

JPIC & IRD Joint Event on World Environment and Ocean Day report.

Themes: “Sustainable Fishing Means More” & “Inspired by Nature. For Climate. For Our Future.”

Aim: Faith communities stand in solidarity to protect our environment and oceans. Sustainable living and responsible stewardship for future generations. “Let’s share the commitment”.

Date: Saturday 20 June 2026

Venue: Sacred Heart Cathedral Crypt (Hall)

Participants: Different Faith Communities, religious leaders or representatives and members of Civil Society Organizations.

The event focused on the theme **"Sustainable Fishing Means More"** and **"Inspired by Nature for Climate Action for Our Future."** The purpose was to bring together people from different faith traditions to reflect on environmental stewardship, ocean conservation, and climate responsibility from both faith-based and educational perspectives. The joint event official program commenced at 2.00pm, few members from different faith communities gathered at the Nasese foreshore (Ocean) for a special time to thank the Almighty /Creator, seek forgiveness and prayed for blessings, peace, unity and the success of the event. *This prayer by the ocean was a good way of centring the event in thanksgiving and praying for the protection and care of our beloved ocean.*



The different faith groups, CSO’s and members were warmly welcomed and thanked for their presence and all joined in the opening Interfaith prayer.

Two guest speakers were invited to share their expertise and insights:

A faith-based speaker Rev. Dr. Bruce Yeates serves as the minister of the Presbyterian Church in Fiji. Rev. Bruce also is an active member of the Fiji Council of Church’s, who has been the voice of reason in the recent national constitutional reviews. Making him a champion of interfaith dialogue in Fiji, most

notably through his firm advocacy for a secular state. Rev. Dr. Yeates argues



Caption: Rev. Bruce is the Minister for the St. Andrews Presbyterian Parish in Suva.

that the principles underpinning a secular state are closely connected to environmental stewardship. He believes that caring for creation requires the freedom to express and live out our diverse ecological spiritualities. By safeguarding religious freedom, a secular framework enables faith communities to contribute authentically to environmental action, each drawing on their own spiritual traditions to inspire care for the Earth.

Dr. Joeli Veitayaki serves as the Strategic Adviser for Blue Prosperity Fiji, an initiative established through a partnership between the Government of Fiji and the Waitt Institute of the United States of America. Dr. Veitayaki shared valuable insights into the current state of Fiji's coral reefs, the importance of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and the urgent need to strengthen conservation efforts to safeguard these vital ecosystems.

Drawing on his experience as a science lecturer, Dr. Veitayaki reflected that just as he hopes his life's work will leave a legacy, so too should the beauty, abundance, and resilience of creation endure beyond his lifetime. He emphasized that protecting Fiji's natural environment is a responsibility owed not only to the present generation but also to his children, their children, and all future generations.



Caption: Dr. Veitayaki reflects that the impact of the work must outlive him, and benefit his children and their children, and

The various faith groups participated actively through spiritual hymns, opening and closing prayers, reflections on the theme, power Point presentations highlighting their faith perspectives on environmental protection and ocean conservation. Their presentations created an opportunity for participants to learn from one another and appreciate the shared values across different faith traditions regarding care for the environment. The inspiring solo dances by a youth named Aanvi talked about responsibilities of Ocean and our future, and biodiversity.

Following the presentations, an open question-and-answer session and dialogue were held. Participants engaged in meaningful discussions, exchanged ideas, and explored ways faith communities can contribute to environmental sustainability and climate action. Some of the questions raised were:

1. What is the current position of our “qoliqoli” rights and MPA’s in our local communities?

Dr. Joeli answered this questions by saying that Fiji’s case is interesting. For indigenous Fijian communities, the iTaukei do not own the sea itself in the same way that they own native land. Yes, the indigenous do have customary fishing rights, but the state owns and controls the seabed and territorial

waters. Wherein all commercial activities, fishing licences and conservation matters are state regulated. This raises the question about subsidiarity (whether local communities should have more decision-making power), environmental stewardship, and justice for indigenous peoples. Which calls for co-governance of qoliqoli rights while upholding indigenous stewardship.

2. How does mining which happens in-land affect the reef or fishes in the sea? To this Dr. Joeli answered that this is one of the strongest arguments for law and ecology: what happens on land does not stay on land. Rivers are the link between mountains, forests, mines and the sea. It reminds us that everything is connected. To this, if the river carries the blessings of the mountains to the sea, what else does it carry when we scar the mountains.

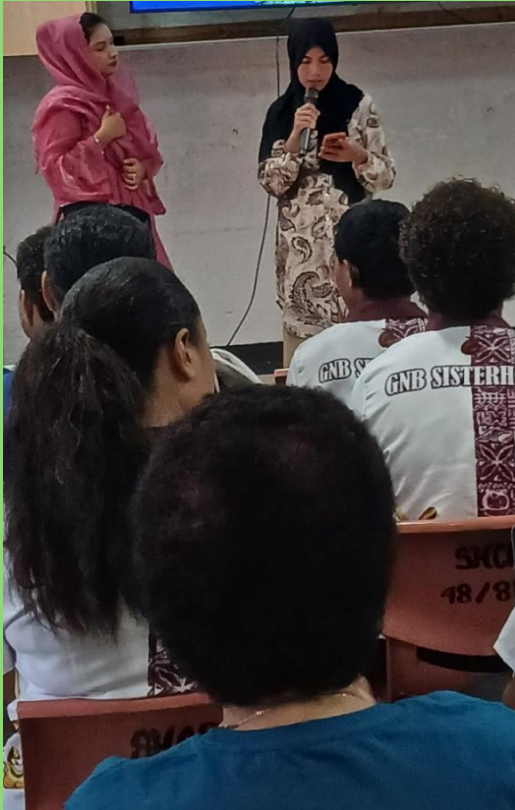
There were some members also from National Youth Fiji Council, Raiwaqa parish and sacred Heart Cathedral parish joining this very educational/informative topic. It was great to see two Columban Priests: Fr. Frank Hoare and Fr. La Aung, Lay Missionary Nanise Mouna, and a co-worker Alisi Vunivesilevu joined the community members, this reflected the Columban commitment to caring for creation and raising awareness about environmental responsibility.



The photographs to commemorate the occasion. Participants then shared refreshments and fellowship, providing an opportunity for networking, relationship-building, and continued conversation in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

A diverse group of people from different faiths united in support of protecting the ocean and the environment by holding colorful posters with messages “One Earth, One Future, Clean Oceans, Healthy Planet and together for Nature”.





The Islamic community shared the Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth document during the observance of World Environment Day and World Oceans Day with members of other faith communities. The discussion focused on the Islamic understanding of

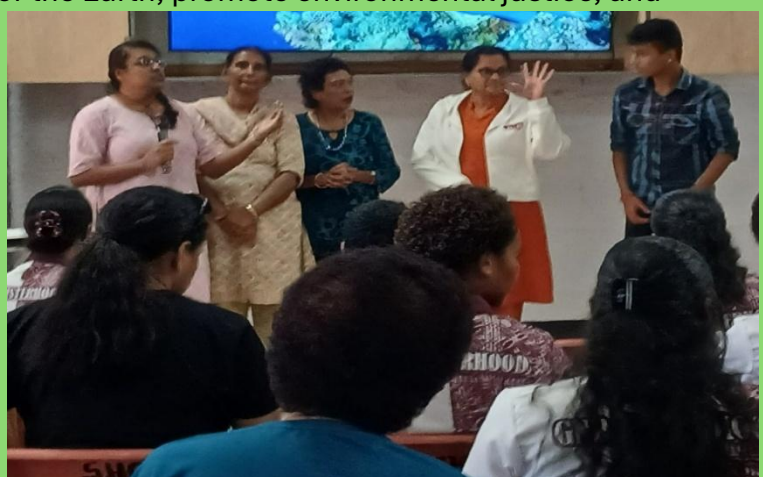
mizan (balance) and humanity's responsibility as stewards of the Earth. Participants reflected on the importance of protecting the environment, conserving oceans and biodiversity, reducing pollution and waste, addressing climate change, and using natural resources responsibly.

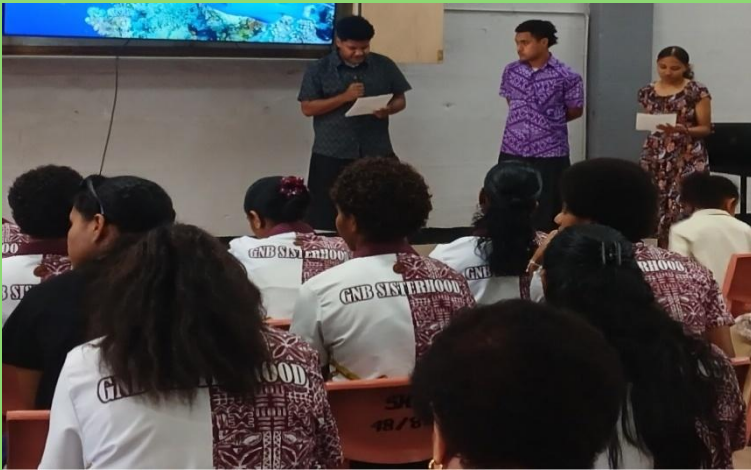
The youths from the Corpus Christi Teachers College presented a power-point to discuss and highlight the urgent need to address environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and the degradation of oceans and marine ecosystems. Participants reflected on practical ways individuals



and communities can reduce waste, conserve water and energy, protect natural habitats, and adopt more sustainable lifestyles.

The members from the Shri Sanatan Dharm prayed and sang hymns from their holy scriptures to work together to care for the Earth, promote environmental justice, and safeguard the environment and oceans for present and future generations. We need to recognize that environmental stewardship is a shared moral and spiritual responsibility.





The members of the Bahai faith shared to the bigger group that humanity is one family and that the earth is our common home and the challenge is our actions are interconnected, and caring for the oceans is a shared moral responsibility.

The event successfully promoted interfaith understanding, strengthened partnerships among faith communities, and encouraged collective action towards protecting the environment and oceans for future generations. The gathering also encouraged interfaith collaboration, recognizing that caring for creation is a shared moral responsibility that unites people of different faiths in working toward a healthier and more sustainable future.



An inspiring solo dance on care for environment by Aanvi Sharma

Pescila Magdalin Interreligious Dialogue Coordinator.

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