

DOING THEOLOGY FROM THE EXISTENTIAL PERIPHERIES REPORT

OCEANIA REGION

ADELE HOWARD, RSM REGIONAL COORDINATOR

ANNE WALSH PASTORAL COMMUNICATIONS EXPERT

GENERAL INFORMATION

ADVISORS:

Dr Bruce Duncan CSsR (Melbourne, Australia)

Dr Neil Darragh (Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand)

Professor Philip Gibbs SVD OBE (Madang, Papua New Guinea)

Dr Veronica Lawson RSM (Ballarat, Australia)

Archbishop Dr Peter Loy Chong (Suva, Fiji)

Professor Dermot Nestor (Sydney, Australia)

Dr Kathleen Rushton RSM (Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand)

Fr Barry Ryan (Ballarat, Australia)

Dr Anne Tormey RSM (Adelaide, Australia)

Australian Catholic University provided significant support throughout the Theology Project.

PEOPLE AND COLLABORATORS

Ten theologians and pastoral workers were involved in the listening exercises, either as facilitators, or as participants:

Mariana Tevurega SM (Fiji)

Maina Talia (Tuvalu)

Sr Kathleen Rushton RSM and

Sr Makareta Tawaroa RSJ (Aotearoa New Zealand)

In Australia,

Clare Locke (Brisbane)

Priscilla O'Brien (Cairns)

Sr Adele Howard RSM (Melbourne and online)

Fr Aloysius Nato SVD (Melbourne)

Fr Barry Ryan (Ballarat),

Sr Veronica Lawson RSM (Ballarat)

Anne Walsh (Ballarat and Melbourne)

NUMBERS AND PROFILES

16 people were interviewed individually. There were seven formal groups: Five groups in Australia and two in Aotearoa New Zealand. Unfortunately, groups planned in Papua New Guinea and a second group arranged for Christchurch New Zealand were unable to proceed due to changes in local circumstances.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Sr Adele Howard RSM conducted face-to-face interviews with Sherry Balcombe, Joan Hamilton RSJ, Bruce Duncan CSsR and Dr Margaret Bannan at Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Thornbury, Melbourne, with Fr Aloysius Nato SVD at Sacred Heart Parish, Preston and online interviews with Helen Bachmann in Brisbane, Queensland, Maina Talia from Tuvalu and Mariana Tevurega SM in Suva, Fiji.

Priscilla O'Brien conducted the interviews with Eunice Winship, Candice Dixon, Margaret Kassmann-Kiangali, Patricia Lockington and Michael Hyde in Cairns. Sr Kathleen Rushton conducted the face-to-face interviews with Jenny Carter and Kathleen Gallagher in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Sr Makareta Tawaroa RSJ was extensively briefed by Sr Kathleen before recording her own input.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEES

Sherry Balcombe is the Manager of Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Melbourne. Sherry is a Western Yalanji, Djabaguy/Okola woman from Far North Queensland

Dr Bruce Duncan CSsR, is a Lecturer at Yarra Theological Union University of Divinity Melbourne, Australia and Chaplain at Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Melbourne

Sr Joan Hamilton RSJ is long-term supporter and volunteer at Aboriginal Catholic Ministry

Dr Margaret Bannan, is an environmental educator and author and member of the Education Working Party, Laudato Si' Action Platform

Fr Aloysius Nato SVD, is Parish Priest, Sacred Heart Parish, Preston, Victoria, Australia

Sr Mariana Tevurega SM is Women's Ministry Coordinator Caritas Archdiocese of Suva, Fiji

Maina Talia is an academic and writer, currently completing a Phd on the case for the neighbour in the context of climate change. He is Secretary, Tuvalu Climate Action Network

Helen Bachmann is an Indigenous artist. With degrees in Visual Arts and Education, Helen is currently working as a Visual Arts Specialist Teacher in

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a Brisbane Catholic primary school having previously been a Specialist teacher, Visual Arts at Brisbane Catholic Education

Jenny Carter is President of St. Vincent de Paul, Rangiora. Her work with persons who are poor includes with an impoverished community living in a camping ground. Being a beekeeper has led her to deeper learning about the environment

Kathleen Gallagher is a poet, playwright and filmmaker who has directed multiple documentaries on the environment, spirituality, and the peace movement

Sr Makareta Tawaroa RSJ is a member of Nga Paerangi Tribe of Te Awa Tupua, Whanganui, for whom she is a Community Worker, and a member of the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart

Eunice Winship and her husband are the Coordinators of Rosies, Cairns, one of 14 branches of the organisation.

Rosies offers community and connection to those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or socially isolated within the local community. Rosies Cairns is linked with the Diocese of Cairns.

Candice Dixon is a married woman with five children who is supported by Rosies.

Margaret Kassmann-Kiangali was born in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea and pre-COVID was a regular visitor to her home country, maintaining strong ties to family and land there. Margaret has been living in Cairns for the past thirteen years.

Patricia Lockington is an Indigenous Australian woman, mother of two children and was formerly the Indigenous Transition Support Officer and Chapter Representative at Holy Spirit College Manoora Campus in Cairns. Patricia grew up in Mossman, Queensland on the traditional lands of the Kuku Yalanji people

Michael Hyde was born in Queensland and has worked all over that state and in the Torres Strait installing communications systems. The knowledge and experiences he gained from his travels he says have widened his horizons and made him conscious of the impact of how lifestyle has an impact on the environment.

ABOUT THE GROUPS

Australia:

Reach Youth Group, Cairns. Reach Youth Ministries Inc is an incorporated Christian not-for-profit youth organisation comprised of committed Catholic families in the Diocese of Cairns. The youth meet fortnightly on a Sunday afternoon at Seville Mercy Conference Centre. The Director of Reach, Priscilla O'Brien, is also the Ministry Development Coordinator at Seville Mercy Conference Centre, Cairns, facilitating the group of eight young people.

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Brisbane Family and Friends Group. Family members Clare Locke (mother), Stephen Locke (father) and Bridget Locke (daughter), all active parishioners of Catholic Parishes of Grovely-Samford and Mitchelton, together with parishioner friends Anne Frawley Mangan and Helen Bachmann.

-Clare Locke, Education Officer at Brisbane Catholic Education, facilitated the group.

Laudato Si' Circle, Sacred Heart Parish, Preston. Formed in 2021 by a small group of parishioners, the group consists of parish priest, Fr Aloysius, who provides guidance and spiritual direction and five active parishioners with varying and complementary backgrounds (including teaching, eco-spirituality, forest science, climate change, community health, liturgical music, St Vincent de Paul). They meet monthly with the support of a group facilitator who is trained as a Laudato Si' Animator.

-Anne Walsh PCE Oceania Region facilitated the group

Ballarat Diocese Ecological Theology Groups. Since 2016, people of faith in Ballarat Diocese have been meeting monthly at the local Mercy Centre to deepen their understanding of our need to care for our common home and our need to understand this as an integral part of our faith commitment. Dr Barry Ryan, priest and theologian with a long-term commitment to the environment, and Mercy Sister Dr Veronica Lawson RSM, an ecological feminist biblical scholar, co-conduct these sessions. Fourteen members of the group formed into two groups of seven for the listening exercise.

-Fr Barry Ryan, Diocesan priest and theologian and Anne Walsh PCE Oceania Region, each facilitated one of these groups

Aotearoa New Zealand

Whanganui (North Island)

Sr Makareta Tawaroa RSJ Member of Nga Paerangi Tribe of Te Awa Tupua, Whanganui, Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, formed a small group

Christchurch (South Island)

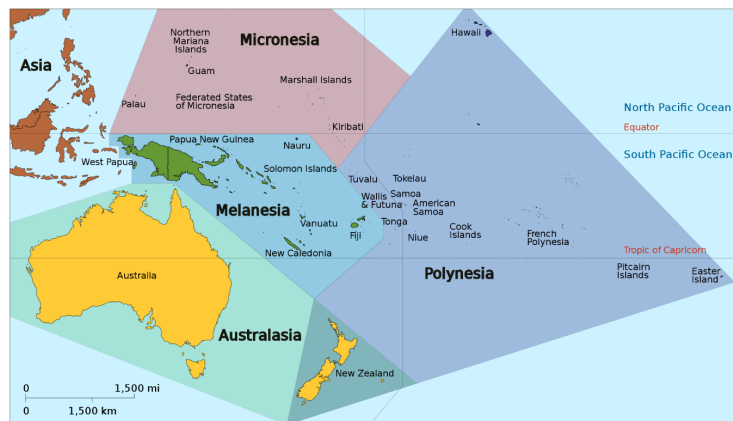
Sister of Mercy and theologian Dr Kathleen Rushton RSM facilitated a group in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. The participants were a retired nurse, President of St Vincent DePaul and beekeeper; an academic; a poet, playwright and filmmaker; a sociologist and a Mercy Sister who is a former teacher.

Unfortunately, three people who had committed to participating in this group were unable to take part due to catching COVID and needing to isolate.

There was to be a second group in Christchurch of Tongans, Samoans and Fijians facilitated by a Tongan Sister of Mercy. Unfortunately, due to the huge project of preparing containers for relief in Tonga because of the volcano, this group was cancelled.

CITIES AND INSTITUTIONS

Oceania is a geographic region of many thousands of islands covering over 100 million square kilometres in the southern half of the Pacific Ocean. There are 14 countries within Oceania. Australia, Papua New Guinea, and Aotearoa are the three largest countries in the region.



By source: Oceania_ISO_3166-1.svg: User:Tintazulderivative work:Cruickshanks - Own work, derivative of Oceania_ISO_3166-1.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=30880556>

Listening exercises and interviews were conducted with Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons, citizens of Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Fiji and Tuvalu and included persons born in and closely tied to their home countries of Tonga and Papua New Guinea. These were held in the following large, (more than one million inhabitants), medium (more than 100,000 inhabitants) and small cities (less than 100,000 inhabitants). The most recently available population figures are cited for each city.

Large Cities:

Brisbane is the capital of the state of Queensland, Australia and has a population of 2,568, 927 (2021)

Melbourne is the capital of the state of Victoria, Australia and has a population of 5,151,000 (2021)



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Medium Cities:

Cairns, a city in Queensland, Australia has a population of 155, 560 (2021). Cairns is about 1700 kilometres north of Brisbane.

Christchurch, the largest city in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, has a population of 392,100 (2021)

Ballarat, Victoria, Australia has a population of 113,763



Small Cities:

Suva, the capital of Fiji, has a population of 93, 970

Vaitupu, is the largest atoll of Tuvalu. The population is 1,061 (2017)

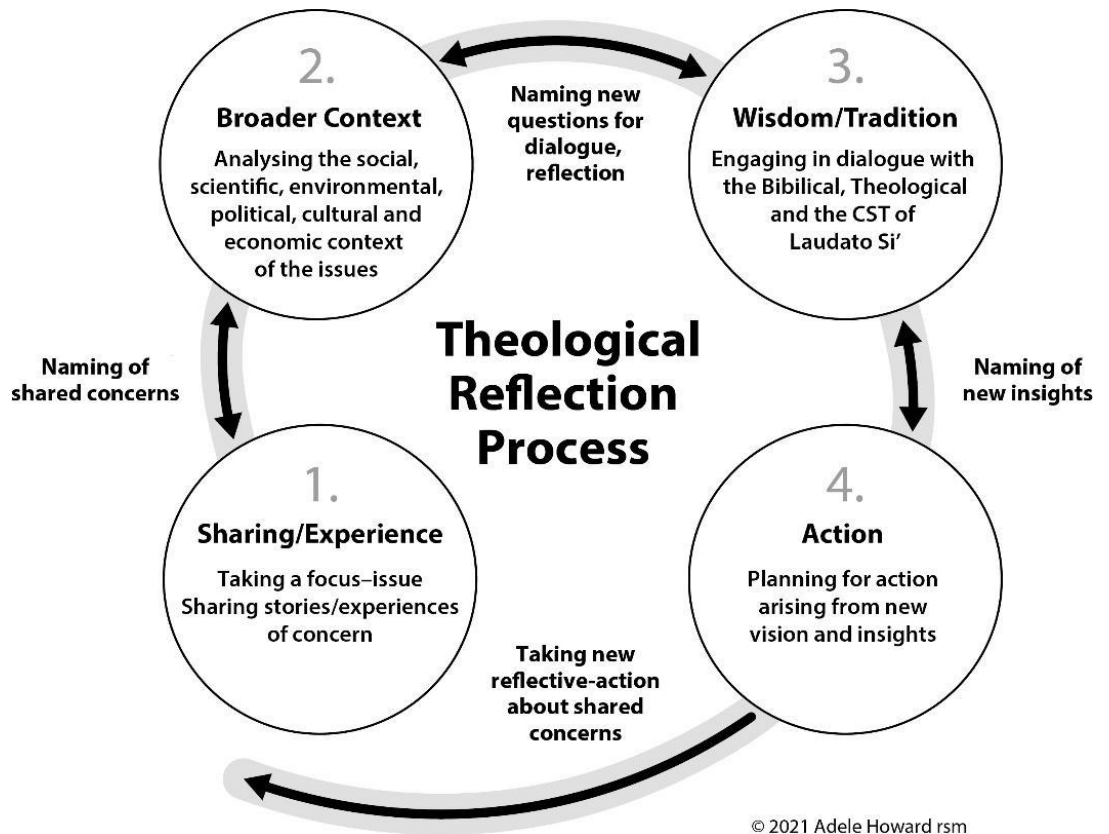
Whanganui, is a small city in the North Island with a population of 47,300 (2020)



Institutions:

Institutions and organisations that supported the listening exercises through providing meeting spaces and links with individuals and groups were: Reach Youth group, Cairns, Rosies Cairns, Seville Mercy Centre, Cairns; Sacred Heart Parish, Preston Victoria; Mercy Centre, Ballarat Victoria; Mercy Community Christchurch, The Mercy Hub, Melbourne.

Methodology Used at the Regional Level



In the Oceania Region a practical theological reflection process was used to engage with the Dicastery's Project on 'Theology from the Existential Peripheries'. Within the restrictions of the COVID Pandemic, we located, invited and organised for facilitators and a number of people to meet and speak about their concerns, according to ten themes. The main focus theme for the Oceania Region was 'Ecological Conscience'.

With the help of local Facilitators and with the Pastoral Communication Expert and the Coordinator, focus groups gathered for discussion and individuals agreed to participate in interviews. All were filmed or recorded by audio. Some were only able to be reached via Zoom because of the COVID travel restrictions.

The themes were offered as starting places for the sharing of stories or experiences of related concerns. Many from the different countries of the Pacific region shared their concerns in relation to these chosen themes. A number of the Indigenous participants took part in this project.

The methodology for the engagement with the listening exercises was a theological reflection process. It has four steps or stages.

Firstly, after an introductory overview to the project, the process and the theme, the participant's **concerns** about this theme were shared in the group. The facilitator then used a number of questions to lead the participants through the next steps of the process - exploring the **broader context** of their concerns, **reflecting** on this expanded awareness in relation to the inspiration of the Word of God, as received through the Biblical texts, the documents of Catholic Social Teaching such as *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti* and also from their own wisdom traditions. From these insights they were encouraged to plan pathways for **appropriate action** in relation to their **initial concerns**.

So the first step of the process articulates concerns, the second step develops and deepens understanding, the third step of reflection takes the listener into their relationship with their faith tradition and the fourth step of the process begins an articulation of what might be possible in action when people's voices are heard with respect and support.

The individual interviews followed a similar process with a little more flexibility, according to the experiences and interests of the interviewees. From the Oceania Region with our theme of Ecological Conscience in the listening exercises, there was a significant focus on the concern of climate change.

POINTS OF STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS

The strength of the questions prepared and asked by the interviewers as well as the methodology used for the listening exercises was a significant factor in achieving clear expressions of people's concerns.

The contributions made by the honest and generous sharing of the participants was the key to the valuable outcomes of this project in the Oceania region. The involvement of many Indigenous participants offered powerful insights and challenges to the whole process.

The impact of COVID and the reality of the vast travel distances across Oceania were the two challenges that most impacted the listening exercises, making it impossible for the Coordinator or PCE to go to places to assist with the process. Australia's borders were closed from 20 March 2020 to 21 February 2022 to slow surging case numbers. In addition, state and territory borders regularly had travel restrictions in place. When Australia's borders opened, Aotearoa New Zealand's border was closed to Australia, the Australian government advice was not to travel to Papua New Guinea and the Australian government advised exercising a high degree of caution to travellers planning to go to Fiji. Tonga's borders remained closed until 1 August 2022.

The impact of COVID also affected the organisation of local gatherings in countries in the Region. Requirements for social-distancing and mask-wearing as well as stay-at home orders and rolling lockdowns, particularly in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, made people hesitant about forming or joining groups, despite their interest in the project when it was explained to them. When restrictions were released, cases of COVID meant some people had to cancel their participation in organised gatherings, as happened in Christchurch.

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Other events had impacts. In response to the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha‘apai volcano eruption in Tonga, which caused a Pacific-wide tsunami, the group of Tongan, Samoan and Maori participants planning to meet for the listening exercises in Christchurch, turned their attention to relief efforts.

Communications with Papua New Guinea were problematic.

In the first six months of 2022, telecommunications systems were largely dysfunctional in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea making it impossible to have any reliable communication channels with people there to set up the listening exercises or engage in interviews.

The group in the PNG Highlands were keen to be involved but despite numerous attempts over several months of trying phones, texts and emails, communications systems remained problematic, and the power supply failed regularly. Together with COVID restrictions, illness and the security concerns relating to an Election year, it was difficult for the people who had been asked to be involved to carry out their planned meetings and recordings. Multiple efforts had to finally be abandoned in June. Beyond that time it would not have been possible to gather new voices and incorporate them in the productions required and within the timeline of the Project.

MAIN RESULTS OF THE LISTENING EXERCISES

The Regional Coordinator met with each Facilitator individually to explain the process and to provide the process materials. In preparation for their personal interview or participation in a group discussion, participants were invited to reflect on the Oceania Region selected theme of Ecological Conscience and to identify another theme (or more) that spoke to them and about which they were happy to be interviewed or to share in a group.

The tables below show the choices made by participants in the individual interviews and in the group discussions.

Individuals and their chosen themes

| Theme | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Sherry | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Bruce | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Joan | | | | | | | | | | |
| Margaret | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Aloysius | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Makareta | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Maina | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Helen | | | X | | | | | | | X |
| Jenny | | | | | | X | | | | |
| Kathleen | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Makareta | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Eunice | | | | | | X | | | | |

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| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Candice | | | | | | | | | | |
| Margaret K-K | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Patricia | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Michael | | | X | | | | | | | |

Groups and their chosen themes

| Theme | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Reach Youth Group | | | | | | | | | | X |
| Brisbane Group | | | | X | X | | | | | X |
| Laudato Si' Group, Melbourne | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Ballarat Group 1 | X | | X | X | | | | | | |
| Ballarat Group 2 | | X | X | X | | | | | | |
| Whanganui Group | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Christchurch Group | X | | X | | | | | | | |

Other themes that were addressed were: Vulnerability and Tenderness (Theme 2) Women's Perspectives (Theme 4), Revelation and Joy (Theme 5) Christians in the Public Sphere (Theme 6), Leaving Clericalism Behind (Theme 8), Welcoming the Stranger (Theme 9) Dialogue and Encounter (Theme 10)

What became evident in the listening exercises, particularly in the group discussions, was that themes were intersecting, with a focus on one theme chosen by participants leading to coverage of points relevant to another theme which hadn't necessarily been selected. This was particularly noticeable with the themes of 'Beyond Clericalism' and 'Women's Perspectives' and with 'Wisdom from the Margins' focussing on Indigenous People's insights and 'Ecological Conscience'. In part, these linkages were to do with the personal preparation participants had made, with their own interpretations of the theme and with their life experiences. It was also to do with the reality that, in the words of Pope Francis, 'Everything is connected'. Quotes that fit a theme that hadn't been nominated by the participants are included there.

THEOLOGICAL RESULTS ON EACH OF THE TEN THEMES

THEME 3: Ecological Conscience and Climate Change

Our key theme of Ecological Conscience led to many powerful responses from those interviewed as well as from the members of the focus groups.

Quotations from the participants and commentaries are grouped under the four steps of the theological reflection methodology we used.

STEP 1. CONCERNS/STORIES/EXPERIENCES

It was clear from many voices, particularly Indigenous peoples who spoke from the countries across Oceania, that there is an urgent need to act to stop the warming of the earth, the devastation of unregulated mining and deforestation and the extinction of species.

The stories and shared experiences of their concerns related to: sea levels rising and the threat of displacement of peoples from their homelands; food insecurity through extreme weather events with crops being unable to grow due to damage and degradation of land; water scarcity or extreme floods, and bush fires killing numerous species and displacing people.

The biggest threat of these extreme weather events is that sea levels are rising at damaging levels for people living on or making their livelihood from coastal areas of their Pacific Island homes. This problem is clearly manifest in countries such as Tuvalu, Fiji and Kiribati, but is widespread across the Pacific islands and shores of these countries.

Maina (Vaitupu): *“They’re, [the people of Tuvalu] living with fear. The fact of climate change related sea level rise and how the sea is encroaching on our shores is a constant fear that builds in our people. And it’s something that we really need to pay serious attention to.”¹*

Mariana (Suva): *“Climate change is a world issue. Globally it’s threatening life. We are trying to create awareness with our women to try and protect themselves, keep themselves safe, so if they are asked to relocate, they need to relocate.”²*

Unregulated Mining and Forestry is causing large scale environmental, economic and cultural damage to some areas in countries in the Oceania region.

Margaret (Cairns and PNG): *“The land in PNG [Papua New Guinea] is suffering, especially the trees, because of the process of getting all these minerals out from the ground. Taking all of those timbers out affects the land. Some are able to be replanted and grow, some are not, and it affects the local villages where all these projects are*

¹ [OC_VAI_AH_01_Int](#)

² [OC_SUV_AH_01_Int](#)

happening because only some are able to go back and grow their vegetables in those lands, others cannot.”³

Makareta (Whanganui): *“But our struggle continues and one of the big struggles is to regain our status as the people who belong to these particular lands here in Aotearoa New Zealand. It means that we are people of the land. But how can we maintain that status when so much of our lands have been taken from us? Of course, there have been many gains over many years, so many of our European friends, our Pacifica friends, our Asian friends, have stood alongside us, have fought our battles with us, have been with us on our struggles, to fight for our lands and for our rights. So, we continue to work toward the ability to be self-determining, to determine our own lives, to shape our own destiny. And this is all that all peoples want, this is what makes us people, and in particular this is what makes us Maori people. The only country of Aotearoa where New Zealand has Maori as its identity.”⁴*

Another concern expressed was about identity and relationship to home – to land, river, and ocean as integral to the strength of culture maintained by Indigenous people.

Sherry (Melbourne): *“And so this land, as I said before is Wurundjeri land in the Kulin Nations and this is Victoria, and so this is not my spiritual home. My spiritual home is Far North Queensland. And so that's where my ancestors come from and that's - when I die that's where I'll return to. And the same as my children, even though they were born on Wurundjeri country, this is not their home and it'll never be their home. Our spiritual home, and so where our soul belongs is in Far North Queensland on Olkala and Djabaguy country.*

Yes, the spiritual connection and the family connections are very, very important to Aboriginal people. I think that's what gives us our grounding, and that's what gives us our courage and our identity of where we come from and who we are as people. And I think when we don't have that then our spirits are very lost. And so having that family connection it's part of the knowing and being and that's where my country is and that's where I belong. It is about identity.”⁵

STEP 2. BROADER CONTEXT

Looking at the broader context of the causes and background to these issues of concern a number of key statements were made or drawn on by group members. Their home places are under threat of being submerged and in fact some already are.

There are also unprecedented flood, fire and drought events from Australia to Papua New Guinea to Fiji, Tuvalu and beyond.

Natural disasters such as the earthquake and volcanic eruptions in New Zealand and Tonga have been at an unprecedented scale.

Maina (Vaitupu): *“We don't need scientific proof to tell us that we are facing this greatest threat in life. The recent IPCC report that came out is telling us that we are... heading towards the point of no return. if we don't act now. And, you know, science is*

³ [OC_CAI_POB_01_Int](#)

⁴ [OC_WHA_MT_01_Int](#)

⁵ [OC_MEL_AH_01_Int](#)

telling us that Tuvalu will be submerged in 30 or 50 years' time. That is wrong! Tuvalu is literally submerging now. You know losing the islands that we have lost to the sea is more than enough to tell us that...

We don't need any scientific proof anymore. You know science is telling us that we are having a problem. But Tuvaluans - we're telling the world that we don't need any scientific proof, we are seeing ... ourselves. We are seeing that islands are gone. We are seeing that soil erosion is taking place. The whole island, Fanafuti especially - near the runway - is bubbling right from the middle of the runway. Water is coming underneath. So, I may say that it's not that Tuvalu will be underwater in the next 50 years, we are literally sinking right now.

What we need in Tuvalu, to protect Tuvalu. We need to build seawalls ... there is a potential to build that, it's just the money that we need. As I said earlier it's not just about saving us.

I see how rich Australia is, you know. And it's something they should pay more attention to. The action that they need to take in order to save small island states like Tuvalu, Kiribati and other low-lying atolls. Well, I'm hopeful, as I will never imagine Tuvalu will go under water for something that other people have caused. So, we still have the potential to protect our island, to save our island, to save our cultures, to save our lives.”⁶

Locally there are serious issues of degradation of local environments through mining and forestry sites that have not followed environmental regulations and have done nothing to rehabilitate the lands they have worked on.

Margaret (Cairns and PNG): *“Even though we're out of - our backgrounds being here in Australia we still identify as, we're from Papua New Guinea. I mean, I am from Papua New Guinea. So a lot of traits that are still within me have been instilled in me since I was born, which is respect for land and environment around us. And because everything comes from God, because that's the way I was brought up back in Papua New Guinea. I still believe in... acknowledging the environment and what's around me because of my background. And I still hold that even though I live in Australia, and there are a lot of things that are different here, I believe that we can still you know - it's a connection ... to be connected.”⁷*

Makareta (Whanganui): *“Since the signing of the treaty of Waitangi 182 years ago we have been struggling to have the Treaty recognised in New Zealand law. We continue to fight many assimilationist policies. And the many monocultural institutions which have shaped our country for one specific people. Even today, even in these our own times, our lands continue to flow away from our own hands. We struggle to maintain our cultural identity and integrity. Thank God there has been a significant change in the way in which New Zealand history will now be taught. Starting from 2023 New Zealand*

⁶ [OC_VAI_AH_01_Int](#)

⁷ [OC_CAI_POB_01_Int](#)

*history will include history from a Maori perspective and this will be taught in all of our schools.*⁸

Sherry (Melbourne): *"I think that my role is to offer our fruits of our culture, to offer the fruits of our spirituality and to help enculturate the Catholic church in Australia. And it's not an easy role but I've noticed even particularly over the last 10 years how much things have changed. And there's a lot more awareness of Aboriginal spirituality and there's a lot more understanding than there has been in the past. And we're really moving into a different era. And I think, particularly in Victoria, we're looking at doing a treaty and that'll be an enormous thing for Aboriginal people. You know we're the only country in the Commonwealth that doesn't have a Treaty with its First Peoples. ... But a country can't move forward until they look back and acknowledge what's happened. And Australia hasn't done that yet. I think that's why it's an important role for the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry too because - we really see that we're here to fulfil Pope John Paul's words, that you know - for us to be joyfully received into the Catholic Church fully."*⁹

Maina (Vaitupu): *"...when we talk about land we're not simply talking about people who are living in the land, we are also talking about those who are resting in the land. So, it is very important you know... and if we are to move, I want to move with my mum, with my grandfather, with my grandmothers, with my whole family, those who are passed beyond, it's not that they are dead, no they are resting. So, we still have that spiritual connection, we still have that respect for them. So that's why migration, relocation for our people is not easy as what other may think. It is difficult because it's a combination of many things."*

*"We have eight islands that need to be protected. We need to build a seawall in order for us to survive, because it's not just about the people, it's about the culture, it's about our identity as people. And it's very unfair for us to be submerged for something that we did not cause. We have no factory at all, we have nothing to do with climate change. Our contribution to climate change is almost next to nothing. It's zero point zero, zero, zero, zero one (0.00001). Yet we are the first to suffer. We are the first to be submerged. It is very unfair."*¹⁰

Jill (Whanganui): *"This [is] our place, not just a place for people to fly over and look and say, 'How beautiful is that!' But for Tangata whenua [people of the land] we live here and fish here and eat here and hunt and this is our life."*¹¹

Sherry (Melbourne): *"We're the longest continuous culture on the planet, something for us to all be very, very proud of. We've survived ice ages in this country to be here today. I think that shows the resilience of our race. We've survived segregation, survived terrible trauma within our lives, but we're getting stronger. And I think that's something important and something that we can pass down, that's tangible to our youth."*¹²

⁸ [OC_WHA_MT_01_Int](#)

⁹ [OC_MEL_AH_01_Int](#)

¹⁰ [OC_VAI_AH_01_Int](#)

¹¹ [OC_WHA_MT_02_Int](#)

¹² [OC_MEL_AH_01_Int](#)

Maina (Vaitupu): *"...When a mother gives birth to a child, and this is a common perception in the Pacific, the placenta and the umbilical cord (of the baby) needs to be buried in the land. And traditionally we plant a coconut tree on top of it. We still practice that up until now. Either you plant a coconut tree on the placenta of your child or your grandson or grand-daughter or they throw it into the sea with the understanding that your grandson or your son will grow up and be a good fisherman.*

We plant it on the land and we plant a tree on - a coconut on top of that placenta. It signifies the role of the placenta in the mother that fed the baby will continue by the land. So we have that spiritual connection, traditional connection with the land. And the land identifies who we are. So the land is not simply a land, but it takes meaning because of who we are as people. Our language, our culture, our identity, who we are as Tuvaluans or who we are as people from the Pacific, we are determined by the land.

So moving to Australia and having Tuvalu totally submerged for example will give me no chance at all to show or to make reference to my kids that this is where I come from, that is where Tuvalu is, because there is no reference on the map any more for Tuvalu.

"When we talk about neighbour and the global discussion of climate change its very rare to hear people talk about 'neighbour' in the United Nations platform, whether under the UNF triple C (UNFCCC) or the General Assembly. But this is something that we should talk about.

We should expand the concept of "neighbour" as a global phenomenon that needs to be well understood by all of us because it will drive the way we think and the way we respond to the issue of climate change as well - let alone the biblical story of the good Samaritan.

But we can always connect that to our Indigenous lands, our Indigenous understanding of what it means to be a good neighbour in either the local context or the global context. So that's how I want to mobilise the concept of neighbour.

Like, for us going to negotiations, we know already that we are weak. We normally call ourselves weak actors. But I want to use that as a middle axiom, that connects us with those who we are negotiating with. We're not just as weak actors, but we are there as a neighbour, as a global neighbour."¹³

Allan (Ballarat): *"Our Indigenous Australians showed us how to build a relationship with the land; we need to acknowledge that and learn from this ancient culture. Mining companies have acted with total disrespect to sacred lands. There is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures, and to appreciate that the development of a social group presupposes a historical process which takes place within a cultural context and demands the constant and active involvement of local people from within their proper culture."¹⁴*

Carmel (Ballarat): *"That brings me to the question of acknowledgement and respect for the wisdom of our Indigenous people and their relationship with Land. In this country [Australia], we have experienced devastating bushfires and we live in fear of*

¹³ [OC_VAI_AH_01_Int](#)

¹⁴ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

*hot summers and what they might bring. Our Indigenous sisters and brothers have much to teach us in this respect and in relation to respect for cultural diversity. We need to let our Indigenous sisters and brothers know the importance of their voice in both public and church communities.*¹⁵

Noelene (Whanganui): *“For many years now we Pākehā (a Māori language term for New Zealanders of European Descent) have separated humanity from earth and from all other creatures... but that's not the reality. Everything is connected, all life is connected, and the people are as much the river as the water in it, and the banks, and the trees, and the birds, and the fish - all of us are river.*

*We are humankind, but we're only one kind of species. We're the humankind, but there's all other kinds.*¹⁶

John (Ballarat): *“I was brought up on the land in the Wimmera district and I've always had that connection - a sense of place where I still feel as though I belong - and I've always had a sense of creation. But there's a whole lot more that I need to explore and understand - that it's not only the land, it's about all that is within it, all the living and non-living beings as well.*¹⁷

Aloysius (Melbourne): *“I find this expression of earth as ‘our common home’ so beautiful and of course we learn from the example of the Indigenous people. They know land is their heart, land is their life and land is their mother. They cannot be separated from it and that's why I find this so beautiful.”*¹⁸

STEP 3. REFLECTION

Indigenous people's relationship and connection with their land, ocean, river.

The intrinsic nature of personal identity and ‘place’ in indigenous spirituality.

Mariana (Suva): *“The ‘Vanua’ is what we say is our identity and we say the land has eyes. We are connected to our land because the land has its own spirit for us. If we disregard the land then it disregards us because we are so much connected to the land. We really do believe that the land has eyes and ears. Therefore, we cannot just pollute it.*

*When a child is born the umbilical cord is taken and planted, that's how closely connected we are to the creation, to the land.*¹⁹

Makareta (Whanganui): *“The river was a very important part of our lives. It was our first road, our first larder, our first wash house, our playground. Our first baptismal font. It was a sacred space where our wairuatanga or our spiritual worldview literally came through being born of the river and of the land. I often heard one of my aunties say,*

¹⁵ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

¹⁶ [OC_WHA_MT_03_Int](#)

¹⁷ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

¹⁸ [OC_MEL_Wisdom_Ecological_Rep](#)

¹⁹ [OC_SUV_AH_01_Int](#)

*'The river is like my mother and my father. It is my Tupuna, my grandmother and my grandfather. It is a person, a living being with a personality.'*²⁰

Jeanette (Ballarat): *"For Indigenous peoples here in Australia, we firmly understand that we are born from our Mother the Earth and ...when we die we go back to our Mother. And we can't separate our [birth] Mother from Mother Earth We cannot make a distinction between the two. We cannot treat Mother Earth with disrespect because she is our Mother and from that perspective we cannot separate what is on the Earth, what is from the Earth and where we go when we go back to the Earth. It all goes with us..."*²¹

Patricia (Cairns): *"We believe our Earth is Mother Earth, it nurtures us, it raises us, it feeds us and looks after us. When we're on country we feel good because that's where our ancestors are, and they still walk this land today, even my mother who died in July. We know our elders are around.*

*They give us signs all the time.'*²²

Makareta (Whanganui): *"We are a river people. Our identity is intimately linked to the river. Our old people used to say without her we are nothing. It is for these reasons that we can truly say... I am the river and the river is me."*²³

Helen (Brisbane): *"Our God is triune and forever moving through us, entering into us, and then out of us as well to other people. That Trinitarian belief system links beautifully with the Aboriginal notion of Creator Spirit. And Pope John Paul II in his Blatherskite Park, Alice Springs address, over 30 years ago indicated that God's presence has been with Aboriginal people from the beginning. So, to me that means I can explain in my own mind that the Creator Spirit and triune God are the same."*²⁴

Sherry (Melbourne): *"...We have to respect the waterways, the ground, the animals around us, you know those were the things that helped us survive, and we had to have respect for every single one of those. We have respect for our trees, for our mountains, we hold sacred our Mother Earth. You know the earth is our Mother. And so we are people of the earth. I was actually reading in Genesis, God picks up a piece of dirt and he blows air into it, you know he blows human - he blows air into - breath into mankind. You know we've had God with us since the beginning of time. Thousands of years before the birth of Abraham, God was here working with my people.*

So, I think that's what kept us so strong for so long. And then when we had other nationalities arrive, particularly the missionaries, and they talked about Jesus, we understood about this man that was persecuted for doing nothing wrong, because we were persecuted for doing nothing wrong. Our culture was squashed, our spirituality was squashed and we weren't allowed to practice that. And that's what I think ... and I really think that's where Aboriginal people have got problems today - because of our spirituality being squashed so much. You know we're now at a time in the history of

²⁰ [OC_WHA_MT_01_Int](#)

²¹ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

²² [OC_CAI_POB_04_Int](#)

²³ [OC_WHA_MT_01_Int](#)

²⁴ [OC_BRI_AH_01_Int](#)

*Australia where we can start to renew that and bring that back to life, and we can start to strengthen our young people with all of that talk.*²⁵

Jeanette (Ballarat): *"I cannot fully separate Bunjil [Creator Spirit of the Kulin Nation] or God as both have given me life, bring me comfort and are so much a part of me that I cannot function without their presence."*²⁶

Helen (Brisbane): *"Just feeling at one with the country and feeling like there's this divine presence in all of creation and when you can be still in nature you can really experience - you can breathe with the earth. ... you can feel the breath of the earth, ...think with your breath as well..."*

"God's presence is everywhere throughout nature... I go to Santa Teresa [Arrernte Indigenous community in the Northern Territory of Australia] and sit under those gum trees and to me that is one of the most holy places because when you hear the breeze blowing through the branches of the gum trees, you know that that's the breath of God, you know that creaking of the gum branches, that's God talking to you. And you can really experience the Divine presence when you're in nature."

*"You can see God when you see a tree, you can see God when you see another person, you can see God when you see a beautiful mountain. God is reflected in all creation. Humans are not separate from the non-human natural world. It is all linked. Many groups believe that there are deep veins that run through the earth that connect us all. Not visible veins, but like our blood veins, there's deep veins that run through the earth and we are all connected through these veins which helps when we think about losing our ancestors that they're still there, they're still connected."*²⁷

Maina (Vaitupu): *"When we talk about neighbour ... we simply understand the word - 'neighbour' not just from the biblical teaching in Luke 10, but also it's an indigenous concept for the people in the Pacific and around the world. Indigenous communities know fully the meaning of 'our neighbour'. So, in my studies I want to bring that whole concept of ... how we can relate to one another, and how countries like Australia and New Zealand that are nearby to Tuvalu and other low-lying atolls respond to the inevitable effect of climate change-related sea rise. And it's also a concept that, you know, it really touches the heart, because of our moral responsibility. If my neighbour's house is on fire, shall I bring water or petrol, you know - it's a moral thing, it's a moral or conscience issue, it's a moral obligation and a moral responsibility as well."*²⁸

Maina (Vaitupu): *"...Climate is a gift of God and a common good and Fratelli Tutti as well looking into the perspective of how they address the brothers and sisters and also the concept of neighbour. It is very important. You know he's really touched the heart of the people. When we start talking about neighbour it's very practical. And our theology should be based on our neighbour, because if we lose focus on our neighbour, we're doing abstract theology. So that's why it is very important - the work Pope*

²⁵ [OC_MEL_AH_01_Int](#)

²⁶ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

²⁷ [OC_BRI_AH_01_Int](#)

²⁸ [OC_VAI_AH_01_Int](#)

*Francis is doing, very important. And we, the people, need to learn from Pope Francis.*²⁹

Sherry (Melbourne): *"For Aboriginal culture - we're built on spirituality. All of our ceremonies, our rituals, our celebrations are all to pay respects to the Creator Spirit, to God. For us it's a matter of pride and dignity for all of our communities. If we can't perform certain ceremonies at particular times of the year, then it will bring shame onto our communities."*³⁰

Clare (Brisbane): *"God's presence in nature often comes at that time when we're aware of the threat to it or the loss of it. Like the times when something is devastated- like after the floods. The reality of climate change comes through so strongly in Laudato Si' and other writings. The great thing is the church is not turning its back on that idea of needing to face up to the fact that we're co-contributors - we're causing this and so the grief feels like a big part of mourning with God. If we recognise that it is sacred holy ground, then having a greater awareness means that everything we do matters."*³¹

Margaret (Melbourne): *"The naming of the Encyclical - Laudato Si', Our Common Home, expanded my focus for me from my local earth to look at the whole earth and how it functions. So, whatever's happening in the rest of the world will eventually happen to us locally. There are many of people who are already suffering because of those who are 'dominating' the earth, not wanting to take care of the earth."*³²

Miranda (Ballarat): *"Christians speak about prayer, about speaking to God and they speak about creation and all of life. Indigenous people actually live it through their relationship with all of creation."*³³

Bernadette (Ballarat): *"We must take much more notice of the Indigenous concept of the Dreaming, that it's past, present and future. Our sense of time kind of might need a bit of a tweaking and adjusting and our sense of spirituality needs tweaking and adjusting to be more in tune with the earth."*³⁴

Veronica (Ballarat): *"I'm so grateful to Pope Francis for drawing us in to this whole understanding of our common home and even the language he uses, you know the earth is among the most vulnerable of our poor. We used to think of that only in human terms. And now he has drawn our attention to the intrinsic value of all creation, not just of humans. The earth isn't just there for us. I keep thinking that the earth is God's and all that dwells therein and I come to it with gratitude."*³⁵

Kathleen (Christchurch): *"Pope Francis is quite on strong on being attentive. In talking about 'breath' - in the Hebrew, 'Ruah', you know it's the spirit and it's the wind and the*

²⁹ [OC_VAI_AH_01_Int](#)

³⁰ [OC_MEL_AH_01_Int](#)

³¹ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

³² [OC_MEL_Wisdom_Ecological_Rep](#)

³³ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

³⁴ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

³⁵ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

breath, and the same in the Greek, so everything's connected – interconnected, isn't it?"³⁶

STEP 4. ACTION

The call to an Integral Ecology is clear in the voices of people who are indigenous to these countries across the Pacific, in the Oceania region, they are offering a new way of relationship and connection with all of creation to those who only know a Western or Euro-centric approach.

They are also crying out for the peoples of the world to halt global warming and its consequent outcomes and in that it is obvious that we need each other. Only an integration of both approaches will help save the planet and its people.

They are also calling for assistance from those countries that have the resources to help mitigate the risks of the rising sea levels, the loss of food security and the destruction of once safe places to call home.

Maina (Vaitupu): *"How can we continue to say God is good all the time - from our theological perspective when people in Tuvalu are literally sinking, are literally dying for something that they did not cause? So sometimes we need to get out of our comfort zone of doing theology and challenge ourselves. You know we need to be disturbed in doing theology. We should not feel complacent in doing theology."*

Doing theology differently as an Action...

"We should not feel complacent in doing theology, because most of that time I go to ... big events like this and our fellow Christian brothers and sisters continue to say, 'Oh Maina don't worry we will remember you in our prayers.' I said no, no, ... God is praying for us to do something. I think that's the basis of theology that we should look into now. We have to be very serious in how we deal with theology.... it's something that we should really look deeply into; how we disturb the way we do theology. We should not feel complacent in the way we do theology. God doesn't need to be made to 'look good' in doing theology. We are the ones who need to change the way we do theology and how we engage with those who are in need. That's how I look into theology."³⁷

Patricia (Cairns) *"If you want something to change, you've got to be that change and be part of that change. I think spirituality and education are powerful tools that we can use. And building relationships as well. If we can start sitting down in those yarning circles, whether at a world level or grassroots level, we can start yarning and put things into action, especially to look after Mother Earth."³⁸*

Sherry (Melbourne): *"I think for so many years, our culture, our language has been suppressed in this country. We have so much to share. Please let us share it. Let our contribution be joyfully received. We're ready to give it. Are you ready to receive it?"³⁹*

³⁶ [OC_CCH_Wisdom_Ecological_Rep](#)

³⁷ [OC_VAI_AH_01_Int](#)

³⁸ [OC_CAI_POB_04_Int](#)

³⁹ [OC_MEL_AH_01_Int](#)

Maina (Vaitupu): *"... with climate migration, people have the rights to move, people have the rights to choose what they want to do, but when we talk about relocation, migration ...it all goes back to how we connect with our land. What is most important for us, it's our connection with our land which is very important.*

*What we need to do right now is to secure our island, is to build resilience, and to do whatever we can do to ensure that Tuvalu survives for the next thousand years, which is our ultimate goal. But we should also have a Plan B because things can happen overnight!"*⁴⁰

Sherry (Melbourne): *"Honestly I think it's only really probably the last 15 years that we've really felt comfortable enough to be able to share some of our ceremonies and some of our spirituality because before this we've, you know, we've had the white Australia Policy here, we've had a lot of segregation in this country, and a lot of racism. And so for us Aboriginal people those things are so sacred that when you share them, they have to be shared properly and they have to be done with respect. And I think we've only in the last few years had enough confidence to be able to do that and know that it will be respected, what we're doing."*⁴¹

Ethan (Ballarat): *"We need to encourage Indigenous empowerment and agency and acknowledge dispossession of country and oppression."*⁴²

Berenice (Ballarat): *"I believe there's a long process where we will open ourselves to receive the knowledge and the experience that our First Peoples are offering us. And in doing that we might also bring in from the periphery, from the margins, our common home, so that it does become our common home, and not something to be exploited."*⁴³

Kirsten (Ballarat): *"The Australian Catholic Church and all its people need to acknowledge the importance of healing and sustaining earth's ecosystems and commit to this through concerted action."*⁴⁴

Carmel (Ballarat): *"The Uluru Statement from the Heart needs to be affirmed and promoted more powerfully in the churches. We need to let our Indigenous people know the importance of their voice in both public and church communities. Ongoing affirmation from Pope Francis has a role to play in this."*

Margaret (Melbourne): *"In looking at the Catholic Church today and what the Catholic Church can do, I think it's very important that we make Laudato Si' come to life in our Parishes, in our Schools and in our Dioceses; that we all take responsibility for restoring God's Earth."*⁴⁵

⁴⁰ [OC_VAI_AH_01_Int](#)

⁴¹ [OC_MEL_AH_01_Int](#)

⁴² [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

⁴³ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

⁴⁴ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

⁴⁵ [OC_MEL_Wisdom_Ecological_Rep](#)

RESULTS FROM OTHER THEMES

The following pages record the quotations taken from the sharing on the other chosen themes. Only key quotes are recorded. This means that with some themes there are not quotes for each step of the 4-step process.

Theme 1. Wisdom from the Margins

Ballarat Group 1 selected Wisdom from the Margins as a theme for discussion, focussing on how much non-Indigenous people can and need to learn from Indigenous people, particularly in the areas of spirituality and earth.

STEP 1. CONCERNS/STORIES/EXPERIENCES

Stephen (Ballarat): *"I think part of our problem is that we don't know. Evidently, Aboriginal ways of knowledge are very different from ours so their understanding is a different type of human understanding of the world. It just hasn't permeated any distance at all into the settled society. So, I don't think we know what we're talking about."*⁴⁶

Miranda (Ballarat): *"Just today I heard some music which was inspired by Aboriginal astronomy and ...for 60,000 years, or however long, these people having been looking at the sky in a different way from how my background has educated me to see the map of the stars. So, it's all quite mind-blowing really.... I feel quite privileged to be experiencing this change. And I have so much to learn. It's quite true as Stephen said, we probably know that we don't know anything really."*⁴⁷

STEP 3. REFLECTION

Berenice (Ballarat) said: *"It seems to me that we have pushed out to the margins the experience and the knowledge that our First Peoples have and it's gradually been recognised. We're gradually bringing it in from the peripheries and we — meaning westerners — are wanting to know. I believe there's a long process where we will open ourselves to receive the knowledge and the experience that our First Peoples are offering us. And in doing that we might also bring in from the periphery, from the margins, our common home, so that it does become our common home, and not something to be exploited."*⁴⁸

Veronica (Ballarat) made this point: *"I find that a great place to be, knowing that there is so much that we don't know...I think we need to listen to the wisdom of Indigenous people and know how to regenerate...so many places. And it reminds me I'm so grateful to Pope Francis for drawing us in to this whole understanding of our common home and even the language he uses, you know the earth is among the most vulnerable of our poor. We used to think of that only in human terms. And now he has drawn our attention to the intrinsic value of all creation, not just of humans. The earth isn't just*

⁴⁶ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

⁴⁷ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

⁴⁸ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

*there for us. I keep thinking that the earth is God's and all that dwells therein and I come to it with gratitude."*⁴⁹

STEP 4. ACTION

Sandra (Ballarat): *"There has to be two-way communication between an Indigenous understanding about earth and of our own spirituality. There has to be a meeting somewhere."*⁵⁰

Theme 2. Vulnerability and Tenderness

STEP 1. CONCERNS/STORIES/EXPERIENCES

Allan (Ballarat): *"Three of the books I have read this year 'Escape from Manus', 'After the Tampa' and 'No Friend but the Mountains', they concerned three successful refugees... There are so many who have got talent and skills that we've just turned our back on. And they've been kept on the periphery. And I think this government [Liberal/National coalition] has the most inhumane policy of offshore detention and then locking them up when they come here. That farce of refugees locked in the Park Hotel and then being released was purely political, nothing else because we'd a government that's got no conscience and no morality.*

*But who was silent? Did any archbishop get up and speak about it except for Vincent Long?"*⁵¹

Kate (Ballarat): *"We're all made in the image and likeness of God and if we believe in it then we're all afforded dignity, shown respect or equality..."*⁵²

Ethan (Ballarat): *"I remember when I was much younger...growing up and thinking to myself, how can a church formed in the model of life and ministry of Jesus be so exclusive to so many people? Predominantly, I think at the time those groups were women, divorced people, gay and lesbian community, and the way at the time I perceived the church might be treating them or excluding them and I probably acknowledged over time that there was a level of naivety to that, but there was also, I think, some real -and I still believe- there's some real substance to that. That there is that element of the institutional church, which is exclusive and to reconcile that with the life and ministry of Jesus, I think is something that a lot of people really struggle with.*

I know a lot of people that have left the church from those groups, including family members of mine. And it's something that I think is a real pressing need to talk more about. And I know that dogma gets in the way of welcoming people from the margins and those that are vulnerable and all those sorts of things.

And I think that whole notion of hierarchy and patriarchy that exists within the institutional church, is a real contributing factor. And I think it's probably well, if not the

⁴⁹ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

⁵⁰ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

⁵¹ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

⁵² [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

*most important reason, one of the reasons the church is in the way it is at the moment.*⁵³

Barry (Ballarat): *"This points to what Jesus did and who he was, a radical inclusion. Everyone is welcome. What you're saying in the past, certainly we have excluded."*⁵⁴

Kristen (Ballarat): *read from her prepared reflection: "...The gulf between contemporary life and the attitude of the institutional church is fast becoming a chasm as our leadership refuses to read the signs of the times on many issues.*

*Respect must be the foundational tenet of our, of the church. And this includes equality for all, for all diverse agendas, inclusion of, and respect for all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer asexual, gender diverse peoples; equality and respect for women; equality outright and within marriage... Participation in the church: I believe all people must be awarded equal dignity and given equal rights and opportunities to participate in the life of the church, in whatever roles they discern appropriate whether ministerial, pastoral or administrative..."*⁵⁵

Jeanette (Ballarat) *spoke of three "standout moments" in her life that demonstrated to her recognition of our common humanity and vulnerability. Here is the story of the third moment:*

*"A few years ago, Pope Francis wrote to the National Aboriginal Torres Islander Catholic Council addressing all Aboriginal Catholic people in Australia. He was reflecting on the 30th anniversary of, of St. Pope John Paul II's speech in, in Alice Springs [1986]. And he reiterated a lot of what Pope John Paul had said. However, he went one to step further and he had his own words in there. And from time to time, I go back and read it because that fills me with hope that we have an institution that recognises the gifts of every single person and we need to turn that around and make sure that everybody hears that, but we need a starting point. And for me, that's my starting point. If I didn't, hadn't, received that letter, I'd probably be filled with some despondency, I have to admit, but the fact that I have the letter and that other people, on the Aboriginal Catholic Council also have it, guides us and we know that we are not forgotten. We are not being ignored."*⁵⁶

Kate (Ballarat): *"...To really learn to empathise, which then to me speaks deeply of, as we have done here today, to that deep listening to what another has to say, and to learn from that and I look at my mother who was extraordinary at that. Many, many years ago — probably 20 plus years ago — [she] got very involved with refugees and asylum seekers and it became her life when she retired. Mum's ghetto was to write to two ministers every day. Mum was an introvert, didn't have the luxury of a computer, but she would write to two ministers every day and talk about the vulnerability of others and the request for tenderness that needed to be offered to them. And bit by bit involved people in that which was extraordinary. And to this day, we have an Iranian adopted brother, someone that mum helped bring out from Baxter [Detention Centre].*

⁵³ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

⁵⁴ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

⁵⁵ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

⁵⁶ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

... So, you know, I think we've got a lot of wonderful men in our church too, but we need to rethink what hierarchy looks like and to think of it through tenderness and the eyes of empathy.”⁵⁷

Theme 4: Women's Perspectives

STEP 1. CONCERNS/STORIES/EXPERIENCES

Candice (Cairns) on the struggles she faces and the support offered to her by Rosies – local Support Services.

“I ended up going and getting emergency housing. That's when I met my current partner and I pretty much fell in love at first sight and we end up moving in [together]. Then we ended up conceiving two children in two years and then we ended up having his eldest daughter move up and she's absolutely beautiful. Every now and then we find it a bit hard money wise because you know, things pop up, kids get school diseases, everything like that. And when I heard about you guys [Rosies] and actually came there, I thought you guys were absolutely amazing and more people need to know about you, especially families. When I went to Rosies for the first time, I just thought it's a miracle[what] you guys are here to do and see what you guys do, not just for the homeless, but for families as well.

We really, really need to see more families there because there's a lot of families that are struggling at the moment. I've heard from welfare and people like that, that there's people living in cars at the moment, because that's how bad housing is up here. So at least if I get these people to come to Rosies, at least[they] get a feed for themselves and their children and things like that. That's, that's my goal is to get out there and start getting more families in need instead of getting welfare on their door, keep them away by getting them to come to Rosies and just benefiting them so much, helping their kids get to school.

Your school packs are amazing. They are so helpful for me and my family to get our girls to school and the sandwiches, the fruit. Just the abundance of help you guys do. It's amazing.”⁵⁸

Clare (Brisbane): *“Within that women's perspectives it does say respectful inclusion and prevention and healing of violence. I can't really speak with any sort of sense of experience or confidence about that, other than my feeling is that the church if it is a place of welcome and the gospel then it should also be a place where we can be a healing place and hopefully if there are people in our community who would find a place of safety and welcome, then it would be good to think that the church can be that. But I think there's still violence in the story of the church itself and I think we're still reckoning with being accountable and honest and dealing with that, so I wonder about the credibility, and I think the church as an institution is still grappling with facing up to that but at the local level.*

I'd like to think that the different arms of the church, whether it's Centrecare in Brisbane, the communities that we say are in the name of the church, actually will be

⁵⁷ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

⁵⁸ [OC_CAI_POB_02_Int](#)

those places that women can feel safe. But then that said, I don't have an experience of it."⁵⁹

Clare (Brisbane) *"When I hear Bridget talk and I see the literature from her school and the way they sort of sell themselves, I suppose, as a school for young women is that it's all about empowering young women to sort of be who they want to be and develop the skills to be whatever they can be professionally and in life.*

*It's not hypercritical but it's 'that but not that' so I think that's a pretty challenging story to have to hold. It's a cognitive leap from one sort of reality to another and I know that the church has been slow to change and there has been change around how women are perhaps more included in terms of liturgy, from the perspective of young women, my sense is that there's a bit of – well, so what?"*⁶⁰

Anne (Brisbane) *"Being a woman of my age in the church I have people say to me all the time, 'Why have you stuck around, why do you put up with this?' And my answer is 'Always I go back to the gospel where Jesus [asks] Peter are you going to go too? And Peter said where would I go?' Because I can't think of where else I would go that would give me my spirit..."*⁶¹

Stephen (Brisbane) highlighted that hearing the homily given by women would give a different perspective.

*"... In the parishes we're talking about and many other parishes, and also within other institutions within the church we see women in leadership roles, women leading liturgy, women doing all the work, women teaching homiletics and liturgy to seminarians at Catholic seminaries, yet they're not allowed to hold the position. So as a result, we - we miss out on hearing a completely different perspective, the diminishing number of us who attend Mass on a Sunday. My entire life I've only heard the gospel preached from a particular perspective... it doesn't mean that a woman would preach it better or do it better because ...women can have the same foibles as men, however, we don't even have the opportunity to hear from that 50% of the population about what their perspective on the Gospel might be."*⁶²

STEP 3. REFLECTION

Stephen (Brisbane) spoke about his personal experience: *"In many ways I feel very lucky because of working mainly with women and so I've seen the best and worst (laughter). As a primary school teacher you work mainly with women. And all the religious leaders generally in all the schools I've worked in have been women. And then when I've gone into an office based role the leaders of my team have been women, women who have doctoral degrees in theology and doctoral degrees in liturgy and people who've led formation and so I have had the luck, the benefit, to have been able to hear from really spiritually engaged, spiritually depthed, engaged, intelligent women who understand theology and faith and speak to that around a whole range of issues. And through my role and work in education, I've been able to hear those people and so*

⁵⁹ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁶⁰ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁶¹ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁶² [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

seeing women in leadership roles and hearing women and trusting them in that space is a natural part of what you do, because you go to those people and even the other day, I was thinking I'd like to get in contact with one of them ... I want to ask them questions for advice about these things, I'd go to the woman to do that because she's been a leader and she's someone who I trust and admire. But not everybody in the church has had that experience. They don't hear or have that chance to hear that if [they] just hear from the pulpit on Sunday.”⁶³

Veronica (Ballarat) shared from her deep knowledge of John's gospel that in the early church women had a significant role – the early church she explained was “a community of equals”.

“The first 20 chapters of John, women, it's a community of equals. And Mary Magdalene is the first to encounter the Risen Christ. And yet in John chapter twenty-one there are no women there. They've been prominent in so many parts of the gospel leading up to that, and then in the final chapter they're not there, and it seems to me it's generally conceded that that's an addition to John's gospel and it seems to me that what is going on there is capitulation to fear. The women were standing by the cross, Jesus' aunty was there, standing by the cross and Mary Magdalene, they were all there; Mary's sister, wife of Cleopas, they were there, standing by the cross, not as in the synoptics where they were at a distance. They were standing there. And then like the Samaritan woman who left her jug behind, and she went off and she evangelised, and brought them back. The mother of Jesus plays a key role. Martha, the most incredible profession of faith that she makes, much more powerful than the profession of faith that Peter makes - that's in chapter 20. You get a conclusion to the gospel at the end of Chapter 20, versus 30-31 and then you move into chapter 21, and the focus is on Peter. And – ‘Do you love me more than these, more than these fishing rods and things?’ or - or do you love me more than ...He has to say it three times and then ‘You know that I love you’. And then right at the end, ‘Follow me’. Peter wasn't the first disciple to be called. Peter doesn't get a high profile in the rest of the gospel in the first twenty chapters. And it's clear that Mary Magdalene comes to fullness of faith. It's not clear that Peter does in the first twenty chapters. But somebody took fright at what was going on. Right at the beginning they take fright and clearly Mary Magdalene has to be sidelined. She's a threat. And it - it just seems to me that that is still operating. We need to revisit the text, and we need to say, we need a revision of the lectionary, and we need to look at the texts and say, ‘Is this the word of God?’ You know, ‘Wives be subject to your husbands’, that's not the word of God. The word of God, no it's not. ‘Slaves be subject to your masters’; we don't read that anymore. So, if we do read these other things, there's some lovely things in John twenty-one, ‘Feed my lambs - very - very powerful in a church where we haven't cared for the children. ‘Feed my lambs, feed my sheep’. That needs to be said but it could've been said to Mary Magdalene as the leader, as an ecclesial leader. Just seems to me that it's been going on for a long time, this push back. The Gospel of John is - I love the Gospel of John, it's marvellous, but chapter twenty-one pushes back. And we keep pushing back. You know it's still

⁶³ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

*happening, and we need to be alert to what's being pushed back now, and revisit John 1-20 it seems to me. We're going to have more respectful inclusion.*⁶⁴

STEP 4. ACTION

Asked by the Facilitator how to address this, Veronica (Ballarat) responded: *'Keep talking, keep being respectful of those who have another point of view ...Like that's one point of view, I have another point of view. Be ready to express it. It seems to me that that's the way to go. Always respectful of those who have, who share our views, those who don't share our views - but hang in there, don't give up. That's the thing, hang in there, don't give up and try and give hope...it's okay to critique the text. We look at what affirms us, we look at what we say, no that's not the word of God for today. That's not helpful and we do it with some very obvious things, but we don't do it with everything.'*⁶⁵

Anne (Brisbane): *"I've made a decision now, I won't go to a conference or go and listen to anything if there are no women keynotes. I won't do it. And that means I miss quite a few things in the church, because everybody who's speaking is a man and most of them will have collars on. I'm just not interested anymore. Unless I get the other perspective I'm not going."*⁶⁶

Mariana (Suva): *"I am actually the coordinator for the women's ministry in the archdiocese of Suva - Caritas Fiji. My work is networking with different organisations, inclusive of who they are and what denominations but most of all our own Catholic women. I work in partnership with all the different women's groups in the archdiocese. One of the main issues that we are dealing with right now is in regard to the elimination of violence against women and children. So that is very much a human injustice that is actually very prevalent...That is why our partnership has to be strengthened with Fiji Council of Churches, other Pacific Island nations, other organisations that are here so that together we can be proactive. And not only that, but to eliminate the abuse that happens. Right now we are also trying to train our men for advocacy for elimination of violence in our, in the society. And so that they are having the workshops so that everyone is responding, working together ... to help educate our own people on the ground."*⁶⁷

Theme 5: Revelation and Joy

In the theme Revelation and joy, the Brisbane Group focussed on the line 'Nature is the locus of God's presence'.

STEP 1. CONCERNS/STORIES/EXPERIENCES

Clare (Brisbane) said: *"God's presence in nature often comes at that time when we're aware of the threat to it or the loss of it. Like the times when something is devastated-like after the floods. The reality of climate change comes through so strongly in Laudato Si' and other writings. The great thing is the church is not turning its back on that idea of needing to face up to the fact that we're co-contributors - we're causing*

⁶⁴ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

⁶⁵ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

⁶⁶ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁶⁷ [OC_SUV_AH_01_Int](#)

this and so the grief feels like a big part of mourning with God. If we recognise that it is sacred holy ground, then having a greater awareness means that everything we do matters."⁶⁸

STEP 3. REFLECTION

Anne (Brisbane): "If you look at those two creation stories we've been talking about, the second one [Gen 2: 4b-9,15-25] says we were made from the earth... we were made from the earth which really is the Indigenous spirituality, and then the first creation story [Gen 1:1-2:4] tells us that - God made all these things - made us to be responsible for the earth."⁶⁹

Stephen (Brisbane) said *"Creation implies something that transcends and comes from beyond. And I can't help but think what we're really talking about is the imminent and transcendent presence of God. And I think that understanding has been there for generations and thousands of years for all cultures because that sense that we would call it awe and wonder. And I think - when you're within land and look up at night-time at the night sky, that's when I then feel the awe and the wonder most keenly... because that's when I reflect 'we are this'."*⁷⁰

Bridget (Brisbane): *"There's something special in nature that you don't get from [being inside] - like when - ...we were at the beach it was awesome - out in the open air. ...Why can't we do this for our retreat days? Why do we have to sit inside in a stuffy room? Why can't we like come out and be in nature? because you don't get [feeling] at school when you're in a kind of enclosed space."*

Helen (Brisbane): *"And take your shoes off and anchor your feet in the earth and be part of it."*

Bridget (Brisbane): *"Yes!"*⁷¹

Theme 6: Christians in the Public Sphere.

Participants addressed this theme with reference to economics

STEP 1. CONCERNS/STORIES/EXPERIENCES

Jenny (Christchurch) spoke of what she has learned in her ministry as a member of St Vincent de Paul society – that the cry of the Poor and the cry of Earth are one: *"What I'm seeing is the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor really stem from the same issues because people don't see the poor, they're invisible, and people don't see the cry view either. They think that it's someone else's issue; they think that it's not their problem. They think that the government will sort it or someone else will take responsibility and it's not going to come to anything, that it - unless we all take some responsibility then it's not going to happen, it's not - there's not going to be the change that's necessary. And working with the poor, it's about listening to the poor, it's about understanding the poor have a culture, they have a proud culture of who they are. They*

⁶⁸ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁶⁹ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁷⁰ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁷¹ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

are not poor of spirit, they have a spirit, they have a belief in their life, and the process of their life. It's we who come in that can find that's difficult."

She recounted in detail the circumstances of the people she works with at a camping ground on the outskirts of a wealthy area in Aotearoa New Zealand. *"They live in a ghetto, in a modern-day ghetto on the outskirts of a very wealthy district actually, and they live behind a pub and behind some fancy motels at the front, they live in canvas. They have a very inadequate kitchen and a toilet block with some showers. The people who live in the accommodation at this place are almost as badly off as the people living under canvas because the condition of the permanent housing there is appalling. It's dirty, it's filthy, in fact the carpet is terrible. There's no facilities, they have to walk 50 metres to the toilet block and the kitchen and they have nothing in their little units. It's very, very sobering, however it is their home. And the common home is the home of whoever lives there and that is their home, and so we've got to be really understanding that our common home is different for many people. And we can learn an awful lot about the common home by listening to people who live in very impoverished positions and places. And their community is interesting. They have tiffs, they fight with each other, there's all sorts of things that happen. But they get up the next morning and it's all okay again. So, in a way, it's their own little way of managing things and we've just got to be really cognisant of trying not to colonise them with actually how we might want them to look, or how that might look. And so it's about really understanding that that that is how it is"*⁷²

Eunice (Cairns) spoke of the need to ensure that no one in the community feels left out or disconnected and her belief making connection will enable the isolated to contribute to society. *"Homelessness to me, since I've been exposed as a branch coordinator and as a volunteer with Rosies, has been a real eyeopener for me because I've actually never seen this before. I've worked with Aboriginal folk in the past in the communities and around the city, but they've always got family and friends to go home to. But when you're talking about the Caucasian people, it's very different. Most of them don't even have family that want to have anything to do with them. And I found this really, really sad as I spoke with most of the homeless, males in this case, 95% of Rosies, we serve homeless men and they've been abandoned by their families. One of the things they can't afford is rent. And I know from statistics here in Cairns, we have a huge waiting list of two and a half thousand people wanting homes. These homeless people are looking for self-worth, they're looking for dignity, they're looking for, um, self-confidence, they're looking for belonging and I really believe that we need to provide the practical needs, their practical needs, which basically are housing, food and of course clothing and then we meet their mental needs because a lot of them suffer mental health issues. And I believe that every single one of them will play a very important role as citizens of our community if we only look at how we can actually lead them to that, that place where they're most happy."*⁷³

⁷² [OC_CCH_KR_01_Int](#)

⁷³ [OC_CAI_POB_03_Int](#)

In the Group discussion in Christchurch, Paul shared about Wellbeing Economics – economic management that promotes the wellbeing of all people so they can live the lives that they value and have reason to value

Paul (Christchurch): *"I maintain some hope. You know, there are opportunities to foster a movement around wellbeing economics that requires a lot of energy at the moment. Not just in Aotearoa New Zealand, but globally. So how much time can you withdraw from that for contemplation given the urgency of that task? And I think that's where communities are important. It's not a question of learning from Indigenous culture. It is being in just relation with Indigenous cultures who have the power to create lives that reflect true Indigenous values. And, it's not a question of taking from to make better decisions ourselves, it is giving up power in order to make room for everyone to participate in [care] of the earth against those powerful economic forces that want to mine the earth to concentrate wealth into the hands of a very small group of people. And so it's not possible to care for the earth without major social, economic, environmental and cultural change based on justice. It's enormous".⁷⁴*

Jenny (Christchurch) responded: *"But if we think of it as being enormous we're never going to make the change that will be the change. And so the change might be that we simplify it in a way that brings it back to the very simple factors of what can happen in regeneration given half a chance, given 10 years out of the expected 90 years. You know we've got 5 years so we can expect that if it's done well and right and with the right process then in actual fact an awful lot could be ...".⁷⁵*

Bruce (Melbourne): *"Pope Francis is very focused on the economic philosophy driving the whole process of globalisation and social change. We're so used to this type of investment growth. The economy's got to keep growing all the time so they can provide jobs for people. There's infrastructure for societies and all the other things governments have to do to improve living standards. That's all wonderful up to a point- but when your resource base is shrinking, we are running out of resources for, to be able to do this on a grander scale. We have more than half the world's population living in very dire circumstances. And these people need to have increased living standards, better living standards, so that they can have the sort of life that we aspire to, too. And he's saying- and again, he's looking to Indigenous peoples as an example of this- "You can have very happy lives living much more simply".*

We don't need all the international trips - we need some of course - but how do we do that without ruining the climate with the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere? How do we think differently so that we can use our resources better, so that we don't have to multiply all the things we have but make sure everybody has access to them? So, this is a challenge we we're facing."⁷⁶

STEP 4. ACTION

Aloysius (Melbourne) shared his dream of *Laudato Si'* impacting the globe.
"For me Laudato Si' is big and somehow also gives me confidence and motivation to

⁷⁴ [OC_CCH_Wisdom_Ecological_Rep](#)

⁷⁵ [OC_CCH_Wisdom_Ecological_Rep](#)

⁷⁶ [OC_MEL_AH_02_Int](#)

act. I'm just thinking of this expression 'the earth is our common home'. And as a parish priest, I'm always thinking about how to make my parish or parishioners people who care for the common home, and it has been my dream. And let us say probably, I don't know how many people I have here. Couple of hundred? If those couple of hundred can become missionaries of the common home, I don't know how many people within a month Laudato Si' will be known to. And when I, one day I, I think I, I talked at our meetings and I think with Natalie too, about how many Laudato si' groups [there are] all over the world. I think it's about 80,000 or something like that. And then I'm thinking of how many Catholics [there are in] the world? Over 1 billion. Now, if this were over 1 billion, all of them are, you know, people who care for the common home. Don't you think that Laudato Si' within one day can reach the whole world? You know, reach everybody's heart. So I'm just thinking that one ... probably, we have to act here first to make this parish Sacred Heart a parish that cares for this common home...So that's me, for me the Laudato Si'."⁷⁷

Theme 8: Leaving Clericalism Behind

STEP 1. CONCERNS/STORIES/EXPERIENCES

Allan (Ballarat) had prepared a reflection which he read during the group discussion:

*"The women of the Church are kept on the periphery and have been for centuries. They must be included at every level if the church is to prosper. The church is losing such an important element by only inviting women to the front door but not opening the door and letting them in. The success of the Plenary Council as an avenue of reform in Australia will only be successful if women who make up more than half of the church are included at the highest level."*⁷⁸

During the discussion, Allan made the point of the urgent need to recognise and welcome women for the contribution they can make:

"It's been like that for centuries. I think something has to be done at some stage sooner rather than later, because the church is a declining institution in terms of numbers and in fact if you go to a church, in most cases, apart from the fact that you see senior people there — you don't see as many children — of that group, more than half are women, if you just look.

*And I think we've got a great resource and I think the church is doing itself a great disservice and the men of the church need to acknowledge the fact that there's half their population has been kept on the margins for eons. And if the church is to succeed as an institution, they need to address that."*⁷⁹

Kate (Ballarat) concurred with Allan, telling a story of a recent experience of women sharing their gifts in: *"Thank you for your observation and it's so true, because I think if the church needs to, if the church chooses to, rebuild, it needs to be very, very humble and go to the margins as Jesus did and embrace women.*

⁷⁷ [OC_MEL_Wisdom_Ecological_Rep](#)

⁷⁸ [OC_BAL_Wisdom_Vulnerability_Rep](#)

⁷⁹ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

I've been involved recently with the RCIA group at our cathedral. And one evening in working with those that were preparing to be received into the church, we were talking about who we are and I said, 'Look, just, just cope with me. I'm a little bit of a feminist' and they wanted to know how and why, and how does that fit into the church? Can you be a feminist and actually be in the church?' And I said, 'Absolutely!' And I said, and just look, when you go back here next time, just look to see who are involved in the ministries in the church. Just think about what you've seen already.' And the group said, 'Well, the only person that wasn't involved today in that evening ceremony was the priest.' So all the other ministries, including the welcoming were by women. They hadn't thought about it until it was drawn to their attention. And they were quite surprised.

I said, well, you know, I'm not anti-male I've got lovely men in my family who were marvellous, lovely men in the church, but, you know, don't ignore that the females who are, who have been, um, keeping it, funding it, cleaning it, doing everything for it in so many ways.

And how do we acknowledge it? How do we change it?"

Later Kate added *"I think we have a lot of wonderful men in our church too, but we need to re-think what hierarchy looks like and to think of it through tenderness and the eyes of empathy."*⁸⁰

Carmel (Ballarat) had prepared and shared a reflection on respectful inclusion, recounting an experience which addressed the important gifts the laity have to offer within the Church, including in leadership and management.

"I am thinking especially of respectful inclusion of the laity in general, and of women in particular. For seven years, I was 'parish leader' of a small rural parish with three communities and three churches. The priests with whom I worked were generally supportive of my role. Every weekend there was at least one lay led liturgy. The absence of an ordained presider on so many occasions provided opportunities for the laity to exercise the sort of leadership that would not have been possible otherwise. I saw my role as providing theological and biblical education for all parishioners and particularly for those who led the Sunday assemblies and ongoing sacramental programs. During that time, I saw lay people, women and men, grow in understanding of the gospel and our Catholic Christian tradition. I saw them grow in confidence and I saw cohesive, vibrant communities that were committed to both social and environmental justice.

After I left that parish, a new parish priest was appointed. He simply took over, so that the enthusiasm and responsibility for lay leadership and faith development diminished, even though the lay people who had taken leadership in the past were willing to keep contributing. What I want to ask Pope Francis is support for small faith communities and support for faith development of all the baptised so that they can exercise their baptismal call to lay leadership. In my view, this will not be possible without a rethinking and restructuring of both initial and ongoing formation of priests so that they no longer understand their role as one of lording it over the people. Priests need to be called out of the community in order to serve the community. Leadership of parishes need not depend on ordination. I have seen communities ready for lay leadership and I

⁸⁰ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

have seen the disillusionment of many lay people when their power was usurped by an insensitive priest.”⁸¹

Kristen (Ballarat) affirmed Carmel’s story and added *“Acknowledging the complementarity of women and men in leadership and management and administration will only enrich and strengthen the church as a community.”⁸²*

Bernadette (Ballarat) was of like mind. *“We raise our young women particularly in Catholic schools in Australia to think of themselves as totally equal, as totally beautiful, as part of God’s creation, and then we tell them, oh sorry Holy Orders aren’t for you. If you’re called to serve God there is a disconnect there. And it - it’s just not working and we can’t look back to a model from the past to find a way forward. We need to open up the priesthood to everyone. Jesus had women disciples and St Peter was married. We need to go right back to the early church and allow people to administer ... to themselves. If there is no priest in a parish, don’t impose a priest from another culture upon them, allow them to solve their liturgical problems within the parish, instead of having to have as you’ve said, control. And keeping women and married men out of the priesthood is one way that the church has asserted control through clericalism and I think it’s wrong and the church is not going to move forward in Australia until we get beyond it.”⁸³*

Miranda (Ballarat) was in agreement with Bernadette. She attributed the disconnect of young people with attending church as linked with its clerical nature and with the age of people attending: *“I also think if I could add to that, I agree with you very much, but I think that it’s that that makes the young people think well you know, so we’re - we’re being educated as - as you described so perfectly and why stick around, what’s the future within the church... as a young adult you have nowhere to go. Erm nobody you know the young people just move away because er it’s not er what’s the word - it doesn’t fulfil their needs.*

And we see going to Sunday mass everybody that’s there... on the older side of the community. Very few younger people will - will commit as er young adults because they see it’s full of disconnection.”⁸⁴

Barry (Ballarat) contributed: *“One request I would have of Pope Francis is that we move as quickly as we possibly can to allow the expansion of the numbers of those who can lead the Mass of a Sunday. And I think in terms of allowing married men to come into it and the place of women. I mean the Mass is just so important and we need to be able — instead of closing down churches — be able to open it up with people in the local area.”⁸⁵*

Carmel (Ballarat) continued, *“Can I just add to that, Barry, that it comes from within that community, that people from within the community are asked to lead the liturgy because we’ve got priests now coming into the [parish], wonderful men, I have nothing,*

⁸¹ [OC_BAL_Wisdom_Vulnerability_Rep](#)

⁸² [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

⁸³ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

⁸⁴ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

⁸⁵ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

*nothing, against them, but people can't understand [them] and they're not being appointed by the people, they're not being raised up from the people, called by the people .*⁸⁶

Kate (Ballarat) added *"I have that idea of resurrection that has being raised to fully participate in life. And we have many people in our church who are very well formed and, and ready to fully participate in the way you are inviting Barry, male and female."*⁸⁷

Berenice (Ballarat) contributed: *'It would seem to me that that would reflect people's reality a lot more closely and it would enhance their capacity to live as Christian people. I'm sorry but I do not become inspired to live the Christian life by sitting in the pews and listening to somebody expound a theology that is —the most charitable thing to say —is outmoded. We need encouragement, we need leaders who will inspire us and help us to Christian action because Jesus said you know go feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those in prison. He didn't say sit and listen to somebody preach at you about it - in a way that - that doesn't relate to you. Jesus never said that. He wants us to act as Christians, not to sit and listen.'*⁸⁸

Bridget (Brisbane) shared the point of view of a young (teenage) woman:

*"... It's like we don't hear any of the voices that even applies to us. So, I guess a lot of the girls, even when we're in liturgies - we're just - or we're watching something that Pope Francis has said, it's like— I guess my impression and the lot of the girls' attitude would be —like none of this even applies to us 'cause we're not hearing anything from anyone that's even like us. So, what's the point?"*⁸⁹

Clare (Brisbane) shared a recent example in her parish of the priest and pastoral associate collaborating to create a meaningful liturgical experience: *"In our parish just over Easter we've had this really beautiful triduum. The parish priest made the comment that it was a really wonderful - wonderful experience especially this year coming off the back of COVID having things be so restricted in the last couple of years, but especially too because he was supported so wonderfully and it was led so wonderfully by a parish associate who just took everything and did everything to make it possible so that he could be present, like spiritually, liturgically and in the way that he needed to be, and I know that's only one person, but time and time again it shows that in these communities women make it happen. Like they're the ones who are doing the work, and it's not to say that men aren't there doing the work too, but the communities rely on the people who are quietly going about, and not just - I mean they're experts too, the woman who runs this, she's done the study, she's done the hard yards, she'd be perfectly qualified to stand up there and preach on a Sunday. I mean she can't for the reasons that remain mysterious..."*⁹⁰

A further practical example was given by Clare of the writing of the reflection in parish newsletter: *"Our parish newsletter has a front page that has a reflection on the gospel."*

⁸⁶ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

⁸⁷ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG2](#)

⁸⁸ [OC_BAL_SYN_FG1](#)

⁸⁹ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁹⁰ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

*Traditionally it was written by the parish priest but he's - he's set it such that other people now in the parish are being invited to write something, partly because that diversifies and gives a different voice too. People can write about experiences that relate to their daily life - their experience as grandparents or whatever. But it's also an acknowledgement the priest can't do everything. I mean these guys are exhausted as well. So it's a mutually beneficial situation when you've got other people whose skills and life experience sheds some light on the Gospel and vice versa, and other people can go ...that resonates with me ...*⁹¹

Theme 10: Dialogue and Encounter

STEP 1. STORIES/CONCERNS/EXPERIENCES

Helen (Brisbane) began by defining her understanding of true dialogue. *"True dialogue is when we dialogue with the other, whether that other is another religion or a spirituality. I think a lot of people are afraid of dialoguing, of true dialogue, because they're worried that they will lose the Catholic tradition. Maybe they're afraid that oh if I dialogue with another religion, I might actually see that that's a better religion and I might leave. Whereas true dialogue is going to enrich your own faith and spirituality. So, the fear needs to be removed."*⁹²

Clare (Brisbane): *"The words dialogue, collaboration, ecumenism; I actually think about the work of it and I wonder whether sometimes we face these things feeling a little bit tired too, like it's easy to just keep going doing what we're doing and face the community of people we know. We know the rules and we know the rhythms and everything's in a sense the same and there's a safety and a kind of a confidence in that. And as you were saying, Helen, it's uncomfortable to step out a kind of - an interaction with a person who's got a different way of doing things, maybe different ideas, and beliefs about it. And I think for some people, that can feel threatening to their own sense of what's right. It came through in this document from the Congregation of Catholic Education ... this was the one that came out in March [2022] as an instruction document. And I know Pope Francis has spoken a lot about dialogue. It's being certain in where we stand but entering [conversation] with or without an agenda and objective about what we're hoping to gain from it and that can be daunting for most of us, not to be in control. I think we like to have certainty; we like to know what the outcome's going to be...."*⁹³

Stephen (Brisbane): *"Dialogue has limits. Dialogue can't solve everything. But dialogue is an important position to take. If you take a position of dialogue, you start with a position of listening. And it's not necessarily about the other being changed but rather you are being changed. That's how I would understand it.... We need a contest of ideas within the church and sometimes that will lead to an impasse and so that's only through dialogue that we can find a bridge between the impasse. So, I think know the purpose of dialogue and the limits of dialogue and knowing that dialogue starts with listening - people think dialogue starts with talking it's - and that's not good for me because I like to talk, but listening is the challenge. And I think, what change do we*

⁹¹ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁹² [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁹³ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

*then expect from dialogue and how quickly, because dialogical processes are not quick? Dialogue is not about finding a fix to a solution necessarily, that's another process altogether. But dialogue opens the possibility.*⁹⁴

Members of the Reach Youth group shared their varied experiences of dialogue.

Kasi (Cairns) *"I try to have those conversations with people I meet, like you run into someone at the shops or just walking around and you just have conversations with someone, and you can have some really deep and meaningful conversations with people sometimes because- and especially with homeless people they have amazing life stories sometimes. And they're there just cause of circumstance and there's such a negative light scene around them, but no one, no one tries to just talk to them."*⁹⁵

Samuel (Cairns) added: *"And so it's hard for people to trust other people and to be real. You know, if you say, 'Oh yeah, I had that absolutely horrible day. I've got hit by a ball in the face, like dust everywhere', no one wants to hear that. Or you think no wants to hear that.*

*And you tell people that, they're just going to walk away. So then how do you ask people the deep stuff? How's your faith going? What do you believe? It's hard to engage. You can't even ask basic questions without getting an answer."*⁹⁶

Gracelyn (Cairns): *"So many people are hungry to be heard. But if one student you sit down and listen to, they just tell you everything. 'cause if you're able to set aside the time and actually show that you care, then they're like, 'Oh my goodness, what is actually going on here?' Like it's incredibly, incredibly rare these days, which is really sad. But it means that there are so many people hungry to be heard and they just pour themselves out and it's, they just can't help it because no one else listens. Especially I found that with kids. For teenagers, they don't have the ability to share that conversation, not even with their friends, most of the time... They're all circumstantial friends, they're in a room together for a certain amount of time during the day for every day of the week, you know, but then any like actual life stuff, they don't even share that because it's just not what you do. In regard to sitting down and just like sharing that moment with people that just opens so many doors and like it's, it's sad to see, but it's also an amazing opportunity if you can actually set that aside, for that then yeah, I guess sharing God's love... We're coming from a place of caring for another human being, who we see as our brother or sister."*⁹⁷

Ashleigh (Cairns): *"I feel like I had a very different experience ... I find it very easy and will often accidentally get into a deep conversation with people... I couldn't tell you my favourite, any of my friends' favourite colours, but I could tell you like, too much about things that they don't talk about to normal people... It's fun talking about deep stuff. It's, it's so much easier to get into a deep conversation than just talking about your favourite food, like your favourite colour, because it can get awkward yeah... Whereas you are having a meaningful conversation like about faith. You can just go on, you*

⁹⁴ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

⁹⁵ [OC_CAI_SYN_FG](#)

⁹⁶ [OC_CAI_SYN_FG](#)

⁹⁷ [OC_CAI_SYN_FG](#)

know? And that's such a good thing that people don't embrace. That needs to be embraced."⁹⁸

STEP 2. CONTEXT

Helen (Brisbane) contributed *"I still feel like I have to leave my Aboriginal Spirituality at the door when I walk in the building. That ritual that we do every Sunday morning is not nourishing my spirituality in a way that Aboriginal Spirituality does."*⁹⁹In her interview, Helen developed her thoughts on dialogue and encounter further when asked how *her Catholic identity and Aboriginal spirituality relate or connect*:

*"I guess what helped me understand that my Catholicism, my Catholicity could sit nicely with my Aboriginal spirituality was starting to read some Franciscan theological literature. And it really took me that the Franciscans believe that creation was the first bible. Now there was something I read, I think I may have even put it in my research project, I can't remember where I read it as well, that [for] Aboriginal people creation is our - is the holy word, is the sacred scripture. So, the sacred scripture is in the trees, it's in the land, it's in the mountains, it's all linked. My Catholicism seems to sit side by side at the moment, there is links, but it's still sitting side by side I guess as - the Catholic part of me, as a religion. So, you enter the church and then I think when I enter the church, I have to leave the Aboriginal spirituality at the door. It kind of feels that way because to me the Aboriginal spirituality is when I can see God in all of creation, when I can see God in the gum trees when I can hear God's breath when I hear the wind blowing through the leaves of the gum trees. But I don't experience that inside the walls of the church. I can experience God in other people while I'm inside the walls of the church, so I guess that's how I can link it as well. But to me the symbolism within the church doesn't link up with the symbolism in nature yet. Yet. I would like to envisage a cathedral outdoors where the trees are the pillars of the cathedral, and we have fire as central and water is central as well and I'd like to think of that. But my understanding of - I'm a very Trinitarian in my belief and I believe the trinity as flow, so as Richard Rohr discusses in a lot of his literature as well. So, our God is triune and forever moving through us, entering into us, and then out of us as well to other people. And that Trinitarian belief system I think links beautifully with the Aboriginal notion of Creator Spirit. And Pope John Paul II in his Alice Springs address, it's over 30 years ago now, indicated that God's presence has been with Aboriginal people from the beginning. So, to me that means I can explain in my own mind that Creator Spirit and triune God are the same. And that sits okay with me because, you know, I've got the Pope's blessing. That's how I feel anyway."*¹⁰⁰

STEP 3. REFLECTION

Elsewhere in her interview Helen responded: *I think Pope Francis' writing has allowed us to explore more the notion of the presence of God in all of creation. But, in saying that, when we dialogue with others, other religions or other belief systems, there's no loser is there? Like it, it only deepens our own faith, when it's true dialogue. I think it can only truly deepen your own faith system, your own belief system.*

⁹⁸ [OC_CAI_SYN_FG](#)

⁹⁹ [OC_BRI_Dialogue_Women_Revelation_Rep](#)

¹⁰⁰ [OC_BRI_AH_01_Int](#)

And if it will, it's a different way to expose a transcendent to you. For instance, the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales stated our faith in Christ gives us the assurance that whatever is true and holy in other religions is not an alternative to the gospel, but a preparation for it. So I like, I really like that quote that it's, it's going to be leading us more to a deeper understanding of God in our lives when we dialogue with the other."¹⁰¹

Helen (Brisbane): *"When we dialogue with all the different religions, can we just all come to an understanding that there is divine presence in all of nature and we've got to look after it."*¹⁰²

Bruce (Melbourne): *"Fratelle Tutti did not originally intend to be a dialogue with the Muslim world. Fratelle Tutti tackles not just the dialogue with the Muslim world but the wider network of international relations and the welfare of ordinary people and our responsibility to each other. So he develops this marvellous document in terms of the parable of the Good Samaritan. And this is such a powerful [document]. When you think about this document the parable is a marvellous, extraordinary thing and Pope Frances really makes it stand up and talk to us. Everybody knows the parable of course..."*

Pope Frances says this is a message that Jesus brings to the whole world, and it's one that everybody of any religion or of no religion, can live by the values of the Good Samaritan.

*But here's a sting in the tail. He says it's religious people who think they're okay with God who walk by, who separate their religious obligation sense of what God is concerned about and the welfare of others around them. So, what is religion all about? What's God concerned about? He's concerned about human wellbeing; the wellbeing of every single person is precious to him. And that's what he's saying. ... The good Samaritan message is saying this is what God is asking of us - to really have a care for others, and as Pope Frances says so many times, especially those who are down and out, the marginalised, those on the edge, those who've been overlooked, the forgotten people... There's so many of them in the world today and we sort of think it's somehow normal. He's saying no, no the - the whole thing about the religious obligation ... is precisely to have real concern for one another. And so in the context of Fratelle Tutti - he does this in a way which resonates very profoundly with people in the Muslim tradition..."*¹⁰³

STEP 4. ACTION

Helen (Brisbane): *"We're a very Eurocentric parish. I wouldn't say close- minded but many are not open to inculturation. So we have to tread carefully, go slowly.... So, a small way to bring some Aboriginal spirituality or meaning into the church is by using my artwork and my priest is lovely and he wears the vestments that I've painted him..."*

¹⁰¹ [OC_BRI_AH_01_Int](#)

¹⁰² [OC_BRI_AH_01_Int](#)

¹⁰³ [OC_MEL_AH_02_Int](#)

*I painted him a vestment that symbolises the missionary discipleship in Aboriginal style and - and I've done it in the Ordinary Time colours. And he quite often will wear it over on the outside of his vestments. So, it's - it's one way to open people's eyes I guess of the - of the beauty that Aboriginal spirituality...*¹⁰⁴

Final Reflection by the Coordinator

Oceania has been called 'the liquid continent'.

Beautiful, vast, inclusive of many island nations and covering a third of the earth's surface, Oceania, with its Pacific Ocean, has become one of the most vulnerable regions on the planet in relation to the effects of climate change.

Sea levels are rising, and coastal lands are being inundated. Severe degradation of lands through unregulated mining and deforestation is widespread as well as large scale loss of biodiversity. These were the issues of greatest concern for the people of this region who engaged in the 'listening exercises' on the theme of Ecological Conscience. They discussed and shared these concerns as people of faith who want to stop the destruction that is occurring but are not confident that their voices are being heard.

Many of the participants were Indigenous people from Oceania who expressed their own personal, communal and spiritual suffering in the face of loss of identity as their homelands are being inundated or destroyed.

For those participants who were non-Indigenous, it was clear from their comments in the listening process that while they spoke from a largely Eurocentric world view, they are people with a growing awareness of and respect for the concerns being raised by Indigenous people. They articulated clear recognition of their learning from Indigenous participants and spoke of the work we all must do together for action to be effective in reversing climate change.

It became clear through their sharing that the Western economic and scientific case for action against climate change is not enough to motivate all people in this region to act.

To see climate change action as an ethical problem calling for a response from faith communities will only happen when people of faith are able to integrate the economic-scientific rationale with the power of their spiritual relationship with the land, with the whole of creation.

For Christians, this calls for the articulation of a new theological approach to form the basis of a new spirituality, to be lived through the action-reflection dynamic of people's individual lives and that of their faith communities.

What is clear from this listening process is that Indigenous people live with an integrated understanding of their relationship with God the Creator in whose living Spirit all that they are and all that makes them who they are is experienced as one. Hence, protection of the environment, the community and their faith in the Creator God is experienced as an interrelated whole. Action to preserve and strengthen their lives and the life all around them comes from this faith perspective.

¹⁰⁴ [OC_BRI_AH_01_Int](#)

To prevent climate change through effective action to save our common home requires both approaches – the scientific-economic together with the theological-spiritual.

The insights drawn from this process can lead to new ethical imperatives being seen more clearly by people of faith as non-negotiable. This has been articulated and supported in a clear and effective way by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* when he writes,

“In this sense, it is essential to show special care for Indigenous communities and their cultural tradition. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.”
(Pope Francis, 2015, p.146)

However, there is further work to be done to develop a theological foundation and spiritual practice that does not leave this teaching of Pope Francis as an optional extra for Catholics or indeed for all people of good will. This teaching of *Laudato Si'* emphasises respect for the vital role Indigenous people play in reminding others of their land as Sacred. This offers a balance and an urgency to the dialogue with the economic and scientific imperatives to care for our common home. There is a need to discern and develop new theological language which reflects this more integrated foundation for the actions required to reverse climate change.

Time and time again Indigenous people from Oceania who participated in this process gave voice to their close spiritual identity with their ‘place’ or ‘land’ of birth and belonging.

They called ‘land’ ‘mother earth’, ‘vanua’, ‘fenua’ or ‘whenua’. These expressions reflect an understanding of presence in their lands as integrating... “the physical, spiritual, social and cultural” dimensions of life.

According to theologians from the Pacific region,

“God’s location is in creation. Our life in God is in creation” (Boseto 1995,69) ...and “Within this web of interrelationships, there is an understanding of how everything is interconnected; the role of human beings, the seasons, and all living creatures and plants play in keeping the delicate balance of life. (see Lagi 2017; Tuwere 2002).” (Carroll, 2021, p.3)

However, a deeper and consistent concern which connects all these issues is the seeking of acceptance from the broader community of their interrelationship of identity to culture, place, and spirituality. Misunderstandings or ignorance of these core relationships can diminish confident action for change by Indigenous peoples.

The **4 Step theological process** used in the listening exercises revealed these observations:

In **Step 1** of the theological reflection process, participants articulated their **Concerns** in the light of the theme of Ecological Conscience. Indigenous participants all spoke about their spiritual connection to the land, to country or water. This relationship was foundational to their way of articulating their concerns. Many also expressed their

inability to have this spiritual connection to country or place understood by others as central to their concerns about land degradation and sea levels rising. Many participants who were not Indigenous expressed respectful and informed openness to these new understandings.

In **Step 2** of the process, participants explored the **Broader Context** of their concerns or issues. Connection to land gave Indigenous participants their identity, their eco-relational spirituality and intrinsic connection with God the Creator. Hence the threat to their land or country's survival through water inundating their lands or through unregulated and destructive land use, had profound implications for the individuals interviewed and for their communities.

Their primary emphasis was not on the economic or scientific reasons as the basis of their concerns re climate change. This knowledge was understood and accepted. There was a deeper level of powerlessness operating which led to further questions and listening. When assumptions were revisited, it became clear that there was an essential trauma for the people whose very identity in the land was under threat. These people feared loss of land because it was loss of who they were as people 'connected' to land, not as 'titled' owners but as related in a spiritual connection of presence to the sacredness of the land of their birth. They talked about those who had died as 'resting in the ground' that would soon become submerged. They spoke of food not being available to the women as the vegetables were unable to grow due to the constant inundation of salt water from the ocean.

As Pasifika Theologian and Indigenous knowledge custodian, Upolu Luma Vaai says,

"Eco-relational spirituality promotes the 'we are' over the 'we have'. It is multi-dimensional as it embraces and respects the relationships that are visible, but most importantly those that are invisible to human knowledge, such as air, ancestors, the invisible underground world of trees, and the invisible domains of the ocean, to name a few. (Vaai, 2019, p.8)

Indigenous participants were at home with an integrated understanding of life as spiritual and as eco-relational. Sharing their concerns and receiving a sense of acceptance of these concerns by others, helped them to articulate new, more confident explanations of their cultural strengths.

Bringing these insights to the **Reflection, Step 3** of the process led to sharing of key words about their faith, their connection with God the Creator and with the sacredness of the land as 'mother earth', or their 'vanua' or, for the Maori people of Aotearoa New Zealand, as 'whenua'.

In their sharing, Indigenous participants offered words and insights such as; 'there is divine presence in all of creation', in 'the breath of the earth', 'the Creator Spirit', 'the land with its own spirit for us', 'being born of the river which gave us our spiritual world view', 'the Trinitarian belief system linking with the Aboriginal notion of Creator Spirit', 'we are people of the earth, our culture was squashed, our spirituality was squashed,' 'God's presence is everywhere throughout nature'.

According to Marist Father Donato Kivi of Fiji, when speaking to an Ecumenical gathering during the Season of Creation:

“Our broken *Vanua* needs us – we know it is broken in all kinds of levels whether it is communal, social, cultural, political, cultural etc. We can no longer hide it. It all comes back to why we are here tonight. To realign ourselves, we need to put on the eyes of the Christ in how he sees the world. We need to speak of creation as our home because it communicates God’s loving relationship to us. Through Christ’s love he has gifted us with a *Vanua* that is teeming with life and beauty.” (Kivi, 2021)

Contextual comments about ‘neighbour’ also connected care for people with land and place. Maina from Tuvalu, an archipelago whose nine islands are threatened by rising seas, explained:

“We understand neighbour not just from the Biblical teaching in Luke 10, but it is also an indigenous concept for the people in the Pacific and around the world. Indigenous communities know fully the meaning of ‘our neighbour’. The concept of neighbour really touches the heart because of our moral responsibility - how we can relate to one another, and how countries like Australia and New Zealand that are nearby to Tuvalu and other low-lying atolls respond to the inevitable effect of climate change-related sea rise?” (M.Talia, personal communication, April, 27, 2022)

This movement from the stated concerns of Indigenous participants relating to the threat and fear of climate change and the degradation of their land, ocean and waterways moved into a deeper and broader context of concern about loss of identity and culture. This, in turn, was explained as a deeper fear of loss of spiritual connection and relationship with each other and with their Creator.

Pacific Indigenous Scholars are aware that the ecological crisis

“is fundamentally about the whole of life and the interdependent interconnectedness between the human community, development and the environment (Bhagwan et al. [2020](#), xv). Accompanying this understanding is the conviction that the ecological crisis cannot be resolved by scientific knowledge and fiscal means alone. The contribution of indigenous and faith-based ecological frameworks (knowledge, ethics and practices) are also required to find alternative solutions (Bhagwan et al. [2020](#), xvi).” (Carroll, 2021 p. 9)

Complementing these insights are, once again, the teachings of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*,

“Ecology ...calls for greater attention to local culture when studying environmental problems, favouring a dialogue between scientific-technical language and the language of the people. Culture is more than what we have inherited from the past; it is also, and above all, a living dynamic and participatory present reality, which cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment.” (Pope Francis, 2015, no. 143)

These words are a clear articulation of respect for the perspectives being expressed in this process. They are also supported in the recent Oceania Statement from the people who describe themselves as “woven together by bonds of kinship, by the waves and

currents of *Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa, our great Pacific Ocean*, by the air currents that circulate above her waters, and most especially woven together by love and compassion for each other and for the most vulnerable.” (Caritas Oceania, 2021).

Moving to the **Action Step 4** in this theological reflection process and taking forward the insights from Reflection Step 3, offers a new understanding of the people across Oceania. This is not only in relation to their need for support for action to stop the destructive effects of climate change events, but it is also to encourage an inclusive culture where all people of the region work together, with respect for both the scientific and the spiritual to prevent degradation of the natural environment in this region.

The action step of the process can include the prevention of global warming and of such actions as destructive mining and forestry, but importantly it also needs to include a greater sensitivity to the way Indigenous people in the Oceania region relate to the spiritual reality of their lives. To ignore this is to diminish any effective action for care for our common home as it is not inclusive of the action of the Creator Spirit of God.

The challenge for non-Indigenous people in this region is to develop greater awareness of this spiritual dimension of life that cannot be ignored because of secular society’s pressure to quash any discourse about this reality. People of faith can give the lead in articulating not only a case for enlightened people to follow the science to respond to climate change but also to invite people to develop an awareness and sensitivity to the action of the Spirit of God the Creator in our lives, in our world.

In the words of Denis Edwards, an eminent Australian Theologian who, before his death in 2019, wrote extensively on ecological theology and on Pope Francis and *Laudato Si’*:

“Francis insists that earth is our common home, that everything is interrelated and interdependent, and that we are all kin, participants in a sublime communion of creation. *Laudato Si’* offers a remarkable theology of the natural world. Instead of an often-taught Christian view of the natural world as given simply for human use, it proclaims that other creatures, and ecosystems, have their own intrinsic value before God.” (Edwards, 2019, p.120)

This concern is also expressed in the theological writings and homilies of church leaders throughout the Pacific Region. According to Upolu Luma Vaai,

“In the eco-relational worldview, there is no clear separation between what we normally call the ‘physical’ and the ‘spiritual’. Life is holistic. The effect on one aspect has radical consequences on the whole.” (Vaai, 2019, p.7)

The theological learning and insights from the people of Oceania through the listening exercises is that there is a necessary complementarity between the scientific-economic and the spiritual in the natural world. This interrelationship is foundational to our seeking of the good, particularly in response to the most serious ethical issues of this region and of our world, at this time.

Our theological reflection has been enriched and integrated with the insights of the Indigenous voices who have shared their understandings about the interrelatedness of the whole of creation.

Across Oceania, Indigenous people's relationship to the 'land' is articulated as a spiritual connection rather than as one of ownership. The significance of this insight and way of thinking and living is the unique gift and challenge they have to offer others, both in the region and beyond.

Everything they say and do reveals the interrelatedness of their lives with their place of home or belonging, their birthplace and family. Such is the intrinsic relatedness of self, place (land) and spirit in their lives and their spirituality, they cannot exclude the 'land' lest they exclude their very selves from having existence.

This leads to important theological questions for us all.

What does this mean for a Christian theology based on European philosophical frameworks which have been carried here, developed and shared throughout this Oceania region for hundreds of years? And what does it mean for the people who are Indigenous to this region who have accepted in faith the Christian story and teachings and who have worked to integrate this into their existing cultures and practice?

Furthermore, what is the new promise for those who are on the edge of discovery of this new way of relating to God the Creator, as was evidenced in the interviews and focus group discussions of those who are not indigenous in this region?

Finally, what can it mean for those who are still unaware of the richness of this gift of understanding about the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, as the basis of all that we share as a believing community and of why we must care for our common home?

First, the dawning of these new insights within the Christian churches across Oceania has potential for significant shifts in commitment to responding to the teachings and calls to action of *Laudato Si'*.

Second, Christians who deepen their understanding of this intrinsic spiritual relationship of people and place, will be freer to act to prevent climate change, not only by drawing on the compelling facts of science and economics but also from the energy they can draw from their new experience of the indivisible engagement of people and place within the spiritual realm of God's Presence. All of living reality will be seen as caught up in the energy of the Spirit of God, the active, engaged Creator, who is constantly being revealed through the Word who became flesh and lived among us fully, and who is, forever, inextricably linked with all lands, oceans, waterways and with all creatures into the vastness of the cosmos.

In the light of the insights which have emerged from the listening exercises on Ecological Conscience, it is clear that traditional Christian systematic theological learning can be challenged and expanded. It is refreshing to begin to discover that a largely overlooked region of the world has so much to share, to teach and to expand our Eurocentric approaches to theology.

One is not right and the other wrong. But the complementarity of the two approaches is, I believe, both revelation and gift to Christian theology in our time, particularly across the lands and shores of the Pacific Ocean.

This is where the insights of *Laudato Si'* become a bridging document for two world views – the rational logic of the European theological tradition and the approach of participatory spiritual presence of the Indigenous people in Oceania.

Denis Edwards, in drawing on *Laudato Si'* provides support for a theological approach in relation to the integration of the whole creation in the light of emerging theological insights about deep incarnation and the risen Christ. He writes:

“The encyclical sees all creatures as bound up with the mystery of Christ - ‘All things have been created through him and for him’ (Col. 1:16). It speaks of the Word of God who became flesh, who ‘entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross’ (paragraph 99). From the beginning, but above all in the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world. Several times, *Laudato Si'* focuses on the risen Christ at work in the whole creation.”

Pope Francis then writes of the risen Christ... “for whom ‘The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.’ (paragraph 100).”

“... Francis understands the whole creation as being drawn to its fulfillment through the risen Christ and he sees this Christ as already present to all things, holding them in love.” (Edwards, 2020, p.610)

The successful implementation of an ‘integral ecology’ will form the basis of effective action across Christian and Catholic communities in their action against climate change. It will also provide the ethical guidance for decision making in relation to other ecologically related issues. The scientific-economic view alone allows for a ‘take it or leave it’ approach to these major decisions, whereas, once the balance of the spiritual-theological ‘whole of creation’ approach is integrated into the ecological decision-making process, then it becomes an ethical imperative to act.

These insights have come from listening to and engaging with the wisdom and spirituality of the people of Oceania, both Indigenous and those who are not Indigenous, as they expressed their hopes and plans for new pathways for reflection and action for the faith community in the face of the climate crisis.

To solve this climate change crisis with informed actions and discerning hearts, we need engagement with both the **scientific-economic and the theological-spiritual, the rational and the mystical.**

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.

Adele Howard rsm - Coordinator of the Oceania Region

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