



The River Above

Volume 1
Issue 2
January
2023

The Quarterly Newsletter of the River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network
(RAOEN)

raoen.network@gmail.com

<https://www.raoen.org/>

For peoples, oceans and forests

To Be Synodal

Editorial updates from RAOEN

Pedro Walpole SJ, Network Catalyst

Recently RAOEN prepared the document [Listening to Indigenous Peoples and Talking as Church from Where We Are](#), a review on the responses gathered from 23 synod synthesis reports of bishops' conferences in Oceania and Asia, and highlighting the voices and experiences of Indigenous Communities, how the Church seeks to engage, and the proposals for change.

There is much hope expressed by Indigenous and Local Communities for greater welcome and cultural inclusion in a new way of being Church.

Some of the hopes and dreams included in the reflection was a call to put more emphasis on the liturgy of the Church and not just practices, to find more creative ways in how the Indigenous feel at home in gatherings. This was made possible due to the efforts of the RAOEN synodality team including Fr Gerry Burns who shared *"The RAOEN Steering Board and Extended Consultative Group are about twenty percent indigenous. We have compiled this initial and necessary summary of summaries in an effort to strengthen awareness and listening to the local indigenous context where the ecological crisis is foremost. The Church today in many countries has limited and structured dialogue. This could be greatly enriched so that Indigenous People can feel deeply welcomed and have a more active part in the Church to speak for themselves."*



The Church is reawakening to the importance for new types of ministries and new ways of including people and being Church.

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Please consider contributing to our quarterly newsletter.
Email us at raoen.network@gmail.com

RAOEN seeks to highlight the faith dimension of advocacy, in the spirit of synodality and talanoa.

Oceania Talanoa (talanoa, a traditional Fijian term for "inclusive, participatory and transparent dialogue") is a faith-based process seeking coherence and greater action in the care and protection of the oceans, their biomes and biodiversity which are integral to peoples' lives and culture.

Voices of Concern



Australia - Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, Chair Bishops Commission for Social Justice – Mission and Service. *“In the light of the ecological crisis that demands a conversion of heart and a change of lifestyle, we must have the courage to align ourselves with God’s plan for the whole world”*



India - Ridhima Pandey from The Letter. Young climate activist to Asian bishops, *“I do not want my generation to suffer...”* Ridhima also asked the assembly to provide a platform for youth voices to be amplified.



Fiji - Reverend James Bhagwan: Sharing during the “Our Ocean Home” FCBCO preparatory event *“Pacific Islanders have taken on that we are not*

small island developing states, but we are large ocean states. And the recognition that has come through our philosophers, and our traditional wisdom, our history of voyaging in our big canoes that traversed the ocean.”

Oceania bishops to consider care of the oceans at 2023 Assembly

It is well-known that the Pacific Ocean plays a significant role in the world’s climate (e.g., the El Niño/La Niña currents and accompanying weather patterns). Also well known are the many challenges facing this ocean and its peoples: sea-level rise, which threatens the low-lying atolls; overfishing; and pollution of the sea and foreshores, which are changing ways of living and food-gathering practices. Big-power rivalries are pulling attention toward political alliances and away from the needs of people and the earth. These questions will be part of the four-yearly assembly of the Catholic bishops of Oceania, taking place in Fiji on February 5–10.

The [Federation of Bishops Conferences of Oceania \(FCBCO\)](#) comprises four groupings: Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands; Australia; Aotearoa/New Zealand; and CEPAC, which covers a broad spread of islands in the central and south Pacific. The FCBCO covers a vast area, and communications are often challenging. But when the first peoples arrived in the Pacific, they navigated great distances to find their way to all corners of this ocean continent.

The bishops will take up these concerns as part of their pastoral responsibility and the worldwide synod process. They will listen to people affected by climate change, to the voices of local and indigenous people, and engage in theological reflection and prayerful conversations to discern how best to care for this part of our common home. And it will be part of their contribution to the continental level of the global synod process.

A sign of the importance of this conversation will be the presence of Cardinal Czerny from the Vatican’s Dicastery for Integral Human Development. Given the challenge of the widely scattered nature of the Oceania region, the bishops will also look at how they can have more continuous, coordinated action between assemblies.

Addressing these concerns will only be possible if Oceania and Asia work together.”
RAOEN for peoples, oceans and forests

Share your reflection – visit www.raoen.org and using the RAOEN Toolkit, you can add your voice.

A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal. (LS 202)

Going a Different Way: Responding to Covid-19 and Interconnecting Concerns in Southeast Asia

The Covid-19 pandemic has raised questions on how society proceeds and how it has brought to life deep-seated social inequalities. What has the experience from the pandemic taught us, and how can we reinforce the lessons learned in “going a different way” as society?

In 2021, the Southeast Asia Task Force was formed to support the Vatican Covid-19 Commission of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in understanding the interconnected concerns of Covid-19 in Southeast Asia. In 2022, the Task Force sought to deepen this conversation through country-listening sessions that gathered people from different disciplines and sectors of society: environment, public health, academe, and women religious.

The Task Force listened to the stories of the marginalized and vulnerable: Indigenous Peoples, urban poor, migrants and refugees, farmers and fisherfolk, prisoners, and persons with disabilities, among others. They highlighted concerns that have been exacerbated by the pandemic: lack of inclusivity, worsened injustice, and mental health issues. Yet, there were also stories of hope.

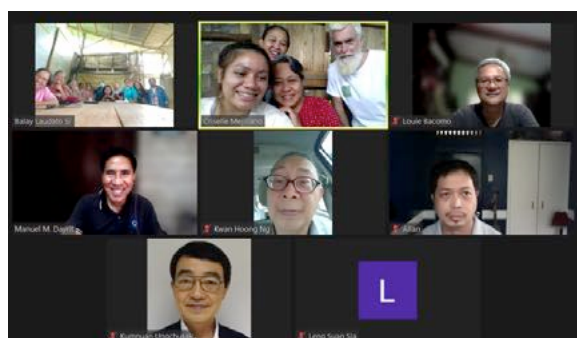
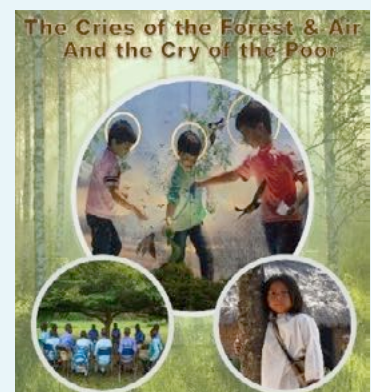
The pandemic prompted an increased sense of solidarity and mutual care with many people volunteering their time and resources to respond to urgent concerns. The discussions also highlighted the Church’s key role in connecting people with their spirituality and faith. What is common from the stories is how faith groups provided platforms for living out the social and community dimensions of faith by showing care for the most vulnerable.

The key output of this year-long engagement is a summary report entitled [Going a Different Way by Caring for the Good of All in Our Common Home](#).

The Cries of the Forest and the Poor

Neelam Kerketta SJ shares a reflection in the recently published [Promotio Iustitiae « Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat \(sjesjesuits.global\)](#)

“In this regard, indigenous people offer instances of climate solutions at the local levels, templates to manage national and global ecologies and to realise sustainability in different contexts. They also challenge the system that causes climate crisis at first-place premiers in crisis-making by offering an alternative to food systems, autonomy, solidarity, and non-profit-oriented economies. (nonanthropocentric worldviews). Indigenous peoples across the globe provide options in their system, and they have proven for ages that instances of sustainability have been consistently ignored in academia and practices. Although historically relegated to irrational, unscientific, unworkable, local, and non-universal, the indigenous systems offer hope for the crisis-ridden world. Like the ‘keeper of the seeds’ in the movie ‘Mad Max: Fury Road’, they plead to the world for water, land, an ecosystem, and autonomy, so that they can save themselves and save the world from ecological catastrophe.”



COVID Taskforce
October 2022

Indigenous Communities Caring for Creation at the Parramatta Diocese



Sue Martin shares a reflection that seeks ways for the Church in Parramatta to better honor the knowledge and wisdom of local communities and First Nations Peoples in caring for Creation and finding a way to connect forests, water (oceans), and people.

John Hunter, an elder from Macquarie University shares, “The Murama River Rangers program recognises and builds on

positive philosophies of learning and leadership. This intergenerational, intertribal, and cross-cultural initiative shares *Our Living Rivers* vision to transform the Parramatta River and its tributaries into living waterways. The pilot program is based at the Murama Healing Space, Sydney Olympic Park, and aims to engage and develop young leaders and future custodians through activation of the Wangal Walk on the Parramatta River. This includes empowerment, support and shared responsibilities for: operation of the Murama Healing Space; local conservation and environmental stewardship initiatives; connecting people to the River through programs, education, events, and creative arts; and facilitating broader community involvement and capacity building through volunteering opportunities.”

Twin Clouds on the Horizon: A combined climate and debt crisis in the Pacific

Caritas Oceania and Jubilee Australia Research Centre have produced a report, “Twin clouds on the horizon: averting a combined climate and debt crisis in the Pacific through locally-delivered climate finance,” looking in detail at debt and climate change and their combined impacts on the Pacific region. The report was discussed in Fiji during a Pacific Regional Talanoa from October 17–19. The report’s recommendations were also included in the Kioa Climate Emergency that was highlighted at COP27.

Read the report [here](#)



Photo credit: Jubilee Australia

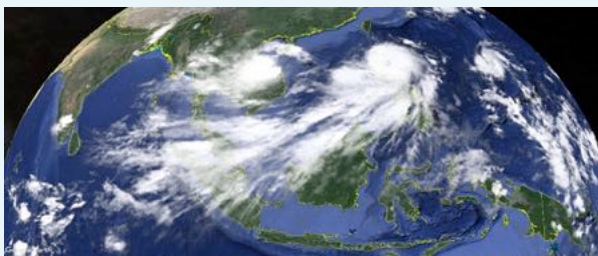
“It’s important for us to be aware that what we are doing at the grassroots level of community action is complemented by top-level action and advocacy.” - Damian Spruce, Associate Director, Advocacy and Government Relations at Caritas Australia, who attended COP 27.

Desires: Your Voice helps RAOEN grow



Faiths at COP15

Decision-makers met in Montreal, Canada, for the UN Biodiversity Conference to advocate for all members of creation, setting goals for 2030. Goal 1 of the Laudato Si' Action Plan speaks directly to our need to protect and enhance biodiversity as we respond to the "cry of the earth." Nature is critical to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees. To protect our health and well-being, as well as the health and well-being of the planet, we need to adopt a global biodiversity framework that is bold and takes on the main causes of nature loss.



An image of the River Above linking the weather, ocean, land, and life across Oceania and Asia



VOICES OF CONSCIENCE. As Church we are challenged to listen from the ground up and build bridges with all faiths to respond to the concerns of indigenous and vulnerable communities across the region.



River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN) seeks to sustain dialogue and collaborative engagements among the Church, indigenous, and local communities, youth, and other faith-based organizations within and beyond Asia and Oceania, as we work towards an understanding of what is possible in the care for our forests, oceans, and peoples.

Ecclesial networks RAOEN collaborates with:



Red Eclesial Panamazónica - REPAM
The Ecclesial Network on the Amazon Basin
● www.repam.net/es/ ● repam@repam.net

REPAM Campaign: "Good Living and Care of the Common Home" is a campaign produced by the Latin American Association of Education and Popular Communication – ALER, which seeks to reflect on the care of the earth, the home of all. We gather the voices of our indigenous Quechua, Kichwas, and Mayan Q'eqchil companions that resonate in our Abya Yala and realize the special relationship that these peoples have with nature. From education and popular communication, living in our Great Homeland, we join the millions of voices of **women and men defenders of human rights and nature**, to demand the change of socio-economic model, since the current one has us on the verge of a civilizational crisis.



ECCLESIAL NETWORK OF THE CONGO BASIN FOREST

IN COLLABORATION WITH SYMPOSIUM OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OF AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR



Réseau Eclésiologique du Bassin du Congo (REBAC)
The Ecclesial Network on the Congo Basin Forest
● <https://rebaccongobassin.org/>

UPCOMING EVENTS & CONFERENCES

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JANUARY

FCBCO Oceania Assembly Preparation

Preparation of the Draft Oceania Discernment on the Working Document for the Continental Stage (for FCBCO assembly)

FEBRUARY

FCBCO Oceania Assembly Fiji 5-10th

Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO) Assembly. Bishops begin their deliberations in Fiji, on matters to be formally part of the October Synod in Rome.

World Interfaith Harmony Week 1-7th

Promotes peace and unity among people of all faiths.

World Ocean Summit & Expo 27-1st of March

Accelerating the transition to a sustainable ocean economy, and for meeting the 2030 targets in UN SDG 14.

MARCH

UN Water Conference 22-24th

Midterm Comprehensive Review of Implementation of the UN Decade for Action on Water and Sanitation (2018-2028) New York

Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development 27-30th



SDG's under review in 2023 6 – 7 – 9 – 11 – 17

A chance to accelerate the 2030 Agenda and the presentation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

World Wildlife Day 3rd

to celebrate and raise awareness of the world's wild animals and plants.

APRIL

UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 17-28th

The Permanent Forum was established by the UN in response to demands from indigenous peoples for a high level permanent body at the United Nations

Ocean Visions Biennial Summit 4-6th

An opportunity to advance the sharing of knowledge and solutions to critical challenges at the ocean-climate nexus

Earth Day 22nd

www.earthday.org theme this year is "Invest in our Planet"



www.raoen.org

CONTACT US

River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN)

c/o Environmental Science for Social Change

1/F Manila Observatory

Ateneo de Manila University Campus

Loyola Heights, Quezon City 1108

Philippines

Tel: +63 2 8927 9684

Email: raoen.network@gmail.com

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