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MEDIA RELEASE

Australian Church Leaders share in the hope that Pope brings to Papua New Guinea

Leaders of Religious Institutes, Bishops and the CRA National Executive Director formed the Australian delegation which welcomed the Pope's recent visit to our nearest neighbour, Papua New Guinea. During his 12-day visit to the Asia Pacific, which is the longest yet since becoming Pope, he promoted tolerance and interreligious dialogue, he encouraged care for the poor and the environment, and pleaded for the protection of women and girls.

During the Pope's three days in PNG, there were multiple events, one of which was a celebration of consecrated life, clerical life and the gift of pastoral associates, where the Salesian Church was overflowing with energy and delight. The Pope recounted the missionary zeal of the many founders of Religious Institutes who followed Christ's example, travelling to the peripheries of society to reach those most in need. He noted that as they forged paths forward, they 'began again, many times over', animated by the spirit of Jesus and responding to the signs of the times. He called attendees to do the same, with trust in God, always believing in growth.

"Francis acknowledged that consecrated life is a prophetic witness to the calling of God and encouraged us to be women and men of compassion, care and tenderness" said Philippa Murphy FDNSC, Vice President of CRA and Provincial Leader of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

Reflecting on Sunday's Mass, she added, "The gathering of 30,000 faithful who had travelled for days over land and sea to be in the presence of Pope Francis was awe-inspiring."

"At first, the people gathered quietly, in reverence, and then the place exploded into colour with dancers adorned in traditional attire, singing hymns," said Anne Walker, National Executive Director of CRA.

"It was a reflection of their faith and the joy of celebrating Mass with the Pope. He inspired everyone to raise their eyes to God, where there is always hope on the horizon," she added.

The Pope's lilting voice was heard in both Italian and English during the Mass, as he unpacked the Gospel story of Jesus healing a deaf man to highlight the importance of overcoming distance from God. He reminded those gathered of God's love and tenderness for all people, he encouraged them to have hope and to stay close to God amid their daily challenges.

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