

BISHOP MARK ORDAINED AND INSTALLED AS NINETH BISHOP OF BALLARAT

The Diocese of Ballarat joyfully announces the ordination and installation of Fr Mark Freeman as the Nineth Bishop of Ballarat, held on Thursday, March 19 at St Patrick's Cathedral in Ballarat.

The celebration brought together bishops, clergy, parish representatives, ecumenical guests, civic representatives, and members of the wider community to witness this significant moment in the life of the Church. The ordination and installation were led by Archbishop Peter A Comensoli with assisting bishops from all over Australia. In addition to around these 500 people packing St Patrick's Cathedral, the ceremony was livestreamed to hundreds of people across the country.

In accordance with the traditions of the Church, the ceremony included the laying on of hands, prayers of consecration, and the formal seating of Bishop Freeman in the cathedra, symbolising the beginning of episcopal leadership in the diocese.

"I am deeply humbled by the trust placed in me and grateful for the prayers and support of this community," Bishop Mark said. "Together, we are called to serve with faith, hope, and love, proclaiming compassion, courage and justice in the world".

A lovely moment during the ceremony was the warm and heartfelt welcome extended to Bishop Mark by the many different groups within the diocese. Representatives came forward as a visible sign of the rich diversity and shared life of the diocesan community, each offering their greeting with joy and respect. This gesture highlighted the spirit of unity, collaboration, and mutual support that defines the diocese, and set a gracious tone for Bishop Mark's ministry among the people he is called to serve.

During his address, Bishop Mark spoke words of gratitude and appreciation. He acknowledged and greeted all the People of God in the Ballarat diocese, asking them to teach him how to be their bishop. "Every time I have begun a new appointment, I have said to the community that you are the people whom God has given me to love. As I begin this new ministry among you, I say the same to the whole diocese, people and priests of Ballarat – You are the people whom God has given me to love. As I received this ring during today's Mass, I made that commitment with all my heart."

Bishop Mark acknowledged Bishop Paul Bird and said "It is an honour to succeed you as Bishop of Ballarat. It's a vibrant local Church that I have been called to serve as bishop. It has been cared for and guided by a true servant leader. You have set the bar high, and I thank you."

Bishop Mark was born and raised in Tasmania, his journey from a Launceston childhood to episcopal leadership has been shaped by early stirrings of vocation, formative mentors and a lifetime of sacramental ministry across Tasmania.

After completing secondary school, he entered Corpus Christi College in Clayton, Victoria, where he found joy, strong friendships and growing clarity about his vocation. A defining influence was Archbishop Guilford Young, who guided and encouraged him throughout his formation. "He really encouraged people to use their gifts well," Fr Mark said. He would become the last priest ordained by Archbishop Young.

Bishop Mark has served as Vicar General for both Archbishop Adrian Doyle and Archbishop Julian Porteous, along with being appointed Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Hobart and most recently, before his appointment as Bishop of Ballarat, Archbishop Tony Ireland appointed him Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia. Each of these appointments reflect the trust placed in his pastoral wisdom and administrative ability.

His priesthood has been defined by sacramental ministry—celebrating Masses, baptisms, weddings, First Communion Masses, confirmations, and hearing confessions. He sees these moments as the heart of his vocation. "You are really ministering the presence of Christ," he explains.

Bishop Mark follows Bishop Paul Bird who turned 75 in 2024 and offered his resignation but was asked to stay on until a successor could be found. On January 7, 2026, Pope Leo appointed Fr Mark Freeman to be the new Bishop of Ballarat.

The Catholic Diocese of Ballarat is a diverse and geographically extensive Diocese of twenty-three parishes which covers the western third of Victoria, extending from the Murray River in the North to the Southern Ocean. To the west it is bounded by the Archdiocese of Adelaide and the Diocese of Port Pirie, to the north by the Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes and to the east by the Diocese of Sandhurst and the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

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