



13 October 2023

Assembly of Catholic Priests ends after five uplifting days that followed five painful years for Aotearoa NZ

The 175 Catholic priests at their national assembly in Rotorua this week are joyous after sharing five uplifting days following five years marked by national trauma since their last gathering in 2018.

Since that last assembly, in Christchurch, the country has experienced such painful events as the mosque shootings, the Whakaari-White Island volcanic eruption, the major storms early this year and the three years of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fr Michael Hishon of Dunedin, chair of the 2023 National Assembly of Diocesan Priests organising committee, says he is very satisfied how all the many months of meetings and preparation culminated in the successful assembly.

“The last five years have proven a kind of stormy and even at times demoralising period for us all as priests attempting to make our way, and so this opportunity to gather has made for a really hopeful and joy-gilded five days of companionship,” Fr Michael said today at the assembly’s conclusion.

Fr Michael said the formal welcome at Te Papa-iouru Marae on Monday, the formal dinner on Thursday night, and everything in between was a success.

“The organising committee also thanks the New Zealand bishops for calling their priests to this time of uplifting refreshment and spiritual renewal.”

Speakers included Archbishop of Brisbane Mark Coleridge, New Plymouth assistant parish priest Fr Vui Hoang, Whanganui parish priest Fr Craig Butler, Pakuranga parish priest Sherwin Lapaan, new Bishop of Palmerston North John Adams, Caritas chief executive Mena Antonio, Catholic Enquiry Centre director Rebecca Taylor-Hunt, Auckland Catholic couple Hannah and James van Schie, and Dr Therese Lautua and Lucienne Hensel, who took a leading part in the Oceania and diocesan phases respectively of the current Synod of the Synod process.

“The attendees thoroughly made the most of what was a very timely gathering, from the welcome at the marae, to hearing the very well presented and encouraging words from our speakers, enjoying the very best of foods, the local activities amidst the fresh air of Rotorua, and gathering in prayer and very uplifting song,” said Fr Michael.

“The theme of becoming more attentive at listening to the many ways God speaks to us, through the Holy Spirit and through listening to the voices of God's people, has heightened our awareness of the incredible power of God's love that comes to us all through being his children, belonging to his family and journeying together.

“Seeing the way our very diverse group of clergy chose to mix and enjoy conversations with one another and the energy that was evident through to our final evening's wonderful banquet meal was testimony to how powerful our Lord's presence was experienced amongst us.

“The few words I said after Lucienne Hensel's presentation on the spirituality of synodality seemed to capture our few days together – ‘In the words of St Peter, *it is good for us to be here*’.”

ENDS

Notes of speakers at the Assembly and other helpful material are online here:
<https://www.catholic.org.nz/resources/nadp2023/>

Photo attached:

The NADP Organising Committee from left: Fr Michael Hishon (Dunedin), Pa Gerard Paterson (Hamilton), Fr Brian Carmine (Palmerston North), Fr Bill Warwick (Wellington), Fr Carlo Cruz (Auckland) and Fr Joaquin Camano (Christchurch).