



For all things give thanks.

1 THESS 5:18

Reconnect this Christmas

An Invitation from Bishop Brian Mascord

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ

Peace be with you. As you continue to prepare this Advent for the joy of Christmas, I pray that you and your family are well. May Jesus be present in your conversations, your homes, and your lives.

It has been my earnest desire and prayer that this year would see us come back together. Indeed, I saw this year as being an important time of reconnection and so it has been heartening to see many of us able to return in person to the sacraments and parish community life.

During the pandemic, we were physically separated from one another. For many of us, the effects of that separation still linger. Perhaps we are a little slower to embrace a friend or more reluctant to share a meal together. We have seen echoes of this in broader society as well. Our towns and suburbs sometimes feel more like a collection of strangers than friends or neighbours. **We are apart together.**

But we don't have to be.

The radical message of Christmas has always been the mystery of Emmanuel - God with us (cf. Matthew 1:23). It is not God with us in a palace or five-star hotel or a world where all is well. No, rather it is God with us where we are - in a humble stable, the mess of our lives. It is through Jesus that we are no longer strangers but become members of the household of God – his family – joined together and growing into a holy temple in the Lord (cf. Ephesians 2:19-21). He is our unity. He is the one who truly draws us together to be a people of peace.

So, when we gather at the table of the Lord this weekend, and every weekend, it is not who is present that should be our only focus, but also who is missing. Perhaps it's part of our family that is missing - our sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, mother or father, husband or wife. Perhaps it's a neighbour, colleague, or friend – maybe they never knew there was a seat for them in the first place.

When the prophet Isaiah was called to serve the Lord, he heard God say, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" (cf. Isaiah 6:8) And so I say to you, whom shall God send to your family? To your neighbours, friends, and work colleagues? Someone else? Each of us has at least one person in our life who is disconnected from faith. **Will you invite them to be with you, with us, this Christmas?** With Isaiah, I ask you to respond to my call, by saying, "Here I am. Send me."

May this Christmas be a blessed time of reconnection and new connection. May we have the courage to invite and share our story of faith with those not at the table. And may God give you and your family all the grace you need to live out your mission to be faithful disciples who love God and your neighbours.

Yours in Christ

Most Rev Brian G Mascord DD

BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG

6 December 2022

MOST REV BRIAN G MASCORD DD

BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG

Xavier Centre, 38 Harbour Street (PO BOX 1239), Wollongong NSW 2500 Australia
T +61 2 4222 2402 • F +61 2 4222 2419 • bishop@dow.org.au • dow.org.au