

## New online training program to raise up future Liturgical Ministers for Australian parishes

Lay Catholics chosen to serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion anywhere in Australia can now receive specialised online training through a new program developed by Australian Catholic University's dedicated liturgy experts.

The ACU Centre for Liturgy has launched its first online Liturgical Ministry Training program for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, designed to support parishes throughout Australia, especially in rural communities.

Supported by the Bishops Commission for Liturgy, this new online training program is now open to confirmed Catholics who have been nominated by their local parish priest to train as Extraordinary Ministers of Communion for their community.

ACU Centre for Liturgy Director, Professor Clare Johnson, said the new program will transform the way parishes, schools and dioceses train lay people to use their gifts in service of the Church.

"Our aim is to offer the best, high-quality training for liturgical ministers available anywhere in Australia, regardless of whether you're in a remote parish in Wilcannia-Forbes or in bustling Sydney," Professor Johnson said.

"Our comprehensive online training program has been developed by the nation's leading liturgy experts and will prepare future liturgical ministers to offer their gifts for the glory of God and the benefit of their local community."

The Diocese of Bathurst enthusiastically piloted this new program in late 2021, under the leadership of highly experienced liturgy coordinator and educator Cathy Murrowood, a member of the National Liturgical Council.

Ms Murrowood said her work in remote parishes convinced her that a hybrid model, combining in-person practical training with an online component, will meet the needs of today's Church and support dioceses with limited training resources in this area.

"I realised that people who are in remote areas don't have access to a lot of resources for liturgical training, and yet, being an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is one service that Catholics are called on to perform every single week. This program provides a rich, accessible option for all," Ms Murrowood said.

Ms Murrowood, who received her master's degree in theology from ACU, said it was logical to offer nationally-approved liturgical ministry training programs online following an increasing interest in online courses since the beginning of the pandemic.

"It's the next step for the Church to be able to connect with a greater number of people and assist them to access high quality and consistent training for liturgy nationally," she said. "In this time of rebuilding and renewal, this new program provides an attractive and contemporary learning experience for liturgical ministers."

Offering robust liturgical training could also improve the participation of the laity in the Mass and other liturgies as people who understand why they are doing what they are doing will inevitably celebrate better.

"In the last couple of years Pope Francis has really called us back to understand that the liturgy belongs to the people, because it's the people who participate in the liturgy every week. Liturgy's the most important thing we do as Christians because it nourishes us for daily living," Ms Murrowood said.

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