

The 70th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Diocese of Wollongong Part 2: The day has come!

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21 February 2022



Above: Bishop's House on the day of Bishop McCabe's installation as Bishop of Wollongong with Norman Thomas, Cardinal Gilroy, Archbishop of Sydney processing to the Cathedral followed by Archbishop Paolo Marella, the Apostolic Delegate to Australia, New Zealand, and Oceania (on the steps)

On Sunday 24 February 1952 Thomas Absolom McCabe at 49 years of age was enthroned as the first Bishop of Wollongong in Saint Francis Xavier's Cathedral. This significant day for the diocese did not start in Wollongong but atop Bulli Pass where the new bishop and the attending Church hierarchy were met by some of the new diocese's Catholics and in a fifty-car procession escorted to Harbour Street Wollongong. The enthronement occurred, according to the *Illawarra Mercury*, 'amid a blaze of colour and centuries-old Roman Catholic pomp and ceremony.'¹The newspaper stated that 'the largest crowd the Cathedral has

¹ *Illawarra Mercury*, Monday 25 February 1952, p.1

had in its history packed all normal and emergency seating well before the Pontifical High Mass preceding the enthronement began.’

Just before eleven o’clock on that Sunday morning through an honour guard of pupils from St Mary’s Convent and boy scouts a procession moved from the presbytery to the cathedral. Led by the Cross Bearer came Norman, Cardinal Gilroy, the Archbishop of Sydney and Archbishop Paolo Marella, the Apostolic Delegate, both wearing cappa magna followed by Bishop McCabe. Bishop McCabe wore an alb, two dalmatics and a chasuble. On his feet were red buskins, on his hands were gloves and his episcopal ring. They were followed by the Co-adjutor Archbishop of Brisbane, Archbishop O’Donnell; Archbishop Eris O’Brien, Auxiliary to the Cardinal; John Norton, Bishop of Bathurst; bishops Farrelly of Lismore, Fox of Wilcannia-Forbes, Henscke of Wagga Wagga, Doddy of Armidale, the Co-adjutor Bishop of Maitland John Toohey, the Auxiliary Bishop of Canberra-Goulburn Guilford Young as well as two bishops from Queensland: Joseph Roper of Toowoomba and Andrew Tynan of Rockhampton.



Above: Beneath the magnificent Foley Memorial Window, the singing of the Gospel

During the Pontifical High Mass, the Cardinal sat under a canopy on the southern side of the Sanctuary, while Archbishop Marella sat under a canopy on the northern side. Attending bishops were arrayed choir fashion at the front while clergy of the new diocese occupied the first two pews at the front. Participating in the Mass was the St. Francis Xavier's 30 voice choir conducted by the Choir Master, Mr. W. Dwyer, while Claire Campbell was the organist. Father F Fuhlendorf was the Master of Ceremonies, Father Frank Deignan read the Epistle, while Father John Mulheren sang the Gospel.

The Auxiliary Archbishop of Sydney, Eris O’Brien, delivered the occasional homily at the Pontifical High Mass. The archbishop, a highly regarded Church historian, noted that

new dioceses had followed the trends of population expansion in Australia, where the Catholic hierarchy had existed for only 117 years. the creation of this new diocese of Wollongong at the end of last year from parishes taken from the Archdiocese of Sydney and Canberra-Goulburn is the first of its kind in New South Wales during the past 34 years.²



Above: Archbishop Paolo Marella between his secretaries. Bishop McCabe and Father Ferdinand Fuhlendorf

At the conclusion of Mass, the Papal Bulls were read: the new Wollongong Diocese and Bishop McCabe as Bishop of Wollongong were proclaimed. The Bulls were read by Archbishop Marella's secretaries: first, in Latin by Monsignor Emanuele Clarizio (later Archbishop), and, in English by Father E. Kelly. Then Cardinal Gilroy enthroned Bishop McCabe by placing a mitre on his head and a crozier in his hand (as a symbol that he was now the chief shepherd of the Catholic people of this new diocese) and the Cappa Magna around his shoulders as a symbol of the bishop's authority.³ Archbishop Marella then left his purple canopied chair on the northern side of the sanctuary and led Bishop McCabe, wearing Cappa Magna, at the Faldstool to the throne where he was handed the rolled Papal Bulls parchment by Archbishop Marella. Pope Pius XII in the Papal Bull of November 1951 assigned "the Chair of the Bishop to the present Parish Church of Wollongong dedicated to God in honour of Saint Francis Xavier and We raise it to the dignity of a Cathedral." (In 1959 Pope St John XXIII dedicated the diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.)

² *Illawarra Mercury*, Monday 25 February 1952, p.2

³ The Cappa Magna (Great Cape) was a silken train with a huge hood lined with ermine in winter and silk in summer. No longer mandatory, and thus rare, it fell into disuse by the 1960s. Cardinals would wear a red *cappa magna* while bishops wore a purple one.



Above: (L to R) Marella’s Secretary, Bishop McCabe, Archbishop Paolo Marella, Father Ferdinand Fuhlendorf and Father (later Monsignor) Frank Deignan

A Welcome Luncheon for Bishop McCabe and the visitors was, according to the invitation card, ‘rendered by men of the Archdiocese at 1 pm in The Southern Cross Hall Church Street.’ In his toast to the new bishop, Cardinal Gilroy said that “Bishop McCabe was a genius at raising funds.”⁴ It would take more than men and a bishop to fill the Diocese’s coffers. In reply, the new bishop thanked the archbishops and bishops for their presence and the men of the diocese for the luncheon. He went on to stress that

there was no body of men more united than Catholic men for bond of union among them was that most precious gift — the Catholic faith. You men, no doubt want me to tell you how you can help. I could ask you to be generous and self-sacrificing, to cooperate with the priests, to be good citizens but all I am going to say to you is this— I ask, urge, even beg of you to do one thing and one thing well. I ask that you all live your Catholic faith every moment of your lives.⁵

The new diocese was only a day old when the cardinal suggested to the attendees at the lunch that the State and local governments should assist Bishop McCabe to build a new cathedral so “that Wollongong has not merely a cathedral that was formerly a church, but a truly beautiful cathedral worthy of Greater Wollongong.”⁶ In 1952 the Diocese of Wollongong consisted of 22,000 Catholics in eighteen parishes with 23 priests. It had a revenue of £2,500. Today there are 28 parishes with about 40 priests for a Catholic population of 191,000.

⁴ *Illawarra Mercury*, Monday 25 February 1952, p.1. Bishop McCabe was transferring from a diocese four times the size of Victoria and 70 times the district of Wollongong.

⁵ *South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus*, Monday 25 February 1952, p.2

⁶ *Illawarra Mercury*, Tuesday 26 February 1952, p.1.



Above: The new Bishop of Wollongong in magna cappa leaving the cathedral accompanied by Father Fuhlendorf

Thomas McCabe: a humble, prayerful and pastoral Bishop

Thomas Absolom McCabe had been ordained a priest in Rome on 20 December 1925 at the age of 23 years and four months by Willem Marinus, Cardinal van Rossum, Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Almost thirteen years later, Archbishop Giovanni Panico, the Apostolic Delegate, along with Bishop John Carroll⁷ (Bishop of Lismore) and Bishop Patrick Farrelly consecrated McCabe at the age of 36 years and 7 months as bishop for the Port Augusta Diocese on 12 March 1939. (Father Carroll was parish priest of Moss Vale before becoming Bishop of Lismore in 1910. Bishop Carroll was the principal co-consecrator of the parish priest of Albion Park, William Hayden, as Bishop of Wilcannia in 1912 and Norman Gilroy as Bishop of Port Augusta in 1937.)

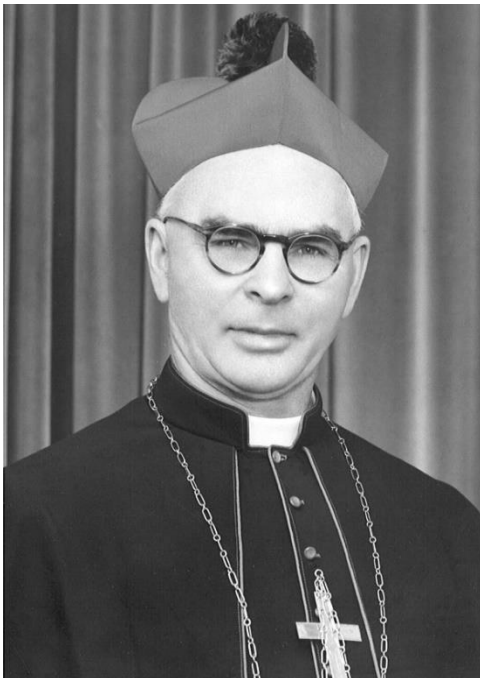
During his tenure of Wollongong Bishop McCabe continued with a life of prayer and simplicity, devoted to enhancing the Faith in the diocese's existing and expanding urban settings. Parishes were established and churches, schools and presbyteries were built without concern for his own personal comfort. The bishop's office was a former bedroom in the 1917 built Bishop House and his adjacent bedroom was a closed-in verandah. After the evening meal at Bishop House, Bishop McCabe, the priests in residence⁸ and the housekeepers, Mrs

⁷ John Carroll (1866-1949) had been born in Piltown, County Kilkenny, Ireland, which is in the parish of Templeorum in the Diocese of Ossory. Readers of my two publications of the history of the Diocese of Wollongong will know that this Irish parish was the birthplace of Fathers William Hayden (Albion Park), PJ Walsh (Wollongong), John Dunne (Bulli and Wollongong) and Dean Michael Malone (Kiama).

⁸ By the late 1960s the clergy in residence included the Administrator Father Michael Bach, the Bishop's Secretary Monsignor Frank Deignan, the Catholic Education Office Director Father Pat Kenna, Father Paul

Mary Casey and Mrs Mary Cooney would kneel around the dining room table and recite the Rosary.⁹ Usually on Sunday evenings the bishop would drive to Sydney to spend Monday (traditionally the priests' day off) with his long-time friend, Cardinal Norman Gilroy. By the late 1960s there were eight Sunday Masses at the Cathedral, Coniston, Wollongong Hospital and Villa Maria on Cliff Road. There were two Masses each weekday at the Cathedral and a Saturday Vigil Mass was introduced. As the immigrant Catholic population grew the Bishop's House was used as a 'base' for visits by the German, Hungarian, Portuguese and Ukrainian chaplains.

Thomas McCabe's life would be regarded as remarkable if only for his part in the Australianisation of the Church and his leadership in establishing and developing a new diocese, yet Bishop McCabe's significance can be found beyond this See. He was a Council Father, attending all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council from the first session in 1962 in the pontificate of St John XXIII to the last in 1965 when St Paul VI was pope. He was also the Australian Military Vicar Apostolic, that is the head of chaplaincy services to the military from 1964 to 1969, succeeding Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne.



Thomas McCabe was Bishop of Wollongong from 24 February 1952 to his resignation on 10 May 1974. On Thursday 18 December 1975, a concelebrated Mass took place at St Francis Xavier's Cathedral to mark the Golden Jubilee of his ordination to the priesthood. Recalling McCabe's tenure as bishop, Father Pat Faherty wrote at the time that in the beginning "an immense task lay before Bishop McCabe. For the next 22 years he directed all his energy and effort into organising and developing the Diocese, spiritually, materially and financially." By Thomas McCabe's side for those 22 years was his secretary, Monsignor Frank Deignan, who said in his homily at the Jubilee Mass that people "would certainly retain the memory of Bishop McCabe as a man of prayer, with great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament." In a lengthy personal letter to Bishop McCabe, which was read at the Mass, Pope St Paul VI praised the 'priestliness' of the Jubilarian: 'a priest of wisdom and prayer.'

Bishop McCabe resigned in 1974 due to ill-health retiring to Polding Villa, a retirement home for clergy in Glebe, conducted by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan Order. Here, he was fond of saying, he had "the joy of being at last a simple pastor of a flock whose members, without exception, were all practicing Catholics!" In fact, as bishop, he had been always a true pastor who cared for his flock, serving without a sense of entitlement. He well earned the respect and affection of the Faithful of the Diocese. Thomas Absolem McCabe died on the Feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross, 14 September 1983.

Ryan, Father Dick Hazlitt, Father Pat McCarthy and the newly ordained Father John Whitty. The Diocesan administration and the Catholic Education Office were in Bishop's House. Bishop House also accommodated the Diocesan Marriage Tribunal, the family planning advice service and space for the youth movement, St Vincent de Paul Society and the Legion of Mary.

⁹ Mrs Mary Casey and Mrs Mary Cooney were succeeded by members of the Franciscan Sisters of Malta