

New church leaders formation network to help grow faith in Oceania

A new Church leaders network and formation platform was launched at the Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia (CSYMA) Oceania Leaders Training Day on Monday 1 March. Over 150 educators and Church leaders across Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, and the Solomon Islands participated via Zoom alongside local group gatherings.

The Catholic Leaders Formation Network (CLFN) is the fruit of a partnership between CSYMA and Australian Catholic University (ACU) La Salle Academy. As well as networking Church leaders in similar roles and ministries, the CLFN seeks to build friendships and communities of leaders, called FLAME communities, committed to supporting each other as missionary disciples. The CLFN also offers a range of formation programs to better equip Church leaders as evangelisers responsive in new and creative ways to the signs of the times.

The partnership with ACU and an increasing number of dioceses and schools throughout Australia, Africa, Oceania, and the United Kingdom will enable the new CLFN Network to have a global impact in forming leaders in evangelisation.

The newly developed ACU Spiritus Program is a vital feature of the CLFN and can be conducted as Professional Learning or as units of study in ACU courses. This program is being conducted in 2021 in Brisbane, Melbourne and Tasmania, and Canberra (with national participation). There will also be a Spiritus 2021 Program for England, Scotland and Ireland conducted from April to June by Zoom with online groups and FLAME Communities. The CLFN provides an ongoing formation network for leaders after participating in Spiritus.

In launching the initiative, the Chairman of the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry Archbishop Christopher Prowse, urged leaders to grow in understanding of themselves as “servants of the Holy Spirit”, reminding them that, ‘It is not you, but the Holy Spirit in you who changes people’s hearts. It is only God who can change and transform the human heart.’

In a live Zoom session, ACU La Salle Academy Dean Professor Brother David Hall presented the foundational concept of humility as the driving motivation behind our leadership. Director of Teacher Formation at the ACU La Salle Academy and Founding Director of the CSYMA Mr Peter Woods observed that, “While social media and other digital communication has increased collaboration, Church leaders rarely enjoy the spiritual nourishment and fellowship that can come from journeying together, meeting regularly in small groups for prayer, formation and to share their faith and leadership experience with each other. The CLFN addresses this pastoral need.”

The CLFN also provides opportunities for certified leaders and aspiring leaders trained and formed to facilitate FLAME Communities and formation Programs in their school, parish, or diocese.

Participants commented:

“The day provided our leaders from Fiji formation and the tools to form other leaders in our schools and Church contexts. We are excited about continuing to link with CSYMA, including the CLFN. Our participants, who are mostly education commission leaders from the greater Suva area, are already reflecting on the tools provided by CSYMA so that they can use them in their schools and Parishes.” *Nemani Drova, Director Catholic Education, Fiji*

“The CSYMA training day was an excellent way to learn with others and experience the regional impact of our community. The highlight for me was feeling connected to educators from many countries seeking to develop a new way of offering the Gospel message and friendship with Jesus to young people.” *Brendan Nicholls REC, St Ignatius College Geelong*

Membership for individuals, schools, parishes, dioceses, and other Church organisations and can be requested at <https://www.cln.org/>

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