

Concluding Statement from the Catholic Bishops of Oceania

Feb 10, 2023

*“The Lord’s voice resounding on the waters,
The Lord on the immensity of the waters,
The voice of the Lord full of power,
The voice of the Lord full of splendour.” (Psalm 29:3)*

It has been a great joy for the Bishops of Oceania to gather in Fiji this week to pray for and consider our shared mission as the Chief Shepherds of our region. As we have prayed for our people, we have also been aware of the prayers they have been offering for our assembly and our ministry.

Our assembly has provided the opportunity for us to pray together, to build fraternal relationships, learn from one another and consider common pastoral challenges. The delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic meant we cherished this chance to gather in particular.

Our assembly focused on three themes: Care for the oceans; Becoming a more synodal Church; and Formation for mission.

Oceania is a network of islands, large and small, rich in diversity. Our Oceanic identity and location provide the context in which we participate in God’s mission. In our region, the ecological crisis is an existential threat for our people and communities. It is experienced in sea level rise, the acidification of the oceans, droughts, floods and more frequent and more extreme weather events.

Cardinal Michael Czerny SJ, Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, presided at our opening Mass and gave the opening address for the assembly. We welcomed his emphasis on an integral approach to care for the wellbeing of people and all of creation. This affirms the cultural wisdom of our peoples.

We recognise ecological conversion as an urgent mission priority not only for us, but also for the whole Church. Furthermore, we feel called to make our voices heard at the highest levels of government in our own countries, and also at the global level – in the Church and broader society – for the sake of our ocean home and its peoples.

The themes of becoming a more synodal Church and formation for mission were chosen by the Federation’s Executive following reflection on the Bishops Conferences’ syntheses for the diocesan stage of the international Synod for a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission. Although our region is very diverse in many ways, these two themes were important concerns in each of our Conferences.

Oceania is home to some of the world’s youngest local churches and also the oldest continuing culture in the world. We appreciate the complexity of the contemporary world that our people must negotiate. While being young may entail vulnerabilities, it also offers freshness and vitality. We learned that the youngest churches in our region have lessons to teach the more established churches about synodality and about maintaining the freshness of the encounter of the Gospel with local cultures and societies.

Accompanying our young people, in particular, in more courageous, creative and engaging ways is an essential aspect of mission for our Church in the context of our world today. In this year of World Youth Day, we encourage their participation in local and international celebrations.

We shared our reflections on the many ways in which our churches are already living synodality, and how they can become more synodal. As always, our desire is to be communities of ever-closer followers of Jesus Christ, led by the Holy Spirit to the Kingdom of the Father.

We recognise that as a pilgrim people we are always on a journey, and at times may make wrong turns. As we continue on the journey towards the Synod Assemblies in Rome, we place our trust in the mercy of God who will surely accompany us.

Indeed, significant time during our week was spent in anticipation of those Synod assemblies, as we prayed with and discerned our response to the Working Document for the Continental Stage of the Synod. Guided by the voices of the People of God in Oceania, we progressed the work already undertaken to ensure a distinctively Oceanic voice will continue to resonate through the Synod documents. Our response will be completed in coming weeks.

We were able to further our understanding of synodality through the experience of our gathering. We appreciated hearing of the Synod experience from other parts of the world through the presence and contribution of **Sr Nathalie Becquart XMCJ**, the Undersecretary of the General Secretariat of the Synod. As in Oceania itself, there is no “one size fits all” template. We felt affirmed in responding in our own way in our own context.

The nature of our context and the desire to become more synodal call for an integral formation for the entire People of God – lay, religious and clergy. Integral formation requires a holistic approach to the human person. It considers the physical, emotional, social, spiritual and intellectual dimensions of being human, and acknowledges that we are creatures within God’s creation.

Formation is always at the service of mission, which has several dimensions: the witness of life; explicit proclamation of the Gospel; conversion; entry into and growth within the Christian community; and becoming an agent of evangelisation oneself. With Pope Francis, we affirm that the witness of life requires the defence of human life from conception to natural death; respect for all life; the promotion of justice and peace; and an ecological conversion that is personal, communal and structural.

As we walk together on the synodal path, our formation programs may need to give more emphasis to inclusion, transparency, accountability, intercultural competency, new theological methods and leading in a more participative and collaborative way. Our efforts should equip our Church to reach out and en flesh a culture of hospitality, encounter and dialogue in a world marked by both sin and grace on our pilgrim way to God’s kingdom.

We seek to become people who are grounded in Scripture and Tradition, and its interpretation in our cultural traditions. Lay people, whose mission is in the heart of the world, especially require formation in the Church’s tradition of teaching and acting on social issues and ecological crises – that is Catholic Social Teaching. Most of all, formation should mould us to be people who joyfully accept the invitation to participate in God’s mission.

We leave our gathering with this mission in ever sharper focus in our hearts and minds. We carry with us the hopes and dreams of our people, and of our precious region of Oceania.

St Peter Chanel *Pray for Us*

St Mary of the Cross MacKillop *Pray for Us*

St Pedro Calungsod *Pray for Us*

Blessed Peter To Rot *Pray for Us*

Blessed Diego Luis de San Vitores *Pray for Us*

Blessed Giovanni Battista Mazzucconi *Pray for Us*

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