

CRA National Council elected amidst Assembly's call to an 'adventure of love'

The new National Council has been elected by the members of Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) as over 150 leaders and leadership team members of Religious Congregations gathered in Melbourne for the 2026 CRA National Assembly (3-5 August).

The Assembly theme, 'Our Adventure of Love, for the Life of the World', was inspired by Pope Leo XIV's words that "Religious vocation is, above all, an adventure of love with God." With this papal encouragement, the Assembly was enriched by the input of Fr Tony Banks OSA and Sr Michele Connolly RSJ, who reflected on Augustinian spirituality, the call of Pope Leo, Holy Scripture, and how these can illuminate religious life today.

The Assembly unfolded through a dynamic rhythm of input, reflection, and intentional conversations, supporting deep listening and shared discernment through two days of Conversations in the Spirit facilitated by Sr Karon Donnellon RSM. Religious leaders gathered to ponder how to share this adventure in communion with one another, and continue to bring hope and healing to all whom we encounter.

For the first time, the Assembly was blessed to be joined by members of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Sr Tiziana Merletti, S.F.P. (Secretary) and Fr Richard Welch, C.Ss.R. (Official). Their presence was a significant encouragement and a valued opportunity for connection and dialogue between Australian Religious and the Holy See.

Annual elections at the Assembly marked a transition in CRA leadership with Philippa Murphy FDNsc passing the torch to new President, Kari Hatherell OSU, Provincial Leader of the Australian Ursulines. In addition, six new Religious Institute Leaders were elected to the CRA Council: Grzegorz (Greg) Skulski SDS, Salvatorian Fathers; Edward Khaemba CSSP, Spiritan Fathers; Peta Goldberg RSM, Sisters of Mercy, Brisbane; Catherine McCahill SGS, Sisters of the Good Samaritan; Bonifasius Buahendri SVD, Divine Word Missionaries; and Tony Banks OSA, Augustinian Fathers.

Seven Council members continue: Philippa Murphy FDNsc, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart; Alan Gibson CM, Vincentian Fathers; Andrew Chen OMI, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate; Karon Donnellon RSM, Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, Australia and Papua New Guinea; Chitra Justin MSSM, Servite Sisters; Louise Cleary CSB, Brigidine Sisters; and Therese Haywood DC, Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul.

Members retiring from Council were thanked for their generous service: Margaret Jones RSM, Sisters of Mercy, Parramatta; Mary Ryan OP, Dominican Sisters of Western Australia; Gerard Brady CFC, Christian Brothers; and Philip Watkins SSS, Blessed Sacrament Fathers.

Acting CRA President, Philippa Murphy FDNsc, offered her good wishes to the incoming President, saying, "Sr Kari reflects the spirit of the Assembly's call to an 'adventure of love'. With wisdom, warmth, and a deep trust in God, her leadership invites us to embrace the future with faith and deep listening as we strive to bring hope and healing to our world."

Newly elected CRA President Kari Hatherell OSU said that she had been energised by the Assembly experience and the connection between Religious leaders, "My hope is that CRA will remain steadfast in representing the prophetic voice of religious in the Church and in society, and continue to serve religious life and mission into the future."

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