



## **CONNECT → COMMUNICATE → COMMIT**

### **TEAMS OCEANIA ONLINE CONFERENCE 18 SEPTEMBER 2021**

Embracing the changed world of the pandemic and inspired by the Holy Spirit and the spirit of Fr Henri Caffarel on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, over 165 home links and more than 300 people gathered across Oceania – Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines on Saturday, September 18.

The theme of **Connect – Communicate – Commit** was lived out through formal and informal connections throughout the day either in Breakout Rooms, freely online during breaks or in the Chat Column – there was great energy! All were welcomed → **Welcome! Haere Mai! Pug Abiba!**

Chris & John Dighton, Oceania Super Regional Couple set the scene for the day and Kevin and Faye Noonan, Liaison Couple for the Eurasian Zone and members of the International Leading Team shared the ERI message – indeed we were connected across the globe.

The Gathering Liturgy beautifully prepared by the Sydney and Canberra sectors centred everyone into the heart of our spirituality as Teams members. Members lit candles in their homes as we prayed and sang together across the internet as ‘Companions on the Journey’. Participants were encouraged to embrace the call of Pope Francis to **Openness → Encounter & Engagement**.

**Bishop Steve Lowe** of the Hamilton Diocese, New Zealand, presented a very powerful Reflection on *Amoris Laetitia – Hope and Support for Married Couples -Challenges Facing Catholic Marriage* through the analogy with Covid. Bishop Steve suggested that Teams is the antidote to the Virus – ‘*whilst there may be a need for social distancing – there is never a need for spiritual distancing – Christ is always with us online, anytime, anyplace*’. In *Let us Dream*, Pope Francis reminds us that we need a movement of people who know...we need each other and have a sense of responsibility to others...and to the world...every month 153,000 members of Teams meet together across 90 countries!’. The live Q&A with Bishop Steve teased out a number of matters – key insights included:

- ✚ Marriage is so much more than a theology – inject marriage with the love of Christ.
- ✚ Members are encouraged to pray the Letter of St Paul and make variations such as ~ Love is patient, Love is kind...; **God** is patient, **God** is kind...; and **[insert name of someone special to you]** is patient, and **[insert name]** is kind.
- ✚ Important to have married couples talking about their relationship, not just in Teams but beyond in schools, the parish etc.
- ✚ Take time with your relationship – take time for the Sit Down.
- ✚ Teams is an antidote to the virus attacking marriage.

Bishop Steve inspired all present due to his very ground and down to earth approach and his conversation with us inspired the day. We are indeed grateful.

#### **Exploring Marriage – A Personal Story and Teams Insights**

**Lara & Tim Kirk** shared the journey of their marriage which was very generous, insightful and vulnerable in its openness and sharing. A key quote from the talk ‘*brave enough to reveal my own heart*’ resonated with so many. Three Teams Couples from NZ (Raewyn and John Jackman), Canberra (Genevieve & Tim Power) and Victoria (Jane & Scott Gould) shared their varied experiences in Teams and the blessing it is in their lives at various stages of their marriages.

## **Exploring the Context of Faith and Marriage in Today's World – Phil Billington**

Phil presented research around the current context for marriage, social attitudes and faith patterns of young people. Whilst the data was confronting, it was an opportunity to tap into what is happening in the world and how Teams could become the 'antidote' which Bishop Steve spoke about.

### **Breakout Rooms Feedback – Session 1**

The following themes came from the discussions:

- ✚ The challenges of social media.
- ✚ Show love → strong belief that love will ultimately be successful.
- ✚ Young people may be 'unchurched' but they are good people – they are our own sons and daughters and grandchildren.
- ✚ Accept that things have moved on and that young people do live together before marriage and still welcome them into marriage and Teams.
- ✚ Teams and the Church need to recognise, not reject modern trends and be open.
- ✚ We are the face of the Church for most people, so we need to reach out and not judge – spend time being more understanding.
- ✚ Be open to Jesus working miracles in our lives.
- ✚ Teams provides a safe place and trust.
- ✚ Importance of welcoming widowed and divorced members.
- ✚ Church should be more inclusive, especially of women – Teams can show leadership in the institutional church instead of following.
- ✚ Important for Teams to be positive and to be part of the change that needs to happen – do our bit with those we are around.
- ✚ Need to reach out and engage clergy and religious, mindful of their schedules.
- ✚ Importance of the language we use in reaching out to engage with younger generations – accept them where they are on the journey and understand that we can influence to help them on their way – recognise that the young have faith but they need to explore how to live their faith.

### **SLIDES FROM ACROSS THE OCEANIA REGION WERE SHARED OVER THE LUNCH BREAK**

A message from the Cebu Teams in the Philippines was displayed with the following message:

- ✚ Being in Teams has somehow eased the desolation and boredom brought by the Covid pandemic.
- ✚ Through the virtual meetings and social media group chat, members share information and opinion regarding lockdown protocols, symptoms, cases updates and vaccinations.
- ✚ Prayer groups are activated whenever a Team member or a relative is infected. Members reach out to those affected for any assistance and to comfort them in anyway.
- ✚ We know it is still a long way to go but, having our strong faith in God & the Teams support, we all can make it through.

Teams in Cebu has been established for 21 years and the pandemic has impacted the health of members as well as sadly, some members losing loved ones. Our love and prayers are with Cebu.

### **Looking Forward in the Universal Church: Sr Clare Condon sgs**

Sr Clare presented a very thorough reflection entitled *Without a Vision – the People Perish* which drew inspiration from the recent book of Pope Francis 'Let Us Dream'. Sr Clare emphasised that it is time to See → Choose → Act (Cardijn YCW inspired) – to be a Church where the People of God take the initiative. Pope Francis sees that the Family has taken the

greatest knocks. Teams are called to discern where we find God's mercy ready to overflow – this is where we are called.

### **Looking Forward in the Universal Church: John Warhurst – Emeritus Professor ANU**

John Warhurst presented with the focus: ***The Changing Landscape in our Church communities and the Synod process -the voice of lay Catholics***. John informed participants of his engagement in the Plenary Council as a member for Canberra & Goulburn and his concerns about the process and lack of the legitimate voice of lay Catholics. John suggested that the Australian Church is more polarised than at any other time in its history. We are bereft when we don't embrace women in ministry and leadership in the Church.

### **Breakout Rooms – Session 2: Feedback for Q & A with Clare & John**

A number of insights were posted from the Breakout Rooms and included:

- ✚ So true that without a vision the people perish – there is a dearth of vision at present.
- ✚ How can we be a more welcoming and less exclusive church?
- ✚ How can Teams take up more of a leadership role in a synodal church?
- ✚ Signs of hope...recognising 'church' in the life of Teams and there is hope in that we can build on those experiences and outreach.
- ✚ Main event at the PC has to be the empowerment and respect of women.
- ✚ Free our minds of rigid structures ...need to recognise the abiding gift of the Holy Spirit!
- ✚ We see hope in Pope Francis pursuing a Synodal approach world-wide to bring laity and women into the decision-making of the Church.
- ✚ Concern at the unilateral decision-making in some dioceses where both the priests and the laity have been excluded when the outcome has been parish consolidation and the 'disappearance' of parish communities.
- ✚ Need for a change of language to be inclusive in all aspects.
- ✚ Need for Teams to be more evangelical and to respond to the challenges of the times – to do so our discussion topics will need to be more often about social issues.
- ✚ Sit-downs and sharing will need to be more reflective and prayer at meetings will need to be stronger.
- ✚ Plenary Council is full of hope but also the potential for terrible disappointment.
- ✚ Given that Fr Caffarel said that 'Marriage is the only community founded on a sacrament'. Do you think married people underestimate their capacity to influence their networks for good?

### **Q & A with Clare & John General Responses**

- ✚ There are more diverse ways of belonging – too often we don't recognise the good around us.
- ✚ The divide between secular and sacred is not a helpful mindset or language.
- ✚ Teams should express the lack of inclusion in the Church loud and clear and tackle the lack of inclusion of women's voices.
- ✚ John encouraged Teams to continue to make submissions to the PC – Teams has already done so but John is also happy to receive direct submissions from members.
- ✚ There is confusion between power and authority → need to move much more towards co-responsibility and broader models of ministry.
- ✚ Important to engage in the Plenary Council as it is broadcast on a daily basis – links will be provided from Lay Movements.
- ✚ The World Synod of 2023 was raised and concerns about lack of response from Bishops – Clare and John advised people to agitate locally for a process of engagement and a voice.

## **Insights: Monsignor John Woods – Perspective of a Teams Chaplain, Marriage Tribunal, Diocesan Priest and Fellow Pilgrim**

Monsignor John presented a number of insights which included:

- ✚ Let's begin with ourselves in any ways of growing as a Church.
- ✚ Let's sift our lived reality in the light of our Tradition.
- ✚ We are only touching few youth and with a more catechetical method rather than experiential - approach needs to be broader in order to attract young people.
- ✚ Are we open to where God is calling us?
- ✚ Where to from here?
  - In our homes let's extend our relationships both within our marriages, our children and our friendships.
  - In our parishes → the critical importance of coming together as the Eucharistic community → Eucharist is the source and summit of who we are.

Members were invited to reflect on what they would take from the day's presentations and conversations both personally and as couples.

### **Final Insights & Themes from the Day:**

Such a blessed and grace-filled day in so many ways with God's grace flowing across the internet. Much to ponder but some insights heard include:

- ✚ The critical importance of **Sit-Downs** was emphasised throughout the day.
- ✚ **Sharing** needs to be more reflective and **Prayer** at meetings needs to be emphasised and perhaps to be stronger for some Teams.
- ✚ Support for the many generous and faithful clergy who continue to give so generously in ministry.
- ✚ Opportunity for outreach to committed couples but who do show commitment to couple spirituality, even though unmarried.
- ✚ Teams provides a safe place and trust which can be extended to others especially those who may be in need – reach out. We need to articulate who we are in parishes.
- ✚ Teams has the capacity to influence and provide leadership in the institutional church.
- ✚ The support of bishops can be crucial as exemplified by Bishop Steve.
- ✚ Need for more Lay Chaplains in Teams – an unexplored opportunity.
- ✚ Maybe it is time for a new model of Teams → new generations – new models.
- ✚ The harvest is ripe to reap → we're here as examples of God's love → hold on to the spirit of Hope!

The day concluded with the Closing Liturgy led by Fr Gary Walker, Oceania Teams Spiritual Counsellor and the Changeover Ceremony when Chris and John Dighton welcomed Petra Ball and Terry McDevitt as the new Oceania Super-Regional Couple.

With blessings and thanks for the privilege



**Philomena (Phil) Billington**

**Facilitator**