

## Seamus Freeman ordained as 94th Bishop of Ossory

**Monsignor Seamus Freeman was ordained as the 94th Bishop of Ossory at a ceremony held at Saint Mary's Cathedral in Kilkenny on Sunday afternoon last. Bishop Freeman, son of Bridget and the late Jimmy Freeman of Coolagh, Callan, succeeds Bishop Laurence Forristal, who had held the position since 1981.**

At the conclusion of the ceremony, church bells were sounded in each of the diocese's 89 churches, spread out across 42 parishes, which serve a total of 78,273 Catholics.

The three-hour ceremony, which drew an attendance of almost 1,000 people to the cathedral, marked the first official Irish function of Sean Brady's Cardinalship. Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin was principal consecrator at St Mary's, with Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Giuseppe Lazzarotto and Bishop Forristal as co-consecrators.

Also in attendance were Cardinal Desmond Connell, Archbishop of Cashel Dermot Clifford, retired Papal Nuncio, (and Ossory native) Archbishop Thomas White and retired Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Walton Empey.

The political and civic realms were also represented at the ceremony, led by Mayor of Kilkenny Marie Fitzpatrick, County Council Chairman Tom Maher and Fine Gael Deputy Phil Hogan, who represented party leader Enda Kenny. Members of both local authorities also attended, as well as IFA President Pádraig Walsh, who lives in the diocese of Ossory.

Representatives of schools from across the diocese, which stretches from Ferrybank, across County Kilkenny and into Counties Laois and Offaly, were also in attendance.

Close circuit television coverage of the ceremony was provided in the adjoining Christian Brothers School for the congregation which couldn't be accommodated in the Cathedral.

### **Laois Native**

During his homily, Monsignor Liam Bergin spoke of a decision made during the 12th century by a previous holder of Bishop Freeman's title, to move his residence from Aghaboe in Laois to Kilkenny city.

"Now, as a native of County Laois, I cannot understand why the soft fertile fields of Laois and Offaly were to be abandoned for the harsher terrain of Kilkenny," said Mgr Bergin.

“Perhaps there were more sinners to convert down here. Whatever the reason, Kilkenny became the centre of the diocese and that is why we are gathered today in this cathedral.”

He added: “The bishop is not a business leader nor a management expert nor a political representative, but he must be a man of faith and hope who lovingly walks with others on life’s journey encouraging, consoling, teaching, leading.

“May the bell that first pealed for Kieran continue to ring out loud and clear in the Episcopal ministry of Seamus Freeman, assuring us that God continues to walk with the people of Ossory.”

Bishop Freeman, who has been overwhelmed with the messages of support and goodwill he has received from young and old alike since news of his imminent appointment was made public, thanked all who contributed to Sunday’s celebration.

“Today would not have been possible without the generous efforts and presence of so many people,” he told the congregation. “I thank the ad hoc committee for today’s ceremony and yesterday’s pilgrimage. Nothing was left undone to make today an event worthy of the traditions of the Ossory Diocese.”

During his speech Bishop Freeman also saluted his own family, many of whom were present for this special occasion.

“Without family, life is difficult but not impossible,” he said. “But with family it is a great blessing. I have experienced a rich family life, first with my own Freeman family and then for many years with the Pallotine family.

“I am delighted that Bridget, my mother, is here. I am certain that Jimmy, my father, who departed life 10 years ago, is missed, but we know by faith that he is very much with us in spirit here, today and every day.”

## **Tributes to Dr. Forristal**

Tributes were also paid to Dr Forristal by both his successor and Cardinal Brady.

“Doctor Forristal had shepherded this Diocese for 26 years with consummate graciousness and he will be sadly missed at the Bishop’s Conference, where his genial friendship, good humour and wisdom were deeply appreciated for many years,” said the Cardinal.

Bishop Freeman said that Dr Forristal had provided almost three decades of generous and efficient service as Bishop of Ossory and he wished him well upon his retirement.