Journeying together
IN FAITH & MISSION

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG

News and events from the Diocese of Wollongong

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To Be Truly Human

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In his inspiring new encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*, Pope Leo XIV calls the whole Church to safeguard human dignity in the age of artificial intelligence. In a world where people can so easily be reduced to data, productivity, popularity, or usefulness, our faith reminds us of something much deeper: every person is created in the image and likeness of God. Every person is made for love, for relationship, and for communion with God and one another.

This speaks directly to the life of our parishes. Each Sunday, we gather as the Body of Christ, united with Jesus in the Eucharist. This is the heart of who we are. Yet we also know that people can come to Mass week after week and still feel unknown.

Pope Francis described the parish as "a community of communities" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 28). I think this is a beautiful vision for us. A parish is not only a place where we "attend" Mass. It is a community where we belong, grow, and walk together in faith.

I believe this is why small groups in the context of parish life can be such a gift. They must never replace nor separate us from our gathering for Mass. They flow from it. They provide a simple place to share life, reflect on Scripture, pray together, and support one another in following Jesus. I warmly encourage our parishes to consider what may be possible. How might God be calling you to be part of this transformation? Could one or two small groups begin? Even a small beginning can help people experience the joy of being known, listened to, and loved in Christ. In our diocese during Lent, many gather together in small groups to share their faith. Additionally, our *Faith Circles* small group resource is available for your use throughout the year, and can be found on our diocesan website (faithcircles.dow.org.au).

As Pope Leo XIV invites us, drawing on the example of Nehemiah:

"Like Nehemiah, let us pray, plan wisely and work perseveringly, placing God at the forefront of our actions and the human person at the center of our choices" (*Magnifica Humanitas*, 16).

May the Lord bless your efforts to know and be known in His love.

Yours in Christ

+Brian Mascord

Most Rev Brian G Mascord
Bishop of Wollongong

Bishop Brian's prayer intentions

Please pray for:

- The courage to share our faith
- The gift of grandparents and the elderly
- Christian unity
- Peace amongst nations
- The parish renewal summit

FAITH CIRCLES

Build small group community in your parish with this easy-to-use weekly resource.

faithcircles.dow.org.au

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG

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News, events and stories from across the diocese

dow.org.au

Journeying Home

Recently, Mr Matt Baxter was appointed to the significant role of Executive Director and Chancellor for the Diocese of Wollongong. An interview with him provided some great insights about what led him to embrace Catholicism, and the importance of us all being missional. Let's pray for him as he takes on this role, but also for each other to be bolder in the way we share our faith in Jesus and the Church he established.

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself Matt.

I've been married to Kate for 12 years and we have two kids in primary school. I grew up in this Diocese and love living here. I've worked in a variety of roles across the corporate and nonprofit sectors, including with CatholicCare Sydney and Catholic education in Wollongong.

2. What has been your journey of faith?

I was baptised Catholic but raised in a non-denominational Christian church, where I first developed my relationship with Jesus and love of the Bible. Over the course of several years, I felt a strong pull towards Catholicism. Podcasts and publications, especially Bishop Barron's *Word on Fire*, were hugely influential as I began exploring the faith. Reading the early Church Fathers was incredible; the consistency of Church teaching and worship across the centuries was a revelation. Around this time, we started attending Mass and I moved through the process of coming into full communion with the Church and was confirmed a Catholic in 2019.

3. Are you encouraged by what the Holy Spirit seems to be doing in the Church today?

It's encouraging to see record numbers of new Catholics here and around the world. This seems to stem from the growing desire to base your life on something solid—and the Church's unbroken 2,000-year history and tradition certainly offer this. At the same time, Catholicism is demanding, offering so much, while asking people to live radically and embrace objective truth. I believe young people especially are attracted to this. I'm excited by what the Spirit is doing, and eager to help ensure we continue boldly embracing what has always been required of disciples: sharing the truth of who we know Jesus to be, and inviting people to encounter him through his Church.

4. What in your mind are some practices and attitudes that will help we, the Church, be renewed for mission?

Pope Leo XIV keeps emphasising that the power of our witness is tightly bound to our unity, our love for one another. For me, that means all of us—in our parishes, workplaces, schools, and other ministries—continually embracing the essentials of maintaining a daily prayer life, spending time in God's Word, and being centred around Sunday Mass and the Eucharist, the Sacrament of unity. When we're consistent in these things, we rely less on ourselves and more on the Holy Spirit. We also need to speak, to actually use our words, sharing who Jesus is and what he has done for us, backing these words up with our actions by loving and serving others. We have to do this faithfully, in and out of season, popular or unpopular—and that requires courage, so I am pleased my first day of work here fell on the feast of St Thomas More, a true model of courage and fidelity!

5. What is exciting you about taking on this role?

I'm excited to work alongside the many gifted people throughout our diverse and growing diocese, especially meeting with clergy and parish and ministry leaders. It's a big opportunity and responsibility, but I'm eager to support Bishop Brian in bringing to life his vision for the Church in Wollongong. I keep repeating to myself what Saint Mother Teresa said: *'We are called to be faithful, not successful.'* So, I am going to do my best, stay faithful, and simply trust that God will handle the rest. ■

Around the diocese

dow.org.au/events

MAJOR DIOCESAN EVENTS

6 September – Significant Marriage Anniversary Mass (St Francis Xavier Cathedral) 2pm

1–3 October – Parish Renewal Summit (Campbelltown)

4 October – Jubilee Year of St Francis (10am Mass with Bishop at Warrawong)

FORMATION

21 & 22 July – Formation Pathway Sessions: Raising up Leaders (Campbelltown & online)

3 August – Level 1 Catechists Course (Online, 5 weeks)

4 & 5 August – Formation Pathway Sessions: Leading Parishes with Clarity (Campbelltown and Wollongong)

YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS

9–12 July – Diocesan Group at Ignite Conference (Sydney)

15 July – Sanctus Summit: Holy Hour and Dinner (Unanderra)

15 August – Vocaris: Young Adult Testimony Night (Wilton)

19 August – Sanctus Summit: Holy Hour and Dinner (Rosemeadow)

29 August – Youth Leaders Retreat: Jamberoo Abbey

SPECIAL DAYS/WEEKS

5 July – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday

26 July – World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly

2–9 August – Vocations Awareness Week

30 August – Social Justice Sunday

14–21 September – St Carlo Acutis Relic and Miracles Tour

For more info contact:
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Sharing Faith Is Our Job

Our public witness to Jesus is more important now than ever, especially given the growing trend of openness to faith in society, particularly amongst young people.

When presented with the profound truth, goodness and beauty of Jesus as found in the Catholic faith, so many are responding with great interest. It's not always easy to step out and share our faith. It can be scary, but exciting too! God wants his radical love to be encountered by everyone, and it is a non-negotiable that we in the Church look for chances to make Jesus known and loved.

So – what are some simple things I can do to reach out and share my faith with others?

1. **Pray** – For opportunities and the courage to speak up. Pray also for the people God is going to put in your path and when it happens, don't freeze – just call on the Holy Spirit to help you.
2. Your **personal story** of faith is powerful and undeniable – so share it. Think through, rehearse and be ready to speak about the impact of God's love, mercy and friendship in your own life.
3. Share your belief that they are made for a **relationship with God**. There is nothing they can do to make God love them more – or less for that matter. Share how Jesus died for them and wants to be in relationship with them now and forever. That's the basic Gospel, but so many have never heard it.
4. **You don't need all the answers!** There's so much amazing Catholic content online, so point people to sites like *Word on Fire*, *Catholic Answers, Council of Trent, Pints with Aquinas*, and to prayer apps like *Hallow*. Use them yourself – they will build up your evangelising muscles.
5. Ask if there is anything you can pray about for them – show them love and connect by just **listening** to their story.
6. Be **invitational and welcoming** – in that order! Ask people to come to Mass with you, or to a course like *Alpha*, which covers the basics of what we believe in a vibrant, nurturing way.

We should all be looking to become more confident in sharing our faith. *Formed* is a resource which will help you. I describe it as Catholic Netflix, with great content for kids, teens and adults. Check it out, maybe starting with Chris Stefanick's Evangelisation talks. See advert on the back page and scan the QR code to request FREE access, thanks to Bishop Mascord's generous diocesan subscription.

Let's start having the sort of conversations that will change people's lives.

Jude Hennessy
Director of Evangelisation and Renewal

Scan here for free access to *Formed* or visit: **dow.sh/formed**

RENEWED & SENT

PARISH RENEWAL SUMMIT 2026

1–3 OCTOBER 2026
ST GREGORY'S COLLEGE
CAMPBELLTOWN NSW

renewedandsent.com.au

in partnership with

CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG

DIVINE RENOVATION

Watch your invitation to the Summit from Bishop Brian Mascord

dow.sh/PRS

RAISING UP LEADERS

Recognise the gifts God has already given your parish. Learn how to **empower people as leaders, not just volunteers**, and develop a simple apprenticeship model for growing confident leaders in your community.

dow.sh/fpjuly2026

CAMPBELLTOWN 21 JULY
ZOOM 22 JULY

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