

MEDIA RELEASE

CRA National Council elected in the Year of Jubilee

A new National Council has been elected by Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) as close to 150 leaders and leadership team members of Religious Congregations gathered this week in Parramatta Diocese for the 2025 CRA National Assembly (18-20 August).

Taking place in the Jubilee Year, the Assembly took its lead from the theme, “Jubilee – Our Story, Our Hope, Our Joy”, embracing the gospel invitation to spiritual renewal and reconciliation in a fast-changing and troubled world. The Assembly heard from two experienced religious formators: internationally renowned Br Philip Pinto CFC, a previous congregational leader of the Christian Brothers, currently engaged in religious formation programmes in India, and Sr Dr Margaret Scharf OP from the Dominican congregation of Western Australia. In a facilitation role, Mercy Sister Mary-Louise Petro RSM, an educator, and founder and CEO of the Mamre Project in Sydney’s Outer West for 30 years, deepened participants experience across the Assembly.

The National Assembly is CRA’s annual signature event at which Religious leaders converge from all over the country, embracing inspirational input, shared wisdom, networking and collaboration. In gathering, they were joined by the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Charles Balvo. The Assembly Mass took place at the Mercy Sisters’ Chapel in Parramatta, with principal celebrant Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, and an uplifting youth choir from Oakhill College (Castle Hill NSW).

Annual elections at the 2025 Assembly saw three new Religious Institute Leaders elected to the CRA National Council: Andrew Chen OMI, Provincial, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate; Louise Cleary CSB, Congregational Leader, Brigidine Sisters; and Therese Haywood DC, Coordinator for the Daughters of Charity, Province of Australia.

CRA continues under the leadership of Gerard Brady CFC as President, along with Council members Philippa Murphy FDNCS, Provincial Leader, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart; Karen Donnellon RSM, Congregational Leader of ISMAPNG; Alan Gibson CM, Provincial, Vincentians; Kari Hatherell OSU, Provincial, Australian Ursulines; Chitra Justin OSM, General Member Superior, Servite Sisters; Margaret Jones RSM, Congregational Leader, Sisters of Mercy Parramatta; Mary Ryan OP, Prioress, Dominican Sisters of Western Australia; and Philip Watkins SSS, Provincial, Blessed Sacrament Fathers.

Members retiring from Council were warmly thanked for their generous and wise service: Peter Jones OSA, Congregational Leader of the Augustinian Fathers and immediate-past President of CRA; and Barbara Brown-Graham FCJ, Area Leader, Australia, Faithful Companions of Jesus.

Citing Pope Leo XIV’s first message, “Peace be with you”, CRA President, Gerard Brady CFC, pointed to the Jubilee Year as a summons to Religious to be leaven of peace in a fractured and divided world, saying, “In the spirit of this holy year, may we continue to be people of hope, always seeing beyond the present moment to what could be in the future”.

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