



The River Above

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

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For peoples, oceans and forests

Integral ecology calls for journeying with those who suffer



Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David, Vice President of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), outlined a method for synodality as a framework for pastoral, cultural, and ecological engagement in a conversation with RAOEN Coordinator Pedro Walpole SJ on 6 August 2025. Cardinal David also shared how the BECs in his diocese (Diocese of Kalookan, Philippines) sustain the daily life challenges of communities.

RAOEN's attention to recent local, regional, and global pastoral letters on the pilgrimage of hope, care for creation and ecological conversion, and climate justice and our common home, reflects its continuing commitment to highlight the vulnerability of the margins and the continuing injustice because of inaction to the climate crisis and disruption where there are climate responses.

In the Philippines, the Catholic Bishops' Conference (CBCP) issued May Pag-asa Pa Ba? (Is There Still Hope?) on 2 February. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) released To the Local Churches in Asia on the Care of Creation: A Call to Ecological Conversion on 15 March. And on 12 June, episcopal conferences of Africa (SECAM), Asia (FABC), and Latin America and the Caribbean (CELAM) came together to publish A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home: Ecological Conversion, Transformation, and Resistance to False Solutions, later presented to Pope Leo XIV on 1 July 2025.

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Using these statements and letters in reflections with the youth gives courage to understand that the Church is listening and supporting local communities in their actions.

On the ground, RAOEN participated in local events with indigenous communities expressing faith, hope, and actions in a world where they continue to absorb the destruction. In many parts of the world, very extreme events of floods, fires, and the loss of whole villages at the same time are experienced while the changes in oceanic and glacial processes, sea level rise and pollution are also disturbing.

These injustices are very difficult to accept in the South where the vulnerabilities of people are higher and disasters from more intense and frequent climate extremes affect millions, while in the North the decisions and policies turn against climate responsibilities.

The joys and sufferings of Indigenous Peoples give life to the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, celebrated on 9 August, and the Season of Creation that we enter from 1 September to 4 October.

Stories of indigenous youth across the biome long for a world that listens and acts and enables a meaningful engagement with others on what needs to be done globally, and the need to challenge systems as well for a humanity that respects and includes all of creation.

The commitment of many is in communities and is the generational struggle of *Laudato Si'*. We are challenged as a synodal Church to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.

The lived experience of an integral ecology calls for journeying closely with those who suffer. We need to find mutual hope and community that allows the poor and indigenous communities to share the woundedness and life of the land and seas, and so that all from the margins can participate in renewed pastoral planning as a journeying in synodality.

Scan the QR code or click the underlined title to read or download the document.



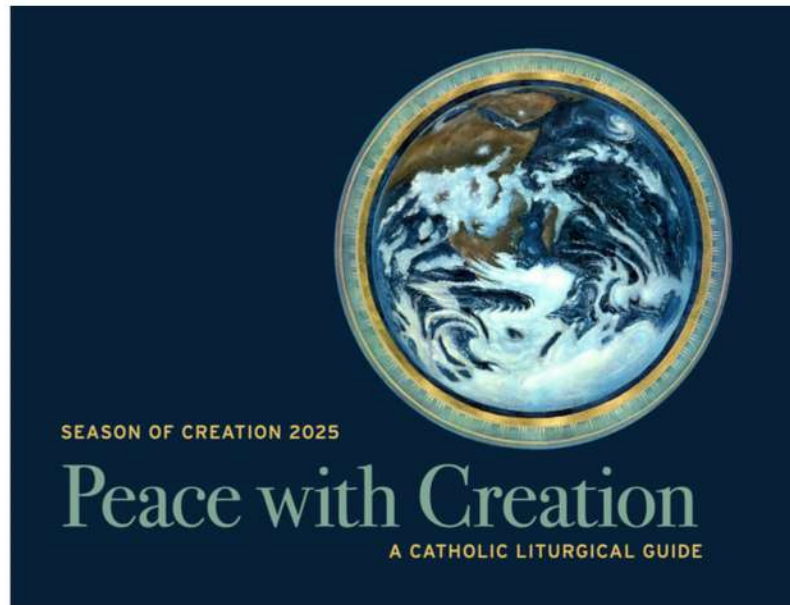
Pastoral Letter of the CBCP Calling on the Faithful to a Pilgrimage of Hope in the Jubilee Year of 2025 ["May Pag-Asa Pa Ba?"](#)



Pastoral Letter from the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) ["To the Local Churches in Asia on the Care of Creation: A Call to Ecological Conversion"](#)



Message of the Catholic Church in the global south on the occasion of COP30 ["A Call for Climate Justice And The Common Home: Ecological Conversion, Transformation And Resistance To False Solutions"](#)



Peace with Creation, Seeds of Peace and Hope: Season of Creation 2025

James Hug SJ

For the last several years, Father James "Jim" Hug SJ, has been preparing homily notes, analysis, and prayers for the Sundays of the Season of Creation (1 September through 4 October) to help focus those liturgies on the themes of care for Creation and God as Creator of the Universe. These are compiled in a 47-page booklet titled Season of Creation 2025: Peace with Creation, A Catholic Liturgical Guide and is available for downloading [here](#). Father Jim reminded us that "we need attention to care for the planet desperately these days!" RAOEN shares this excerpt from the liturgical guide.

The World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, 1 September, opens the Season of Creation each year. Since adding this day to the Catholic liturgical calendar in 2015, Pope Francis issued an official message each year, offering his reflections on the Season of Creation ecumenical theme.

This year, 2025, he took a slightly different path. He chose a theme to complement and support the ecumenical theme of *Peace with Creation*, and his theme is *Seeds of Peace and Hope*.

Then, as we know, on 21 April, Easter Monday, Pope Francis died, rising with Christ to a new life of profound peace and prophetic hope.

While Francis selected the Catholic theme for this year's Season of Creation, he left the reflection and official message to his successor.

Pope Leo XIV begins his reflection by noting how appropriate this theme is during this Jubilee year in which we are being called to be *Pilgrims of Hope*.

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE LEO XIV FOR THE 10th WORLD DAY OF
PRAYER
FOR THE CARE OF CREATION 2025

[1 September 2025]

Seeds of Peace and Hope

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

The theme of this World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, chosen by our beloved Pope Francis, is “Seeds of Peace and Hope”. On the tenth anniversary of the establishment of this Day of Prayer, which coincided with the publication of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, we find ourselves celebrating the present Jubilee as “Pilgrims of Hope.” This year’s theme thus appears most timely.

In proclaiming the Kingdom of God, Jesus often used the image of the seed. As the time of his Passion drew near, he applied that image to himself, comparing himself to the grain of wheat that must die in order to bear fruit (cf. Jn 12:24). Seeds are buried in the earth, and there, to our wonder, life springs up, even in the most unexpected places, pointing to the promise of new beginnings. We can think, for example, of flowers springing up on our roadsides from seeds that landed up there almost by chance. As those flowers grow, they brighten the gray tarmac and even manage to break through its hard surface.

In Christ, we too are seeds, and indeed, “seeds of peace and hope.” The prophet Isaiah tells us that the Spirit of God can make an arid and parched desert into a garden, a place of rest and serenity. In his words, “a spirit from on high will be poured out on us, and the wilderness will become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The work of righteousness will be peace, and the work of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places” (Is 32:15-18).

These words of the prophet will accompany the “Season of Creation,” an ecumenical initiative to be celebrated from 1 September to 4 October 2025. They remind us that, together with prayer, determination and concrete actions are necessary if this “caress of God” is to become visible to our world (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 84). The prophet contrasts justice and law with the desolation of the desert. His message is extraordinarily timely, given the evidence in various parts of the world that our earth is being ravaged. On all sides, injustice, violations of international law and the rights of peoples, grave inequalities and the greed that fuels them are spawning deforestation, pollution and the loss of biodiversity. Extreme natural phenomena caused by climate changes provoked by human activity are growing in intensity and frequency (cf. *Laudato Deum*, 5), to say nothing of the medium and long-term effects of the human and ecological devastation being wrought by armed conflicts.

He then notes Jesus’ frequent use of the image of seeds, even applying it to himself as a grain of wheat that must die to bring forth its fruit. In the mystery of their death, seeds are transformed and new life, new beginnings emerge. In Christ, he writes, we too are seeds - seeds of peace and hope.

Here he draws into his reflection this year’s ecumenical theme based on Isaiah 32:14-18 - the promise that “a spirit from on high will be poured out on us” and the desert created by so much injustice and abuse of Earth will be transformed into a fruitful field, a garden of beauty and peace.

That desert of devastation however – from deforestation and pollution to the loss of biodiversity and ever more frequent and intense storms, fires, and even wars – is still with us. It hurts the poor, the marginalized, the excluded, and indigenous communities the most. And all these wounds are the result of sin.

Pope Leo insists then that environmental justice is an urgent need, a matter of social, economic, and all-around human justice. And it is above all a duty born of faith since the Universe reflects the face of Jesus Christ. We must sow many seeds of justice to contribute to the growth of peace, offering us new hope.

He closes his message with these words:

I pray that Almighty God will send us in abundance his “Spirit from on high” (Isaiah 32:15), so that these seeds and others like them, may bring forth an abundant harvest of peace and hope.

The Encyclical *Laudato Si'* has now guided the Catholic Church and many people of goodwill for 10 years. May it continue to inspire us and may integral ecology be increasingly accepted as the right path to follow. In this way, seeds of hope will multiply, to be “tilled and kept” by the grace of our great and unfailing Hope, who is the risen Christ. In his name, I offer all of you, my blessing.

An ecumenical prayer service is available in the Season of Creation Celebration Guide, pp. 16-27, for use on 1 September and 4 October and can be downloaded at the [Season of Creation website](#).



Garden of Peace

The 2025 Symbol is inspired by Isaiah 32:14-18. Titled “Garden of Peace,” it depicts a white dove flying over a tree. The left side of the tree is barren, with roots digging into dry soil, surrounded by an arid, desolate landscape. In contrast, the right side of the tree is lush and green, standing amidst a flourishing landscape. The dove, carrying an olive branch in its beak, flies toward the right—symbolizing peace as a transition from a war-torn, overexploited land to one that is fertile, thriving, and hospitable.

As yet, we seem incapable of recognizing that the destruction of nature does not affect everyone in the same way. When justice and peace are trampled underfoot, those who are most hurt are the poor, the marginalized and the excluded. The suffering of indigenous communities is emblematic in this regard.

That is not all. Nature itself is reduced at times to a bargaining chip, a commodity to be bartered for economic or political gain. As a result, God's creation turns into a battleground for the control of vital resources. We see this in agricultural areas and forests peppered with landmines, "scorched earth" policies, [1] conflicts over water sources, and the unequal distribution of raw materials, which penalizes the poorer nations and undermines social stability itself.

These various wounds are the effect of sin. This is surely not what God had in mind when he entrusted the earth to the men and women whom he created in his image (cf. Gen 1:24-29). The Bible provides no justification for us to exercise "tyranny over creation" (Laudato Si', 200). On the contrary, "the biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to 'till and keep' the garden of the world [cf. Gen 2:15]. 'Tilling' refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature" (ibid., 67).

Environmental justice – implicitly proclaimed by the prophets – can no longer be regarded as an abstract concept or a distant goal. It is an urgent need that involves much more than simply protecting the environment. For it is a matter of justice – social, economic and human. For believers it is also a duty born of faith, since the universe reflects the face of Jesus Christ, in whom all things were created and redeemed. In a world where the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters are the first to suffer the devastating effects of climate change, deforestation and pollution, care for creation becomes an expression of our faith and humanity.

Now is the time to follow words with deeds. "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience" (Laudato Si', 217). By working with love and perseverance, we can sow many seeds of justice and thus contribute to the growth of peace and the renewal of hope. It may well take years for this plant to bear its first fruits, years that, for their part, involve an entire ecosystem made up of continuity, fidelity, cooperation and love, especially if that love mirrors the Lord's own self-sacrificing Love.

Among the Church's initiatives that are like seeds sown in this field, I would mention the Borgo Laudato Si' project that Pope Francis bequeathed to us at Castel Gandolfo. It is a seed that promises to bear fruits of justice and peace, and an educational project in integral ecology that can serve as an example of how people can live, work and build community by applying the principles of the Encyclical Laudato Si'.

I pray that Almighty God will send us in abundance his "Spirit from on high" (Is 32:15), so that these seeds, and others like them, may bring forth an abundant harvest of peace and hope.

The Encyclical Laudato Si' has now guided the Catholic Church and many people of good will for ten years. May it continue to inspire us and may integral ecology be increasingly accepted as the right path to follow. In this way, seeds of hope will multiply, to be "tilled and kept" by the grace of our great and unfailing Hope, who is the risen Christ. In his name, I offer all of you my blessing.

From the Vatican, 30 June 2025

Memorial of the First Martyrs of Holy Roman Church



Leo PP. XIV

[1] Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, Land and Food, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, 51-53.

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[Scan the QR Code or click this link to download the PDF from the official website of The Holy See.](#)

Indigenous youth speak with Fe y Alegría-RAOEN: Sharing knowledge and voices for climate action

Webinar

Encuentro de Reflexión: Camino a la Cop30

Juntanza:

Jóvenes indígenas hablan con Fe y Alegría-RAOEN: intercambio de conocimientos y voces para la Acción Climática.

30
jul

8:15 PM (GMT+8)
Filipinas
7:15 AM (GMT- 5)
Colombia



feyalegria-org
zoom
Español
Inglés



Indigenous youth from Asia and Latin America gathered online in a juntanza (meeting) and shared their local realities and aspirations, how their climate actions draw other youth in their communities, and as students, how learning is experienced in practice and lived out in community engagement, not just in books. The youth came from Bangladesh, Malaysia, from Bukidnon, Philippines, and from Colombia and Guatemala.

The juntanza webinar is part of a series of youth reflection meetings that [Fe y Alegría Internacional](#) is coordinating, Encuentro de Reflexión: Camino a la COP30 (Reflection Meeting: On the road to COP30), and invited RAOEN to co-organize on 30 July 2025 as RAOEN also has an ongoing series of [learning sessions](#) with indigenous youth on the climate crisis and COP30.

The Pulangiyën and Umajamnon youth from Bukidnon, Philippines reminded all that peace and unity are practices rooted in tradition and the wisdom of elders. While vulnerable to the climate crisis, indigenous communities are leaders in ecological healing and guardians of ancestral wisdom and know that they are not the problem and are part of the solution. The youth shared about paglaum (hope) as fragile yet vital and found in moments when they are able to speak and be listened to, especially the youth who are losing hope and disconnecting from their communities.

From Cartagena, Colombia, the youth spoke about their work in mangrove restoration as an ecological and cultural action. Protecting mangroves reduces the damaging impact of climate change and safeguards fishing livelihoods. Yet they also spoke of the destruction of waterways poisoned by untreated wastewater, which is not only an ecological crisis but a violation of human dignity.

From Guatemala, corruption, pollution, and climate disruption were named as daily realities. Still, the youth plant trees as a way of restoring not only ecosystems but relationships with the land, with each other, and with the future. The youth invited all to listen more deeply to how hope grows in places where the world sees only vulnerability.

Their messages to those in power and making decisions: 1) to think of the future, not only the present; 2) to understand local realities so that the leaders remain connected to the struggles of the communities and the wisdom of those who live on the land; and 3) to ensure that communities are united in seeking solutions to concerns that affect them daily.

Despite the distance of continents and the challenge of languages, the youth affirmed that they are not the problem but are part of the solution. They called on fellow youth to gather and make other futures possible.

Moral duty as a legal obligation:

Response of the Pacific Conference of Churches on the ICJ advisory opinion on obligation of States in respect of climate change

RAOEN shares the [statement of Reverend James Bhagwan](#), General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) on 23 July 2025 in response to the advisory opinion of the [International Court of Justice](#) on the obligation of States in respect of climate change.

"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers." (Psalm 24 : 1-2)

Deep gratitude for Pacific youth

We begin by saluting the Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change. Your six-year journey from a classroom idea to the Peace Palace has changed the course of international law. The PCC is privileged to have walked a small part of that voyage with you, and we are extraordinarily proud of what you have achieved for the whole creation.

Thanks to Pacific governments

We also honour Vanuatu and the wider Blue Pacific Continent for carrying this petition to the UN. Today's unanimous Advisory Opinion proves that when the Pacific speaks with one voice, the world listens.

A watershed for climate justice

The International Court of Justice has ruled that failure to act on climate change may constitute an internationally wrongful act, exposing States to reparations claims. Crucially, the Court affirms that access to a "clean, healthy and sustainable environment" is a human right for present and future generations.



Ecumenical resonance

The World Council of Churches welcomes this moment as the day moral duty became legal obligation, and launches a Decade for Climate Justice Action urging governments to re-orient policy towards ecological transformation.

Safeguarding the ocean – Stop deep sea mining

The Opinion underscores every State’s duty to prevent transboundary harm. Deep sea mining, whether driven by profit or marketed as “critical minerals” for defence, would irreparably scar the blue heart of our planet. We therefore renew our call, echoed at last month’s UN Ocean Conference, for an immediate moratorium on all seabed mining activity.

Recognising the rights of nature

If a healthy environment is a human right, then rivers, forests, mountains, and the ocean must be recognised as rights-bearing entities. Pacific Indigenous leadership is already blazing this trail.

- In 2024, Māori, Tahitian, Tongan, and Cook Islands leaders signed He Whakaputanga Moana, a treaty granting whales legal personhood, so their suffering can be challenged in court.
- Aotearoa-New Zealand’s Te Awa Tupua Act 2017 has long recognized the Whanganui River as a legal person with enforceable rights.

These examples show how the Court’s language can be translated into statute. Pollution or ecological damage by any actor must trigger prosecution and full restoration.

Guided by the Tuākoi ‘Lei Declaration, PCC will now:

- Continue to Reweave the Ecological Mat – continue promoting development models centred on ecological well-being and Indigenous wisdom
- Champion an Ocean of Peace – advocate that to be an Ocean of Peace, the Pacific must both be a Nuclear-Free and Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Zone and a permanent regional ban on deep sea mining
- Advance rights of nature legislation – work with churches, civil society, and lawmakers to grant personhood to key ecosystems and impose strict liability for harm

- Stand with the vulnerable – support Loss and Damage claims, including non-economic Loss and Damage, and press for timely, adequate finance from historical emitters
- Embed youth leadership – continue to secure seats for young theologians and activists within PCC governance to keep their prophetic voice at the centre of our mission.

A call to conscience

The Court has spoken; now the family of nations must act. Let us heed the Tuākoi ‘Lei summons to good neighbourly love by protecting creation, repairing injustice, and embracing a just transition worthy of our children.

The Pacific drum has sounded, may its rhythm guide the world towards an Ocean of Peace where peoples and planet flourish together.

Related documents to this historic ICJ Advisory Opinion in English and French (press release, summary, the advisory opinion and separate opinions and joint declarations) to this ICJ case can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

Indigenous youth and ACI Sisters journey together in faith and dialogue

Bridgit Ann Cuevas-Garcia

In a spirit of synodality and shared discernment, a group of indigenous youth from Upper Pulangi gathered at Balay Laudato Si’ in Bendum, Bukidnon with the visiting sisters of the religious congregation Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Ancillae Cordis Iesu or ACI) for a weekend of encounter, reflection, and communal prayer.

Anchored in the life of the Church and the lived experiences of the community, the sessions focused on listening to the signs of the times and seeking a deeply rooted response to the challenges raised by COP30, considering the pastoral guidance of Church leaders.

The gathering opened with words of welcome and personal sharing from participants. Many of the youth were returning scholars and graduates of the Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center (APC), who spoke of the significance of coming home to the land, to community, and to a place where they could remember and renew their calling.

They shared how their formation in Bendum shaped their identity and values, and how that grounding continues to guide them as they navigate studies, work, and growing responsibilities. The tone was intimate and reflective, characterized by mutual trust and the desire to continue walking together as people of faith.



Central to the reflections were three recent pastoral and ecclesial documents that guided conversations:

- May Pag-asa Pa Ba? (Is There Still Hope?) Pastoral Letter on the Jubilee 2025: A Pilgrimage of Hope by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines
- To the Local Churches in Asia on the Care of Creation: A Call to Ecological Conversion, FABC Pastoral Letter
- A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home: Ecological conversion, transformation, and resistance to false solutions, Statement of the Churches of the Global South

Reflecting on the CBCP's call for inner renewal and accountability, the young people of Upper Pulangi recognized their own life stories in the bishops' words: *"As we reflect on these situations, we realize that the first thing we need to do is to examine ourselves and pursue the path of personal, institutional, and ecclesial conversion in order to rediscover hope. This is the opportunity that the Jubilee Year provides us. Thus, we too make ourselves accountable before the Lord."*

This invitation to conversion resonated deeply with the participants, many of whom shared experiences of coming home to their communities after years away at school or work, seeking how to serve more meaningfully and with integrity.

The group also engaged the FABC Pastoral Letter on the Care of Creation which spoke directly to the urgency of ecological action:

"We call on our dioceses to contribute by raising awareness, supporting climate advocacy, and engaging with decision-makers to push for ambitious and equitable climate solutions. Let us ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable are heard and that the call for justice resonates strongly, especially in the context of our shared Christian responsibility to care for the earth and all its inhabitants."

The youth reflected on how their communities, often among the most affected by climate impacts, also carry deep knowledge and resilience—resources the broader Church must listen to and learn from.

This call to live responsibly with creation was echoed in the Global South Churches' statement, *A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home*:

"It is about living a productive and supportive life, in peace and harmony with our brothers and sisters and with ecosystems. Good Living proposes a new form of human society that recognizes and respects its interdependence with the web of life, promoting solidarity, mutual respect and new alternatives for living, free from the logic of accumulation and prejudice."

For the indigenous youth, this articulation of "Good Living" affirms a way of life their elders passed down – a life rooted not in consumerism, but in balance, respect, and the wellbeing of both people and place.

These texts invited the participants to reflect on their own life stories and community realities in light of the Church's call to ecological conversion, renewal of hope, and deeper participation in the life of the Church. The conversations wove together scriptural reflection, the wisdom of indigenous way of life, and personal experience, revealing how faith, land, and culture are deeply interconnected.

Expressions of community life and joy enriched the discussions of the pastoral letters. The ACI sisters led a bread-making session with the youth - kneading, shaping, and baking as a form of shared labor and hospitality. The sisters also read stories to the younger kids of the dalēpaan, drawing from scripture and lived experience, inviting deeper reflection and opening spaces for dialogue. Choir practice in preparation for the Sunday Mass created another space for collaboration and spiritual preparation, with the youth offering their voices to serve the liturgy and renew their role in the community.

There was time for play and recreation with table tennis and volleyball, drawing laughter and energy. These activities, though simple, became moments of connection and kinship, breaking down barriers and building up the sense of being one body. In all these interactions - whether in study, silence, sport, or song - the spirit of synodality was alive: listening to one another, discerning together, and making space for every voice.



Pedro Walpole SJ celebrated the morning Sunday Mass at the community chapel, with community members from Bendum joining the youth and the Sisters in a Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) session afterwards at Balay Laudato Si'.

This provided the space for participants to listen to the Word, to one another, and to the stirrings of the Spirit.

The youth spoke of how their early experiences in BECs formed their understanding of Church as community, as dialogue, and as service. They reflected on the importance of walking with others, of being a presence of hope in their sitios, and of witnessing to a faith that is not abstract but lived and embodied in the land and in daily life.

The presence of the ACI Sisters added depth to the gathering. Sister Ellie from Dapitan City in Zamboanga del Norte shared her admiration for the landscape and the life she witnessed in the community. She spoke of the contrast between urban and rural religious life, observing how a house without walls - like that of the lawig which is a small nipa hut - can reflect a heart that is open, simple, and truly free.

Participants gathered around a bonfire beneath the stars and encircled by the forest as the weekend ended. Songs and prayers of thanksgiving were offered, and the bonfire became a symbol of kinship, warmth, and the enduring light of faith. It was a quiet yet powerful moment, a reminder that even small gatherings rooted in relationship and grounded in the land can become places of renewal and discernment for the Church.



As the universal Church celebrates the Jubilee of Hope 2025 and the global community looks ahead to the climate change gathering at COP30 in Belém, Brazil, this gathering in Bendum stands as a local expression of the Church listening, learning, and accompanying.

The witness of the indigenous youth, together with the ACI Sisters, is a path of integral ecology, cultural rootedness, and synodal engagement that is vital, not only for the margins, but for the Church as a whole.

RAOEN joins Faith in the Ocean, a multi-faith declaration and UNOC side event for ocean action

On the occasion of the third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) in Nice, France from 9 to 13 June 2025, RAOEN joins Faith in the Ocean, a declaration for multifaith call for ocean action signed by international faith-based organizations, that will be launched on 11 June as a UNOC side event.

The declaration lays out seven calls to action to ensure a healthy, sustainable, and thriving ocean in the web of life for future generations:

- spiritual practice to foster deeper spiritual connection
- realignment to right relations with the ocean
- education on ocean conservation and lifestyle changes
- community engagement for protection and defense of ocean advocates
- policy advocacy such as the BBNJ ratification
- partnerships
- an integrated approach in responding to environmental concerns

Pedro Walpole SJ, RAOEN Coordinator, joined other speakers on 11 June at the Holy Trinity Church in Nice in a panel discussion, Faith in the Ocean: A Multifaith Call to Action for Ocean Flourishing, an in-person UNOC side event that intends to showcase how faith-based organizations draw on their faith traditions to promote a healthy ocean and a revolution of consciousness that realigns humanity's relationship with the ocean.

The Faith in the Ocean declaration launch and side event will examine how multiple faith traditions inform ocean action to meet SDG14 while conserving and living sustainably with the ocean.

Featured also are the voluntary ocean commitments of co-sponsors of Faith in the Ocean that draw attention to critical ocean issues such as ocean-climate-biodiversity interlinkages, plastic pollution, and deep-sea mining. Co-sponsors include the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Peace, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Maryknoll Sisters, Temple of Understanding, Missionary Society of Saint Columban, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, and Fondazione PROCLADE Internazionale Onlus.

FAITH IN THE OCEAN:
 A PANEL DISCUSSION OF THE MULTIFAITH CALL TO ACTION
 FOR OCEAN FLOURISHING,
 A SIDE EVENT AT THE UN OCEAN CONFERENCE 3

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 2025
 15:00 - 17:00 LOCAL TIME

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH
 11 RUE DE LA BUFFA, 06000, NICE, FRANCE



Scan above QR Code or
 click [this link](#) to view the
 conference highlights



Scan the QR Code or click
[this link](#) to sign The
 UNOC3 Multi-Faith
 Declaration online.

Faith in the Ocean:
An International Multi Faith Sign-on Declaration

*On the occasion of the United Nations Ocean Conference
 Nice, France, June 9-13, 2025*

Preamble: As representatives of diverse faiths and spiritual traditions, we recognize the profound relationship between humanity and the ocean. With roughly 80% of the world's population practicing a faith or spiritual tradition, we are united in our commitment to protect and preserve the ocean, the original womb of all life.

Spiritual Perspective: As a source of physical, spiritual, and mental well-being, we recognize the sacred origins of all life in the ocean and honor our responsibility to care for it as the ocean cares for humanity and the entire web of life. We embrace the spiritual, mystical, and contemplative nature of the ocean. We see the need for repentance in the way humanity has abused the ocean and the need for transformation in our relationship with it.

We acknowledge the dynamic exchange of energy between humanity and the ocean, recognizing that the ocean absorbs and reciprocates the energy we generate. As faith communities, we commit to consciously generating and offering energy of love, respect, and gratitude for the ocean. Through our collective and individual spiritual practices, we seek to cultivate values of reverence, stewardship, humility, responsibility and interconnectedness, ensuring that our relationship with the ocean is one of harmony and care.

Grounded in direct relationships with impacted communities and ocean life, we embrace nonviolence and mutual healing in our interactions with the ocean. We respect all forms of life and reject the exploitation and commodification of the ocean and coastal life.

Issues of Concern: Acknowledging the ocean's connection with other critical concerns such as biodiversity destruction, climate change, plastic pollution, land degradation and desertification, massive species endangerment and extinction, threatened mangroves, coral reefs, and seagrass, we support a holistic, comprehensive, integrated, gender-responsive, and human rights- and ecosystem-based approach to ocean care. Of primary concern is the mounting threat of deep sea mining, industrial commercial fishing and the impacts they have on the delicate balance of life in the ocean and on land.

We value the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples, women and youth, and place the environment at the center of our efforts. We strive to foster a mutually sustainable and respectful relationship with the ocean through our spiritual practices, lifestyle choices, and policy advocacy commitments. We believe that the ocean itself is a source of wisdom from which humanity can learn.

We observe that small island nations are particularly vulnerable to these environmental and policy concerns. Therefore we stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers of these nations who, though least responsible for ocean degradation, are most at risk for the consequences. We see the need for special attention to the protection of human and nature rights of coastal communities. Highlighting the commodification of the ocean and its consequences, we recognize how economic exploitation undermines the health of the ocean and erodes a values-based relationship with it. The unchecked extraction and commercialization of marine resources threaten biodiversity, disrupt ecosystems, and diminish the ocean's ability to sustain life. We must restore a relationship with the ocean that is guided by respect, responsibility, and sustainability.

Calls to Action

Spiritual Practice: Encourage collective and individual meditation, prayer, and contemplation to generate the energy of love, respect, and gratitude for the ocean, fostering a deeper spiritual connection and sense of responsibility for its well-being.

Realignment: Realign our relationship with the ocean, recognizing humanity's deep dependence on it while acknowledging the harm we have caused and our responsibility to support its restoration and protection.

Education: Promote awareness building and education on ocean conservation including science-based research and traditional knowledge. For example, learning about the harmful impacts of deep sea mining and geo-engineering of the ocean. Emphasize the need for lifestyle changes that reduce harm to marine ecosystems, encouraging more sustainable living practices that align with the well-being of the ocean.

Community Engagement: Foster community engagement in ocean protection efforts and defend ocean advocates who are threatened for their calls to justice.

Policy Advocacy: Urge governments to adopt and introduce policies that protect the ocean such as the ratification of the BBNJ (Agreement on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, or High Seas Treaty).

Partnerships: Encourage partnerships between faith leaders, scientists, academics, and policymakers.

Integrated Approach: Advocate for a more holistic and integrated approach to environmental issues, aligning efforts across UNFCCC, CBD, Plastics, and land degradation and desertification initiatives.

Together, we commit to these principles and actions, guided by our faith and spiritual traditions, to ensure a healthy, sustainable, and thriving ocean in the web of life for future generations.

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RAOEN organizes animation program in Mymensingh and Dinajpur dioceses in Bangladesh

Indigenous youth leaders from the Mymensingh and Dinajpur dioceses in Bangladesh took part in a two-day animation program to promote participatory engagement in basic ecclesial communities (BECs) while affirming their cultural identity and ecological responsibility.

Held from 8 to 9 May, the program was organized by the River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN) and Caritas Mymensingh Region under the theme “Towards Building Participatory Basic Ecclesial Communities.”

The event gathered 20 participants from six indigenous organizations: Bangladesh Garo Chatro Sonnghton (BAGACHAS), Garo Student Union (GASU), Bangladesh Catholic Students’ Movement (BCSM), Garo Student Federation (GSF), MIKRAKBO, and ASARU.

The initiative is part of a broader regional effort facilitated by James Pochury, RAOEN’S Regional Coordinator for South Asia, who is conducting similar sessions across five dioceses in three countries for indigenous youth leaders, priests, and religious. The process combines immersive learning and game-based methods aimed at fostering inclusion and spiritual engagement.

“Everyone felt deeply impacted by the immersive and games-based participatory process,” said Pochury. “The purpose of the mission is to strengthen communion in a participatory way, especially in the most exploited, discriminated, dispossessed, and marginalised indigenous lands.”

The sessions in Bangladesh followed similar programs held in India’s Jamshedpur Diocese and at Don Bosco University, and preceded another round in Ranchi

Archdiocese, located in what Pochury described as “the indigenous heartland” of India.

Pochury warned that indigenous communities across the region face mounting threats to their land and livelihoods. He said dominant communities are “encroaching indigenous lands” while “existing progressive laws of the land are being amended to favour supremacist, capitalist, neoliberal and neo-colonialists.”

He described a deliberate manufacturing of an “agrarian crisis to capture land for corporate farming and build economic zones,” warning that such developments would “only fill the indigenous people in the subservient, lower rank and file of the employment command chain.”

The program in Mymensingh used participatory methods to encourage active involvement, helping participants gain a sense of ownership in the process.

In Jamshedpur Diocese, Bishop Telesphore Bilung, SVD – who also serves as President of the Tribal Commission of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India – personally sat through the full two-day session alongside other participants, underscoring the Church’s commitment to walking with Indigenous communities.

The animation initiative is set to continue in Ranchi Archdiocese under Archbishop Vincent Aind, further expanding efforts to empower Indigenous youth through faith-based ecological engagement.

Organizers emphasized that by fostering mutual listening, collaboration, and peaceful advocacy, the youth can play a vital role in building inclusive, faith-driven communities that also defend Indigenous rights and ecological integrity.

This article originally appeared on [LiCAS News](#).

Rooted in culture, open in faith: Indigenous youth gather in Bendum for reflection and action

Indigenous youth leaders from Mindanao representing the Blaan, Matigsalog, Pulangiyēn, Higaonon, and Umajamnon communities recently came together for a transformative three-week workshop at Balay Laudato Si' in Bendum, Bukidnon.

More than a workshop, the Beginners' Program on Inculturation, Synodality, Integral Ecology and Indigenous Pastoral Ministry from 22 April to 10 May 2025 is a journey of identity, faith, and hope for the 15 Indigenous youth.

"I am hoping that what I learn here, I can share to others," Dave, an Umajamnon youth from Cabanglasan, Bukidnon said.

Pedro Walpole SJ, Coordinator of the River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN), said that the gathering is intended as a guide for the youth to reflect deeply on the challenges they face and the strengths they draw from their culture and spirituality.

"Honestly, I'm not very active in the Church," shares Eneriza, a Pulangiyēn youth from Bendum. "But for me, I see that cultural practices and Church traditions are very similar. As an indigenous, I follow our traditional ways, but I'm open to learning the ways of the Church. I see a connection between the two."

This openness in bridging tradition and faith is at the heart of inculturation and synodality: walking together, listening to one another, and recognizing the sacred in both ancestral wisdom and Christian spirituality.



Inculturation, Synodality, Integral Ecology and Indigenous Pastoral Ministry Program

Balay Laudato Si', Bendum, Cebuano /English context 22 April – 10 May 2025



This program is envisioned for Indigenous lay pastoral workers, catechists/alagad, junior nuns, and other interested indigenous youth who desire to prepare themselves for ministry with Indigenous Peoples. It may also be suitable for newly ordained priests who desire to pursue this ministry.

Inculturation, synodality, integral ecology, and indigenous pastoral ministry can flourish if more individuals are properly educated on these important concerns. Ministry with the Indigenous Peoples in different communities requires sufficient time and careful preparations. The key to its success is the active presence and engagement of individuals who truly embrace this engagement in mind and heart with the youth where they are.

When a program is properly prepared, interested youth will be encouraged to come. We want to be able to engage the youth in their concerns and working from there, see how the best engagements and actions can be constructed together. These interweaving processes of learning can develop in relation to Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), but most especially in a reflective process where the Indigenous youth feel comfortable and active.



"We must not only observe community realities, we must be part of transforming them," said Dr Emil Ibera, highlighting the urgent call to action. "Many of our youth cannot complete their studies due to socio-economic challenges. These require concrete action, not just reflection." Dr Ibera and Father Walpole are facilitating the workshop.

During the first week of the workshop, the youth explored their cultural and social contexts, how faith and identity intersect, the power of community-led action, and the paths to a resilient and inclusive future.

"This is what integral ecology looks like - where the care for creation meets the care for culture and community," Father Walpole said.

The 15 young leaders are crafting a shared vision in unity - one where culture is not a barrier to faith but its foundation, where tradition is not something to escape but to embrace and grow from.

Together, they are lighting a path forward - rooted in heritage, grounded in faith, ready for action.

Listening, weaving, and finding hope with indigenous youth in northern Thailand

A simple yet profound encounter in Mae Tang District in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand, marked the beginning of a shared journey of active listening, storytelling, and building hope as Indigenous youth from 10 villages gathered not just to speak, but to be heard.

From 9 to 11 April 2025, a team from the River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN) visited communities in northern Thailand. This is part of RAOEN's mission to contribute in opening spaces for Indigenous youth voices and being present with them in the midst of climate-induced displacement, cultural erosion, and deep uncertainty.



Listening as a first step toward hope

In the village of Bakhalam, a young man spoke of staying rooted: "We love each other. I want the youth to know the church and grow in friendship and love."

In Mae Na Chang, a Karen village in Mae Hong Son province, painful stories of addiction and resilience were shared. Younger peers were urged not to follow that path. "It is hard to come out. I want to be a good example in my community."

These words speak of deeply personal truths.

Young people spoke of the forests they protect, essentially their life, and the hope to preserve their own environment. They talked about the floods they survived, and the dreams they carry for agri-businesses, tour guiding, and communal harmony.

Amid these stories, there is a longing to stay connected to land, culture, and each other, even as structural challenges like national park restrictions, generational gaps, drug exposure, and forced migration threaten their ways of life.

We are concerned for the youth, their activities, and the care of our common home," said Ms Vilaiwan "Kep" Phokthavi, Director of the Jesuit Foundation-Prison Ministry in Thailand and who also heads Emmaus Farm that initially served as a place for re-integration to society of recently-released prisoners and recovering drug addicts. In recent years, Kep and a small team of four from the Karen Indigenous community, have broadened Emmaus Farm to welcome people who want to connect with the land and community, inspired and informed by Laudato Si'.

A faith-based journey of reflection and relationship

At the heart of the gathering was a gentle insistence that reflection, prayer, and community are forms of resistance and healing.

Pedro Walpole SJ, RAOEN Coordinator, shared reflections from his home in Bendum, Mindanao where the youth face similar disruptions. "In the cities, people often lack what you have - a deep relationship with land and community."



RAOEN's role is to sustain relationships among the Church, Indigenous and local communities, youth, and faith-based organizations, all rooted in care for forests, oceans, and peoples.

RAOEN draws its strength from Indigenous communities who humbly depend on their faith as they reflect and hope to find ways forward. They do so through caring for creation and the sacred current of life that shapes winds and waters across the biome, symbolizing the interconnectedness of territories, stories, struggles, and solutions.

Crossing borders, finding shelter

The journey of listening also brought the team to a forested community where the Karen migrants from Myanmar care for more than 120 elephants. Fleeing conflict, many live without legal status. Their livelihoods are tied to irregular tourism, and access to education and health care is often problematic.

The Karen people, one of the largest Indigenous Peoples in Myanmar, have faced decades of conflict, military aggression, and displacement. Their ancestral lands in southeastern Myanmar have long been the sites of violent clashes between the Myanmar military and

ethnic armed groups. As a result, many Karen communities are forced to flee, often multiple times, seeking safety across the border in Thailand.

Life in displacement brings new challenges - lack of legal recognition, restricted access to health care, education, and stable employment. For those who stay behind, militarization and resource exploitation continue to threaten both their cultural integrity and their natural environment.

Despite these hardships, the Karen People maintain their strong cultural identity through language, their weaving, rituals, and close ties to the land. As a Karen elder from the Thai-Myanmar border shared, "even when we were running from village to village, we carried our weaving frames with us. It is our story, our memory, our dignity,"

As Christians, we are called to walk with the displaced and the marginalized. The Karen People's journey is a living testimony of hope in adversity. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us that the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one.

The Karen youth, caring for elephants while hiding in forests, reveal a sacred resilience rooted in their relationship with creation. As a Karen youth said, "I pray for peace, not just for us, but for all who have lost their homes and dreams."

"We are happier here than in Myanmar," one resident shared. "There are only guns and no homes there." Yet fear remains as without proper visas, many retreat into the forest when immigration authorities appear.

This is not just a humanitarian issue; it is a spiritual call. We are urged to respond out of solidarity, justice, and faith, and not out of charity alone.

These stories are also powerful reminders that climate and conflict are deeply intertwined as both displace lives and cultures but also call us to deeper solidarity.



Weaving a future together

In a world that often overlooks the realities of Indigenous People, RAOEN seeks to weave these testimonies into a wider fabric of hope and action. This journey in northern Thailand is part of an unfolding community action that RAOEN animates across Asia and Oceania.

For the Indigenous youth participants, there is a commitment to tradition, despite systemic challenges, that is an act of faith. As one young woman said, "Many youth are leaving the village but I want to preserve our weaving culture."

RAOEN walks with these youth not only through workshops and field visits, but in the ongoing journey of mapping stories, understanding community needs, and bridging generations. In sharing this story, RAOEN invites us to reflect, reclaim, and reweave across all our communities in Asia and Oceania and to continue walking together, in faith, in love, and in hope.

As Pedro shared during the gathering, "Sometimes we must take a step back to breathe, to listen again, to discern. But hope is something we cultivate together by listening, by encouraging, by praying, and by reflecting."

UPCOMING EVENTS & CONFERENCES

SEPTEMBER



Season of Creation 2025
Theme: Peace with Creation
1 September to 4 October

RAOEN visit to the Prelature of Infanta

Organized by the RAOEN Southeast Asia Regional Coordinator



**Infanta, Quezon
Philippines**

13 to 15 September

RAOEN visit to the Apostolic Vicariate of Taytay

Organized by the RAOEN Southeast Asia Regional Coordinator



**Taytay, Northern Palawan
Philippines**

16 to 21 September

Bishops' Seminar for Synodality

Organized by the FABC Central Secretariat



**Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Center
Bangkok, Thailand**

22 to 26 September

OCTOBER

Jubilee of Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies

Organized by the General Secretariat of the Synod



**Synod
2021
2024**

**Vatican
Rome, Italy**

24 to 26 October

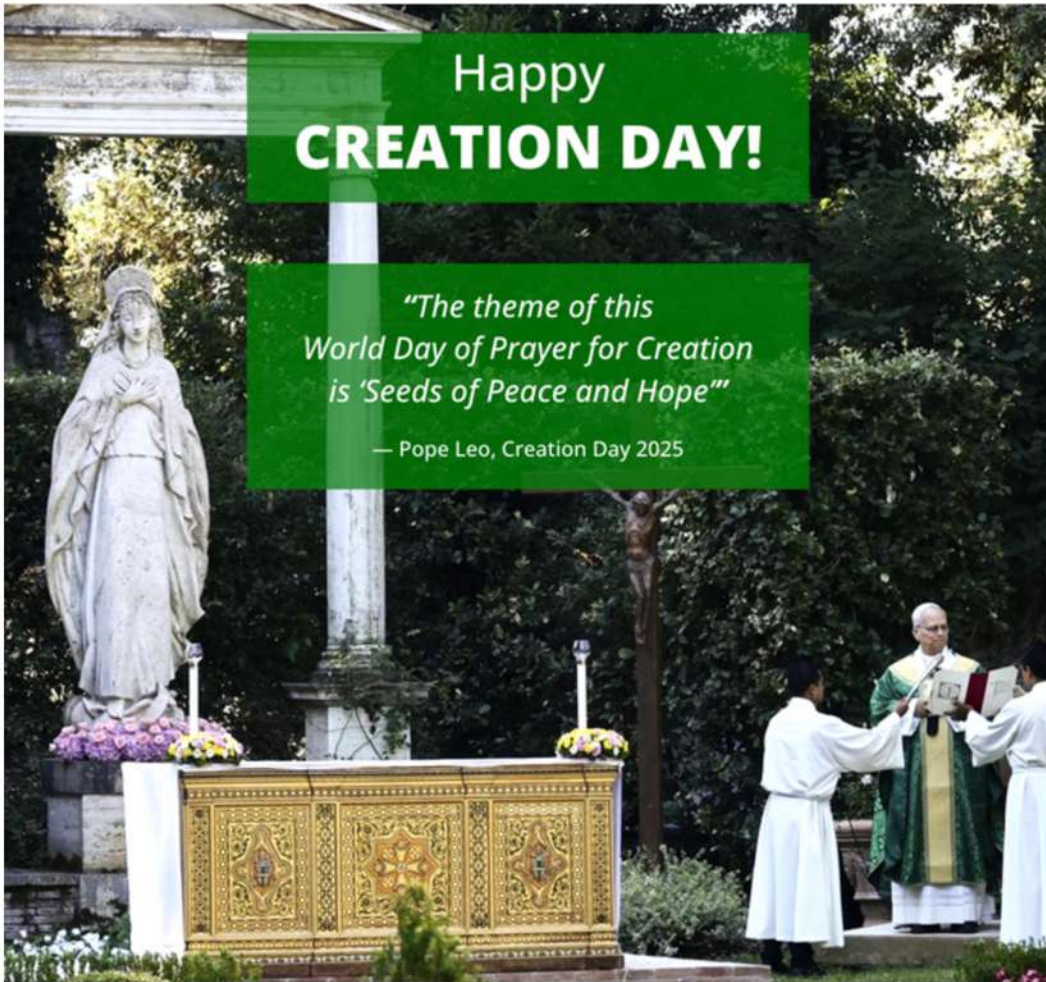
NOVEMBER

UN Climate Change Conference



**Belém, Para
Brazil**

**10 to 21
November**



Happy
CREATION DAY!

*"The theme of this
World Day of Prayer for Creation
is 'Seeds of Peace and Hope'"*

— Pope Leo, Creation Day 2025

**Share your reflection – visit www.raoen.org
Use the RAOEN Toolkit on the website
so 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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