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Media Release

St Dismas Chapel at Reiby marks 20 years of hope

Wollongong - 17 November 2026 – Twenty years of faith, reflection, and support for young people in custody were celebrated at St Dismas Chapel, Reiby Youth Justice Centre, at a special liturgy led by the Bishop of Wollongong, Most Rev Brian Mascord.

The anniversary, held on Friday 30 October, comes as Catholics across Australia marked Prison Sunday on 8 November. This year, the Church asked people to pray for those in custody, their families and the chaplains who support them.

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) established St Dismas Chapel in 2006. CatholicCare Diocese of Wollongong's Youth Justice Chaplaincy provides pastoral, spiritual, cultural and practical support there. The chaplaincy supports young people of all faiths and none.

Guests included CatholicCare and Youth Justice representatives as well as young people from the centre. They heard from Kelly-Anne Stewart, Head of Youth Justice, and Michael Vita, Director of Custody. Mr Vita was managing the centre when the Chapel first opened.

Several young people also shared what the Chapel means to them.

As part of the liturgy, Bishop Brian blessed memorial plaques honouring artist Michele Arentz, whose artwork features in the Chapel, and Uncle Ivan. Uncle Ivan was a pioneer of chaplaincy at Reiby and helped young people reconnect with culture and identity.

CatholicCare Chief Executive Officer Michael Austin said the anniversary was a chance to recognise a ministry built on compassionate presence.

"Chaplaincy is the work of the heart. It's about accompanying young people with compassion and without judgement," Mr Austin said.

"St Dismas Chapel is a sacred space of welcome, acceptance and healing. It gives young people the chance to connect with something deeper within themselves.

"I want to thank our chaplains, the Youth Justice staff and everyone who has supported this ministry over the past 20 years."

"For 20 years, St Dismas Chapel has been a place where young people are reminded that they are known by name, made in God's image and never beyond the reach of His love," Bishop Brian said.

In 2025–26, CatholicCare's Youth Justice Chaplaincy delivered:

- around 350 individual consultations and unit visits

- about 144 Bible Study sessions
- 12 monthly Chapel services
- 26 visits with the St Gregory's community
- release packs for more than 40 young people leaving custody.

About CatholicCare Wollongong:
CatholicCare is an inclusive social services organisation committed to supporting individuals, families, and communities in need throughout the Diocese of Wollongong. CatholicCare provides professional, compassionate services across the lifespan, helping people strengthen relationships, build resilience and create positive futures.

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