



The River Above

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

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

For peoples, oceans and forests

Towards Greater Welcome and Inculturation

Fr Gerard Burns, Archdiocese of Wellington



Credit: Kiribati Environment and Conservation Division / UNDP

It became clear in the Oceania continental process (with notable exceptions) that, by our common Christian formation that the Church is the privileged place for the experience of walking together, the first focus of conversation and discernment was around the intra-human dimensions of communion, participation and mission. This seems to have been the case around the world and so there was little mention of care for our common home and had little mention in the session's preparatory document, the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

Perhaps conscious of this and the ongoing ecological and social crisis our sister Mother Earth is experiencing, Pope Francis symbolically and materially placed care of our common home at the start of the gathering. The assembly formally started on October 4th, feast of St Francis of Assisi and the document *Laudate Deum* was published the same day, *Laudate Deum* is a follow-up to *Laudato Si*, a preparation for COP28, and a placing of the synod process in this crisis context.

This document, plus the discernment process at the circular tables of the synod hall, means that care of the earth has a couple of significant mentions in the Synod report. In section 4, *People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey*, (e) makes

In this issue:

Towards Greater Welcome and Inculturation	1
Indigenous Peoples, Synodality and the Asian Church	2
Committing to a South North climate justice advocacy	2
Voices of Faith and Integrity	3
Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries: A report from Oceania	4
A Reflection on the Australian Referendum	5
COP28: Pacific SIDS workshop a crucial preparation for annual climate negotiations	5
News from the Ecclesial Networks Alliance	6
Upcoming Events and Conferences	7

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

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the point that 'standing with the poor means engaging with them in caring for our common home. The cry of the earth and the cry of those living in poverty are the same cry..... *Laudate Deum* emphasises this.' To assist this section 4 (q) states: 'Church liturgy, teaching and practice must more explicitly and carefully integrate the biblical and theological foundations of integralecology'. Section 5, *A Church out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation*, which speaks of the rich cross-lingual and cross-cultural diversity within the Church as well as its challenges. In 5 (f) it is stated that the common work of social justice, peace, reconciliation and care for our common home can be a powerful witness in the face of a fragmented and violent world. There is also a recognition in 5(n), of the need for 'new paradigms of pastoral engagement with indigenous people, on a common journey and not as an action done to them or for them'. Their participation in decision-making processes at all levels will bring 'a more vibrant and missionary Church'.

How this is done in different contexts is the question. However we know that, because of indigenous/first peoples cosmovision and spirituality, any common journey will inevitably demand a deep kinship with the earth and all its creatures.

Indigenous Peoples, Synodality, and the Asian Church



Dialogue with the Lahu Hawye Indigenous community

The full article can be accessed at [LiCAS News](#)

In a meeting on "Indigenous Peoples, Synodality, and Church in Asia" in Chiang Mai, Thailand on October 26, some 16 church-based IP rights workers from six Asian countries called on Asian Churches "to effectively engage with

the IPs and mainstream their voices as part of a synodal church". RAOEN joined the gathering and shared about the network's efforts in seeking reconciliation with people, lands, and forests.

Since its inception in 1970, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has been promoting the "triple dialogue" with cultures, religions, and the poor, and more recently with nature as its fourth dialogue.

Pope Francis' synod on synodality is inspired by these gifts and charisms – cultural diversity, traditions, languages, respect and care for Mother Earth, living in harmony with Creation, sense of community, solidarity, mutual respect, sharing, respect for elders, wisdom.



Finding ways to call for greater welcome of Indigenous Peoples in the life of the Asian Church

Committing to a South North climate justice advocacy

Ecojesuit, the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network, recently released a statement for COP28 entitled "[Committing to a South-North climate justice advocacy](#)." RAOEN

joins in its journey in seeking to contribute to a strengthening of a South-North dialogue on climate justice, where there is greater concern on the Ocean states.



COP@HOME

Ecojesuit upholds tough hope and deepened faith as We uphold tough hope and deepened

faith as valid forms of participation in global spaces. It is through faith that our commitment is strengthened in working towards an integral ecology way of living while standing alongside the most vulnerable.

We join the call of *Laudate Deum* for COP28 to be a “a historic event that honors and ennobles us as human beings” (LD 59) through the following action points:

1. Commit to developing the **Fossil Fuel Non-proliferation Treaty**, slashing emissions through a **just fossil fuel phaseout**, and **holding top polluters accountable**.
2. Transform financial systems by establishing equitable financial flows of the **Loss and Damage fund for climate vulnerable communities**.
3. Implement climate action on **agriculture and food security** (Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security or SJWA) that upholds the role of **agroecology and culture-based solutions in addressing food and water vulnerabilities**.
4. Deliver **USD 100 billion of public and private climate finance** annually by developed countries in support of the Global South, and bridge gaps to meet the goal of USD 4.3 trillion by 2030 (OECD & Climate Policy Initiative, 2022).
5. Commit to **course-correcting adaptation and mitigation deficiencies** to keep the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement alive.

“I ask everyone to accompany this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and to help make it more beautiful, because that commitment has to do with our personal dignity and highest values” (LD 69).“



Voices of Faith and Integrity

Advocates at the forefront of climate justice calling for urgent action and change

“Non-economic losses and damages are kept to the heart of our reason for being. We need to provide systems and comfort to people already suffering from the irrecoverable losses and damages, so they feel supported and the rest of the world acknowledges their responsibility and morality.”



Soane Cardinal Mafi,
Bishop of Tonga, during
the Press Conference of
the Faith Leaders' Loss
and Damage Statement

“It is regrettable that we have not achieved an equal success to achieve the 1.5 target. We have not responded sufficiently to that call by raising ambition and that is our deep regret and disappointment.”



Seve Paeniu, Tuvalu
Finance Minister, during
the COP27 closing plenary

“I believe that we should maintain and care for our land, trees, and waters. So that even when we pass, the succeeding generations can still enjoy the trees, the water, and a proper place to live.”



Datu Nestor Menaling,
Tribal Leader of the
Pulangiye community,
Philippines

“We are concerned by the lack of progress and deficit in the formulation of National Adaptation Plans. These are crucial tools for countries struggling to build resilience against climate stress...2030 is the decisive decade for us.”



Senator Sherry Rehman,
Pakistan, during the
COP27 closing plenary

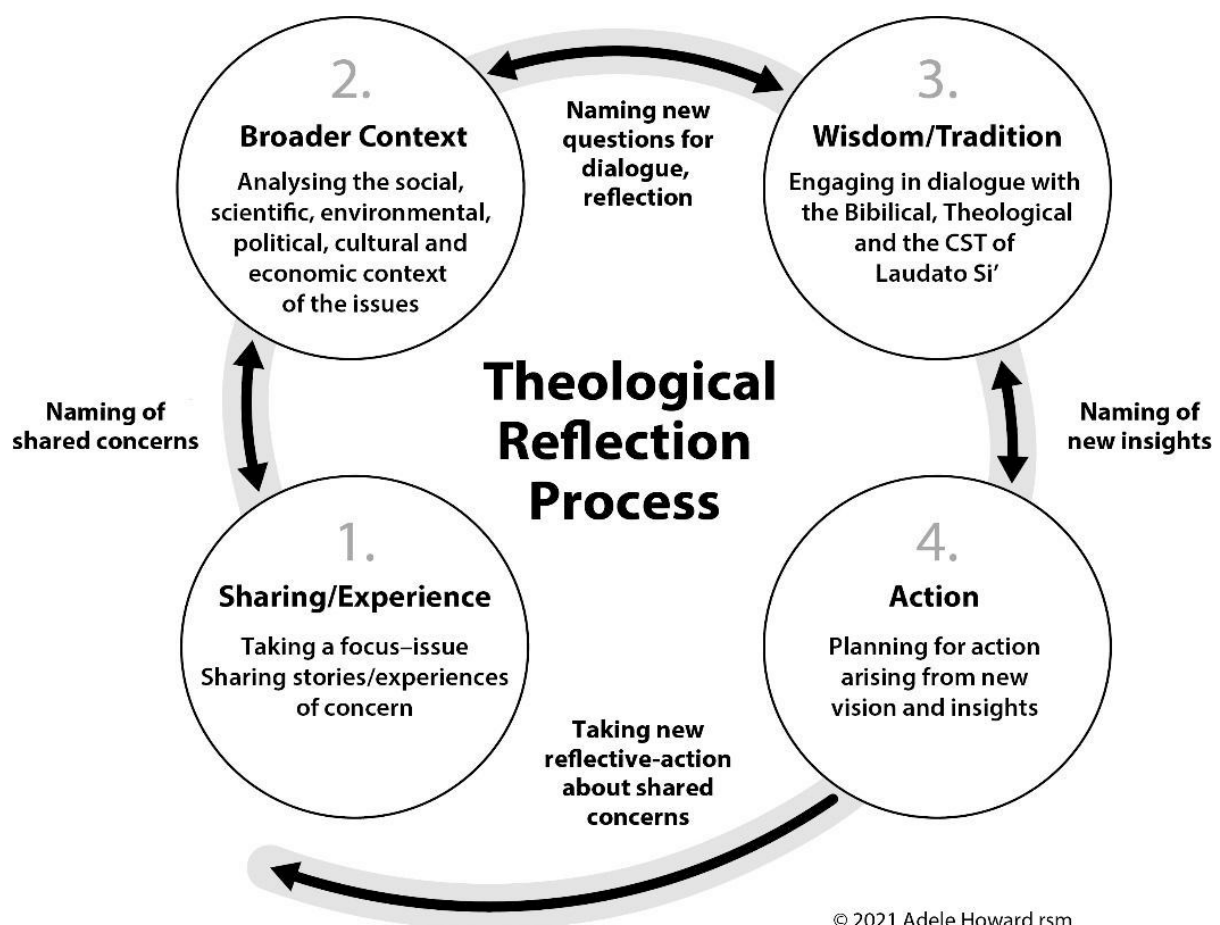
Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries: A report from Oceania

Doing Theology from the Existential Peripheries is a research project of the Migrants and Refugees Section (M&R) of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. It aims at deepening the teaching of Pope Francis and promoting a renewal of theology. RAOEN shares an excerpt of the Oceania report that documents the listening process in the Pacific Region focusing on 'ecological conscience'. The full report can be accessed [here](#).

Indigenous people and the wisdom of their insights can assist the broader community to learn from their integrated spiritual awareness. The people and the church of Oceania need to listen anew to Indigenous wisdom to develop a more effective response to the Word of God in our time and in this place.

If we work together as believing communities, we can develop balanced and highly effective outcomes for ethical decision-making and action to save our common home. These actions will strengthen the credibility of our public advocacy as people of faith, particularly when we articulate new theological statements based on insights which have emerged through these listening exercises. These statements will also be new expressions of the *sensus fidei fidelium*, especially those consistently articulated about the integration of the whole of creation as the basis of our relationship with and belief in God the Creator. With gratitude we have gathered these gifts of insight through the voices of the people from the existential peripheries of our world in the Oceania Region.

Methodology Used at the Regional Level



A Reflection on the Australian Referendum by Bishop Gauci

Despite the overwhelming rejection of the proposal to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander "Voice" in the Australian Constitution, Australia needs to find a way to address the inequalities many First Nations people endure. The full article can be accessed through [Vatican News](#).

At this moment in our history, it is time for the Church and its ministries to redouble our efforts to close the gap—not as a slogan, but as a commitment,' Bishop Gauci said.

'That can only be done by, in the words of our recent Social Justice Statement, listening to, learning from and loving our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters.' The Bishop of Darwin said: 'As I travel through the Northern Territory and beyond, I meet people from all walks of life who recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—

the traditional custodians of our lands and waters for tens of thousands of years—struggle with poor outcomes in health, education, employment and a range of other areas.

'Australians know those poor outcomes are not good enough in the nation of the alleged "Fair go".'

Bishop Gauci said while the debate leading up to the referendum was 'intense and, at times, challenging', there was an 'overwhelming consensus ... that more should be done to address the injustice experienced by so many First Nations people'.

He said that the Church, while not always living up to its own ideals, has been a driver of positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through its parishes, schools, social services, and health and aged care services.

COP28: Pacific SIDS workshop a crucial preparation for annual climate negotiations

RAOEN shares this [article on a pre-COP28 workshop](#) facilitated by the Pacific Islands Forum. The forum comprises of 18 members in the Oceania region, and works to foster cooperation between governments, collaboration with international agencies, and by representing the interests of its members.

Climate negotiators from PSIDS (Pacific Small Island Developing States), along with OneCROP Technical Advisers, convened in Samoa this week for a Pre-COP workshop. This workshop is a crucial step in preparing the Pacific region for the upcoming COP28 climate negotiations in UAE.

The participants are focusing on key regional priorities, including Loss and Damage, Climate Finance, Just Transition, Gender and Social Inclusion, Oceans, Mitigation and Adaptation. An important item for COP28 will be the first Global Stocktake, seen by many as the opportunity to 'course correct' as the world struggles to meet the Paris Agreement 1.5oC temperature goal.

During the meeting, they received a message from the UNFCCC Executive Secretary, Mr Simon Stiell, emphasizing the moral authority of Pacific



Leaders in addressing climate change and the significance of their representation at COP28.

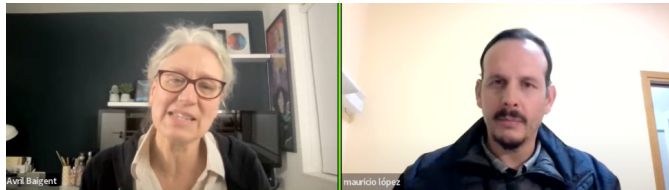
Delegates also had a virtual engagement with Ms. Hana Al Hashimi, a high-level representative from the COP28 President, who shared the priorities of the COP28 President and appreciated the active involvement of AOSIS, Pacific Leaders, and Ministers at the recent UNGA.

The workshop was organized by SPREP (Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme) with support from regional partners PIFS (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat) and SPC (Pacific Community).

News from the Ecclesial Networks Alliance



REPAM | Ecclesial Network on the Amazon Basin



Mr. Mauricio Lopez, Coordinator of the Organizing Committee recently shared School for Synodality's Group Discernment video, the sixth episode of the autumn 'Practicing Synodality' webinar series where he shared his journey of synodality as the Executive Secretary of CEAMA (Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon) and also as coordinator of the facilitators in the 2023 Rome Synod Assembly.

['Group discernment' with Mauricio Lopez - YouTube](#)

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REGCHAG | The Gran Chaco and the Cuarani Aquifer Territory Ecclesial Network



The network invites everyone to read "[LAUDATE DEUM: Confirmation and Challenge for Church Networks](#)," an analysis and reflection about Pope Francis' latest apostolic exhortation. This article by Mons. Angel Macín, Bishop of Reconquista, Argentina and REGCHAG coordinator, is available on their website.

Website: regchag.com
Facebook and Instagram: REGCHAG



REBAC | Ecclesial Network on the Congo Basin Forest



A meeting of Bishops of the Orientation Commission of the Ecclesial Network of the Congo Basin (REBAC), and national coordinators of 5 of the 6 countries that make up this Network was held in Kinshasa, from 1 to 4 November 2023, to reflect on the structuring of REBAC.

The Assembly recommended to form an ad hoc committee the drafting of a restructuring of REBAC which sets out the functioning of each component of REBAC with its specific responsibilities and organisation, which will be sent to Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM).

The purpose of the ad hoc committee was to answer, among other things, the following questions:

- How can we support the structure and functioning of REBAC in each country?
- How can activities be better coordinated?
- How to make the REBAC Orientation Committee work?
- What is its mission? What does it have to do with SECAM?
- What is the relationship between the Justice and Peace Commission/SECAM and REBAC?
- What is the relationship with the regional episcopal conferences?

Website: rebacongobassin.org



NOVEMBER

Release of the [Synthesis Report](#)

XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

[Pre-COP28 Webinar: Voluntary Carbon Markets - A Need for Course Correction](#)

Center for Science and Environment

DECEMBER



COP@HOME

[UNFCCC COP28](#)

[\[Dec 1 to 12\]](#)

Expo City, United Arab Emirates



**World
Soil Day**

[World Soil Day \[Dec 5\]](#)

The theme for 2023:

Soil and Water, a source of life

JANUARY 2024



2024 International Year of Camelids to highlight the important role camelids in protecting ecosystems, conserving biodiversity and ensuring food security in the

face of climate change. Camelids are an important livelihood for millions of poor families that live in the most hostile ecosystems of the earth.

FEBRUARY 2024

World Wetlands Day

2 February 2024

Wetlands and Human Wellbeing



[World Wetlands Day \[Feb 2\]](#)

Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development [Feb 20-23]

Bangkok, Thailand

Share your reflection – visit www.raoen.org 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)

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