

MEDIA RELEASE

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Wollongong mum on liturgy scholarship hopes to close a looming generation gap

Wollongong mum and former teacher Lisa de Paiva will use a liturgical studies scholarship to empower the next generation of Catholics in her parish and beyond.

Ms de Paiva is the recipient of the 2025 ACU Centre for Liturgy Postgraduate Scholarship, which is awarded to eligible students studying a Master of Theological Studies specialising in liturgical studies.

“I’m focusing on empowering the next generation and giving them the tools to come forward, to help and participate actively in parishes in a way that encourages co-responsibility,” Ms de Paiva said.

“Parishes need to give young people a chance otherwise they’re going to be turned away and think, what’s the point of coming to church?”

Ms de Paiva’s approach to liturgical formation stems from her own experience as a former lapsed Catholic.

Born into a Portuguese Catholic family, Ms de Paiva stepped away from the church as a teenager but became strengthened in her faith while studying teaching at the University of Wollongong.

After having her daughter in 2010, Ms de Paiva made a personal decision to homeschool, opening opportunities to volunteer at her local parish, Lumen Christi in Wollongong.

“I told myself, God didn’t ask much of Mary, all He asked her to do was say yes, and He’s not asking much more of me,” Ms de Paiva said.

She is now coordinator of the parish’s sacramental preparation, supports the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and oversees the formation of lectors and altar servers.

Ms de Paiva said her experience as a homeschooling mum largely informed her approach to liturgical and sacramental formation at the parish level.

“Homeschooling has taught me that the best approach is learning with the child rather than teaching at them,” Ms de Paiva said.

“When I first started homeschooling, I put my teacher hat on because I wanted to be the teacher for my daughter, and that just failed. I had to remove that and just be mum.

“I take that approach when I’m working with adults and children in Sacramental preparation and RCIA, I walk with them rather than trying to be the teacher at the front.”

As her parish volunteer work increased over the years, Ms de Paiva decided to return to study “because I knew my faith, but didn’t know how to articulate it to others”.

She enrolled in a Master of Theological Studies at ACU, and after attending a liturgy conference in Brisbane in 2023, developed a passion for liturgical studies.

“Everything flows from and towards the liturgy and without it, you can’t do anything else, and we especially can’t evangelise,” Ms de Paiva said.

“Eucharist is our nourishment, where we're fed, and how can we talk about God without it?”

Ms de Paiva said families who viewed the Sacraments as a significant part of family life, rather than “ticking a box”, tended to remain committed to parish life.

“Parents who walk with their child through the liturgical year, which is the approach we take with the RCIA, leads to more retention because it becomes part of the child’s life,” Ms de Paiva said.

“They form that habit and get into the routine of coming to church and they feel like something is missing from their lives when they're not there.”

While the number of committed Catholics in her parish is increasing, Ms de Paiva is one of the few middle-aged parents.

She hopes that empowering the next generation of active parishioners through good liturgical formation will close the generation gap.

“Young people need to have someone have faith in them and just let them try, and yes, they'll make mistakes, but they need to be guided and supported,” Ms de Paiva said.

“You need to let them participate and thank them for contributing, both within liturgy and everything that we do as parishes.”

ACU Centre for Liturgy director Professor Clare Johnson said Ms de Paiva exemplified a bright new generation of Catholics training to become qualified liturgists.

“Lisa is an excellent student and is studying multiple units in liturgy and sacraments at ACU to deepen her knowledge of this field,” Professor Johnson said.

“Educating the next generation of liturgists is one of the main purposes of the ACU Centre for Liturgy and we are delighted to be supporting Lisa in her studies.

“We encourage anyone with an interest in liturgy, liturgical music, sacraments and liturgical ministries to join Lisa and other keen students to advance their understanding of this central part of our Catholic faith.

“When our liturgical celebrations are vibrant, beautiful and meaningful spiritual experiences of God’s presence in our midst, our parishes and schools flourish.”

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