

CELEBRATING ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND LAUDATO SI

Recently the Diocesan Ecological Sustainability Group (ECOS) held an evening centred on St Francis of Assisi and *Laudato Si*. The evening was chaired by Frank Sheehan who introduced the program and welcomed those attending. Special mention was made of guest speakers Associate Professor Singarayer Florentine (Florry) from the Centre for Environmental Management, Federation University Australia and Sr Veronica Lawson rsm.

Florry referred to the encyclical of Pope Francis suggesting that the whole world is now more aware of the importance of looking after all of creation. He said it is no exaggeration to say that a great many more people were becoming aware of the effects of climate and climate change since the release of *Laudato Si*. He mentioned a recent article in The Age's Good Weekend magazine which featured the plight of coastal dwellers in Fiji who had to move their village some hundreds of metres inland from its original shoreline location due to the rising sea waters. <http://www.theage.com.au/good-weekend/escaping-the-waves-a-fijian-villages-forced-relocation-20150831-gjc0k1.html>



Sr Veronica Lawson rsm and Frank Sheehan



Vin Dillon and Singarayer Florentine (Florry)

As part of his presentation, Florry gave a quick overview of some of the typical arid zone vegetation communities and emphasised the issues in the arid zone. Lack of regeneration of trees and shrubs in the arid and semi-arid rangelands of south east Australia has caused widespread concern. The grazing pressure that has been exerted over most of the land for up to 150 years, coupled with the episodic nature of regeneration, means that many communities are seriously at risk. Both pastoralism and conservation depend on the long-term survival of the natural perennial vegetation. Florry emphasised that the Belah/Rosewood community in particular has been severely depleted through harvesting of timber and clearing of overstorey trees in an attempt to increase growth of grasses and forbs. In addition Florry highlighted some of major issues is arid zone Australia. Issues such as (i) impacts of pastoralism, (ii) changes to water regimes, (iii) exotic plants and animals.



Listening intently

Continuing on, Florry then gave a good overview about Federation University Australia's 40,000 ha teaching research and conservation property of Nanya Station. In 2004 the property was purchased by Federation University Australia with assistance from the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage. Florry finished his talk with a range of research projects currently taking place up in Nanya Station, reducing grazing pressure on the land by closing ground tanks, goat control and ripping rabbit warrens. The tank closure is complemented by research into impacts on biodiversity; regenerating endangered flora and fauna communities by using exclusion fencing around critical communities; and protecting the Mallee fowl population by exotic predator control and monitoring their nest sites.

Sr Veronica concentrated on ecology from a biblical perspective, particularly on water. Highlighting that at the very crux of existence, water is life-giving. All life needs water, it is the essence of life. "Water, I take it but I don't take it for granted". Sr Veronica mentioned some alarming facts such as every minute a child dies of a water-related

disease; one in nine people lack access to safe water; more people have a mobile phone than a toilet.
<http://water.org/water-crisis/water-facts/water/>

The evening was attended by approximately thirty people and the Diocesan Ecological Sustainability Group hope to hold more informative presentations similar to this in the future.

