

Statement of Bishop Fintan Gavin, Bishop of Cork and Ross, on the Publication of the Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes.

13-01-2021

I welcome the publication of the report of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation.

The report describes a very sad chapter in our Irish History. Through a culture of fear, judgement and secrecy, women who were pregnant felt isolated and abandoned and had nowhere to turn but to these institutions. As I read the courageous testimonies of the women and their now adult children who have shared their story with the Commission, I feel a sense of shame and embarrassment for how as a Church and a society we failed so often to respond compassionately to their needs. My first thoughts today are with all those women who were resident in mother and baby homes and with their children.

As Bishop I want to acknowledge the part played by the Church in contributing to this culture of judgement and secrecy which at times showed so little compassion or respect for the women and their babies. They were treated as second-class citizens.

I believe that it is only in acknowledging the truth of this reality and the hurt and pain experienced that we can begin the journey of healing. I thank Judge Yvonne Murphy and the Commission staff for this clear and comprehensive report. They have done a great service to society and to the Church in helping us to know the truth about our past.

As the former residents and their children try and piece together their personal history, I am aware that some of that information is contained in church baptism records. I appeal to our legislators to find ways so that birth and baptism record information can be legally shared with compassion and sensitivity with those to whom it rightly belongs – while taking into account the complexities and challenges involved.

Today I am reminded of the powerful words of Pope Francis in the Phoenix Park on his visit to Ireland in 2018. I, too, want to say sorry and ask forgiveness.

“We ask forgiveness for the children who were taken away from their moms and for all those times when many single mothers were told that to seek their children who had been separated from them – and the same was told to their daughters and sons who were looking for their mothers – that this was a mortal sin. This is not a mortal sin but the Fourth Commandment! We ask forgiveness. May the Lord, sustain and increase this state of shame and repentance and give us the strength to commit ourselves so that these things never happen again and justice may be done. Amen.”

I pray for healing in the hearts, minds and spirits of all whose lives were tarnished and for everyone whose heart is aching as we encounter the truth of our past. With Pope Francis who wrote this prayer in his 2020 letter entitled “We are Brothers and Sisters”, I pray:

“Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel, discovering Christ in each human being, recognizing him crucified in the sufferings of the abandoned and forgotten of our world, and risen in each brother or sister who makes a new start.”