**Words of welcome of Archbishop Michael Neary to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, on the occasion of his visit to the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock, 26 August 2018**

**Press release - Catholic Communications Office, Maynooth - Immediate release**

*A Athair Ró Naofa, céad míle fáilte romhat go Scrín na Maighdine Beannaithe anseo i gCnoc Mhuire, ar maidin.  Is aoibheann linn do theacht.*

Holy Father, on behalf of the lay faithful, the religious, and the priests of the Archdiocese of Tuam, and on behalf of the tens of thousands of pilgrims gathered here this morning, it is my great privilege to welcome you to the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock and to the Archdiocese of Tuam.

It is an honour, a privilege, and a tremendous blessing to have Your Holiness, the Bishop of Rome and Vicar of Jesus Christ come among us to bow down in prayer, and to lead us in prayer, before the scene of the Apparition, and to invoke the maternal intercession of Our Lady of Knock for all families and the World Meeting of Families 2018.

Holy Father, you have chosen to come to this holy place as a pilgrim.  In doing so you remind us by your actions of what you wrote in your Apostolic Letter, *Sanctuarium in Ecclesia*: "The Shrine has a great symbolic value in the Church, and making a pilgrimage is a genuine profession of faith." (*SE*1)  Our prayer for you is that you will, during your pilgrimage to Knock, "experience deeply God's closeness, the tenderness of the Virgin Mary and the company of the Saints." (*Ibid.*)

By choosing to include a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock as part of the celebrations of the World Meeting of Families 2018, Your Holiness is doing something profoundly important.  You are identifying a special and sacred place to which everybody – without exception – may come to drink from the oasis of peace and renewal that exists here, and you are planting the seeds generated by the World Meeting of Families 2018 in the sure and certain hope that they will blossom into "an invitation to Christian families to value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience."  (*Amoris Laetitia* 5)

These seeds will also blossom in such a way as "to encourage everyone to be a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy." (*Ibid.*)

Finally, by coming to meditate on and pray before the Apparition Scene at Knock, in which Jesus, the Lamb of God, is central, you, Holy Father, are reminding us that when "a family is centred on Christ, He will unify and illumine its entire life." (*AL*317)  This is an invitation and a challenge to all families to make time and space for prayer in the home.

Holy Father, your pilgrimage to Our Lady's Shrine invites us to open ourselves up anew to *The Joy of the Gospel*, and it causes us to sing with the prophet: "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings Good News, announces peace, proclaims the news of happiness, and says 'Our God reigns.'" (Is.52:7)  Thank you for honouring us by your visit, and may God and our Lady go with you.

*Beannacht Dé leat, a Phápa Proinsias, agus faoi choimirce na Maighdine Beannaithe Muire thú anois agus í gcónaí*.