

5 August 2021

Religious Leaders Commissioned ahead of Plenary Council Assembly

Over 120 people gathered on Zoom on the 4 August in a Commissioning Ceremony of the 45 members of Religious Congregations and Institutes of Apostolic Life who are preparing to attend the forthcoming Assembly of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia.

In a prayer service organised by Catholic Religious Australia, Peter Carroll FMS, CRA President, welcomed everyone with a sense of anticipation of the momentous opportunity ahead. “We are facing a significant moment in the history of the Australian Church,” said Br Carroll. “The Plenary Council is a vital opportunity for dialogue and discernment, attentive to Pope Francis’ leadership and the energies of the Holy Spirit.”

A spirit of joy and enthusiasm was palpable from the very start of the gathering, with one visitor remarking, “I was struck by the strong spirit of camaraderie among the group as people entered the Zoom space. Greetings and good humour were flying back-and-forth across congregations and states and cyberspace!”

Leading the service, Bernadette Kiley OP invited those gathered to pray. Following a proclamation of the Word of God by Philip Watkins SSS, the group spent some time prayerfully calling upon the power of the Holy Spirit, with the help of a Taize-sponsored international online youth choir (56 young people from 36 countries) singing *Veni Sancte Spiritus*.

The 45 Plenary Council Members were then called individually by name, and each invited to state a particular gift, quality or attribute that they are committed to bringing to the Plenary Council Assembly.

Statements of gift were richly diverse and included ‘attentive listening’, ‘a spirit of mission’, ‘an empathy with the voiceless’, ‘a deep thirst for unity’, ‘a discerning heart’, ‘passion to empower the voice of young people and women’, ‘the strength of the marginalised’, ‘a new enthusiasm to proclaim the Gospel and to learn from others’, ‘a deep love of religious life and the Church’, ‘joy-filled hope’, and many more.

A prayer of commissioning followed, and the group was sent forth with the good wishes of their colleagues and companions. In a closing word of gratitude, CRA Executive Director Anne Walker acknowledged the prophetic voice of Religious in these challenging times, without which the gospel efforts of the wider faith community would not be complete.

Expressions of appreciation from participants were flowing in even before the Zoom cameras were switched off. “The ceremony, with its simple and lovely prayer, was certainly worthwhile. It gives us a real sense of solidarity,” commented Patty Fawcner SGS, Vice President of CRA and Congregational Leader of the Good Samaritan Sisters.

The gathering of Religious was joined by representatives of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, the Plenary Council Facilitation Team, as well as by CRA Secretariat staff Sylvia MacRitchie-Hook and Teresa Pirola who were instrumental in the design and delivery of the service.

The 45 Religious commissioned will take their place among the 285 Members of the Plenary Council who will gather in October 2021.

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