



Bishops will carry shared mission home from Oceania assembly

February 10, 2023 | Suva, Fiji

The Catholic bishops of Oceania have concluded their week-long gathering in Fiji with a missioning Mass, being encouraged to respond to the hopes and challenges they shared with hearts of mission and service.

Dozens of bishops attended the quadrennial assembly of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania, which concluded on Friday evening. The gathering drew bishops from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and many Pacific nations.

In his homily, Bishop Peter Brown CSsR of Samoa-Pago Pago urged his brother bishops – at the end of a week in which they focused often on God’s creation – to reflect on their place in the Church.

“It is difficult to ignore that we are part of those who *have*,” he said.

“We have power, influence and status within the Church community. How can we use that reality to enhance the care of creation?”

Bishop Brown said a fellow bishop recently shared the story of someone whose land and life were being threatened by rising sea levels and pleaded with the bishop to help. Such stories of urgency, he said, should invoke bishops to act on behalf of their people – “to help people to find a place to stand”.

“May we go from here with hope that, through our leadership together with the People of God, we can find room for all – a place where they can stand,” he said.

“We return to our homes, I hope, with a little more unease than when we arrived. It’s a good sign. You have been moved and challenged. That unease is an open door for the Lord to work through us.”

Bishop Brown concluded his homily by paraphrasing the final words of the bishops’ concluding statement for the assembly: “It is with that mission in our hearts and minds that we prepare to leave our gathering. We carry the hopes and dreams of our people and our beloved Oceania.”

[The concluding statement](#) included reflections from the bishops on their three key themes for the week: Care for the oceans; Becoming a more synodal Church; and Formation for mission.

“It has been a great joy for the Bishops of Oceania to gather in Fiji this week to pray for and consider our shared mission as the Chief Shepherds of our region,” the statement said.

“Our assembly has provided the opportunity for us to pray together, to build fraternal relationships, learn from one another and consider common pastoral challenges.”

A key task of the assembly was to review and approve Oceania’s response to the Working Document for the Continental Stage of the Synod for a Synodal Church. The bishops were pleased that, “guided by the voices of the People of God in Oceania, we progressed the work already undertaken to ensure a distinctively Oceanic voice will continue to resonate through the Synod documents”.

That response will be finalised and published in coming weeks.

The next assembly of the Federation will be held in Australia in 2027.