of resources and an intense social poverty go some way towards contextualising the period of this report, the lack of kindness and compassion, as identified by the Commission, is also clear. When Church, state and society lose respect for the individual and forget that we are made in the image and likeness of God, dignity is forgotten and human life is not valued. Like many others, I am saddened and shamed by this report.

I have met with individuals who were either resident or born in these institutions. In addition to what for many were the unacceptable conditions and the inadequate assistance received, they have been unfairly burdened with an unwarranted but enduring sense of shame. There is also a tendency to forget that every child who was born in these homes had a father and that many of the women who gave birth there conceived in tragic or violent circumstances. The report acknowledges this clearly. In many instances, the experiences of these women have been so painful as to prevent them from ever sharing their story with their families. It is a wound that they bear silently. That is profoundly sad and we have an obligation to do what we can to lift this burden.

Those who were adopted are desperate to seek information about their family. One such person that I met, though seeking for some time, located a brother at the time of his death. A missed opportunity and too late. Here much work needs to be done. For this reason, I welcome wholeheartedly the proposal by Government to establish a mechanism to assist those who are trying to establish contact. This is a welcome and practical step which will enable information to be shared, while also acknowledging that many who gave birth in these institutions want to leave the past behind them.

This is a difficult time for all those who lost children to adoption or who were themselves adopted. We should also acknowledge those who provided a loving, kind and supportive home for the children that they adopted.

While we look back at the failures in the religious institutions that existed in our country at that time, we must also cast a critical eye on the structures of today to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not replicated. The personal stories contained in the report speak powerfully and starkly to our world today. Let us not repeat the errors, failings and sins of the past which have been highlighted and, above all, let us remember and value the dignity of each human person.

ENDS

- **Bishop Tom Deenihan is Bishop of Meath.**

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