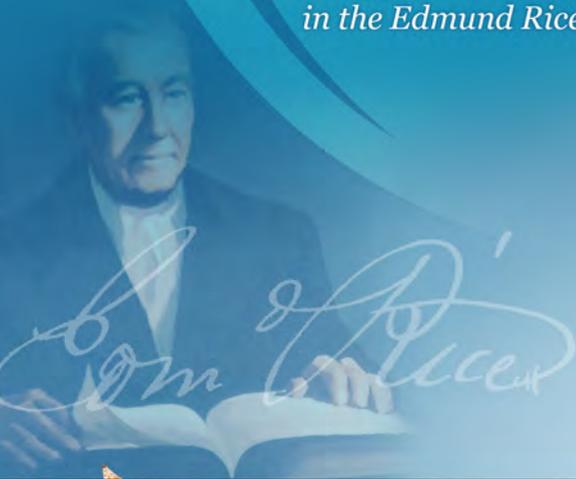




FOUNDATIONS

*for Schools Ministry
as Church Mission*

*As Applied To Catholic Schools
in the Edmund Rice Tradition*



**EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA**



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Foundations for Schools Ministry as Church Mission

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Pictured sculpture above by artist, Vicki Clark (Mutthi Mutthi)

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia as the traditional owners and custodians of the land of our schools. We are inspired and nurtured by their wisdom, spirituality and experience. We commit ourselves to actively work alongside them for reconciliation and justice.

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Forward

Foundations began as a theological reflection on the core beliefs underpinning the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice, the life and ministry of the religious Congregation of Christian Brothers that he founded, and the subsequent Tradition of service to the Church and wider community for two centuries. While *Foundations* still identifies theological beliefs, it also ponders the significance of Christ and Church, the story of Edmund and his Brothers and those individuals and communities that continue Edmund's charism. It elaborates on these stories and situates them and their religious dimension alongside the signs of our times. The faith, compassion and unique insights of Edmund, the history and nature of service which he inspired, the relationships and communities that emerged and the motivation for new and continuing ministry are identified. The continuance of this charism is seen as a Spirit filled tapestry: a blessed past, a dynamic and life giving present, and a future full of hope and joy.

1.0 Continuing the Charism into the Future

Ministering within Catholic Education and empowered by Congregational reflection, Christian Brothers within Australia have commenced substantial planning for the future. Significant among these efforts are:

- confirmation of a Charter which integrates vision and ministry and provides criteria for the accreditation of a Catholic School in the Edmund Rice Tradition;
- identification of renewal processes which support school ministry;
- research as to the provision of mission formation programs;
- investigation of governance structures which empower, engage, support, connect and build community capacity; and
- exploration of appropriate ways for resourcing the mission.

While these national planning initiatives have a specific focus they are also interdependent in nature. As a collection of core activities they are designed to serve a continuing quality ministry that is mission based and rich in communion. The culture being created is one that is Spirit driven, adaptive to the times, centred on Christ, delivered within Church, hallmarked by the vision of the Founder, educationally sound and respectful of unique traditions within the Local Church and school community. Fundamental to these initiatives is extensive consultation and the application of a strict methodology for change management.

2.0 At The Heart of Mission and Ministry

2.1 Historical Experience

Christian Brothers in the tradition of Blessed Edmund Rice have ministered in Catholic schools across Australia for well over a century. By 1900, they conducted 29 schools in the colonies of Australia and New Zealand, rising to 150 schools throughout Australasia and Papua New Guinea by 1974. The Brothers owned and operated some 50 of these schools and worked in partnership with Church authorities in the others, many of which no longer exist.

Christian Brothers in Australia continue to reflect on the history and foundations of their ministry in the light of the Gospel, their mandate from the Church, the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice, their Constitutions and directions from General Chapters. While these foundations are clearly significant, future ministry is reflected in movement and reinterpretation through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Such was the effect of Vatican II for understanding the times and responding to Christ's promise that he had come to give life to the world; a world not confined by time; culture or geography. The Council challenged the Church to renew its understanding of the continuing revelation of the Mystery of God, the awakening by the Spirit of the risen Lord.

2.2 Our Approach to God

Belief, not certainty, characterises the totality of our approach to God. This belief is grounded in a Catholic Christian approach which is reflected in at least five dimensions:

- prizing human reason and desire to seek meaning;
- the conviction that God can be known by human beings and that God is known by us most fully in Jesus Christ;
- affirming that God's life-giving presence continues in our history through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the risen Jesus. who sustains the Church and who moves the human heart to be open to God, particularly to the God revealed in the Bible;
- recognising that faith in Jesus Christ is lived within the community of the Church and that those in authority within the Church - the College of Bishops under the leadership of the Pope - have a particular responsibility for nurturing the Church in unity;
- seeking to articulate that faith in the God of Jesus Christ cannot be separated from engagement with the world faith affects how one understands oneself, one's neighbour, and the world (see *Lennan*, 1998:6).

The approach to God, the faith of Blessed Edmund Rice is one of a remarkable Christian disciple who pondered the Christian story within the culture of his day and the mission and life of the Church. Edmund's gift of faith was an unshakable belief in being unconditionally loved by a loving God. His spirituality is evident in the words; 'providence is our inheritance: a maxim which was given reinforcement in the Congregational Chapter of 1832: *"the spirit of this Institute is that which inspires its members to view nothing but with the eyes of faith, to do nothing but with a view to God and to ascribe all to God."* The personal integration of this belief is seen in Edmund's own disposition: *"a person centred in faith, rooted in love made strong by many trials patiently borne in prayerful union with Christ; and at the same time a faith active in charity which sought to live only for Christ and the establishment of His kingdom in the hearts of all men, but especially the poor and particularly the young"* (O'Toole, 1985:179).

Within our own times, the call to an active integration of faith also begins with examining our assumptions and beliefs as we seek to interpret the signs of the times to bring about the Reign of God. Vatican Council II calls us to a radical re-imagining of our context and invites us to move from a tight knit, predictable and assured construction of our world of experience into a more integrated, dynamic and Spirit centred framework. This significant change in approach is particularly evident in a greater awareness of the context of people's lives, and those elements which are at variance to a culture striving to give expression to the Reign of God. The concerns of women, the welfare of indigenous peoples, the alienation of some youth, the oppressed and starving poor, a sustainable planet, the inadequacy of educational opportunities for many and the injustice in political systems are just some of the new starting points for the explication of our approach to God (Theology) and our contemporary understanding of Christology, Ecclesiology and Missiology.

2.3 Christology: Jesus the Incarnate Word of God

Christian faith holds that Jesus is the Word of God, the perfect revelation of the Father, God in human form. It is in His life and vision that Christians come to understand authentic human life.

Jesus proclaimed the Good News of a loving and trustworthy God. He crossed boundaries in the expression of His compassion and was prophetic about a kingdom that would nurture the spiritual and social environment of the time. He addressed an entrenched religious culture and precipitated social and religious change of a substantial order. He challenged His contemporaries to look to the totality of life, so that the created order could be seen as a gift and promise of God's continuing love and presence in all things. This vision of the Kingdom was something that was achievable, present already in many forms, but not yet fully realised.

The vision of Jesus presents as deceptively simple, yet it is seemingly dangerous to live this world view in times and places of conflict, discrimination, poverty, oppression and injustice. Jesus was crucified for preaching the Reign of God and the consequences of it for the society of His day. As disciples of Jesus in a new age, we are called to give expression to this same vision by reinterpreting His message for our own times. It is a call not to forget the liberating, but at the same time, dangerous memory of Jesus (*Metz*, 1980). It is a challenge not to be seduced by a world where we contain and control His message for our own comfort. It is a conviction to live the memory of Jesus in the here and now, to be active within the Mystical Body of Christ and to continue to proclaim and witness to an unchanging Gospel.

2.4 Ecclesiology: Church as Sacrament of Jesus

The Church, the People of God, the Mystical Body of Christ, enlivened through the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is a living sign of God's presence and action in the world. The mission of Jesus, and subsequently of the Church, is to proclaim His central vision of the Reign of God. Universally this is realised through being a community, united in love and worship of the Father, called by Jesus to serve (*diakonia*), proclaim (*kerygma*), celebrate (*leiturgia*) and give witness by its community relationships (*koinonia*). In these ways, the Church is the sign and instrument, the Sacrament of Jesus, bringing about what He proclaimed and enacted, especially through serving the poor and marginalised.

The characteristics of sign (manifested in communion), and that of instrument (expressed in service) depict an authentic spirit of Christian discipleship. Christ is the first Sacrament, the sign and instrument of God and the Church, as His body, is similarly a sign of His presence in the world. Put another way, Christian people are meant to act as "the face of Christ", the perceptible manifestation of what and who Jesus is as risen Lord. Moreover, as the body symbolises personal identity, so the Christian community manifests the presence of the risen Christ in their midst. The call of the Christian is directed therefore at the individual and the community, the Mystical Body. It is the profound and challenging vocation to be *Christianus alter Christus* – the Christian is another Christ.

Across the centuries, in many different cultures and in greatly varying situations, the Church has striven to pursue its' mission. For the most part it has done this with fidelity and heroic sanctity; while at other times it has failed. Notwithstanding this, the Church is most truly itself and most faithful to its mission when it is converted to the Gospel it proclaims, for it can only be that Sacrament, if it strives to live in union with Christ. This unfolds both within its own community and in its engagement with the joy and hope, grief and anguish of the world in which it serves and is served.

2.5 Missiology: Evangelisation - Sharing the Good News

Evangelisation, sharing the Good News of the Gospel, has been described by Pope Paul VI as the link between the mission of the Church and Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Further, the Church has always held that *"the first means of evangelisation is the witness of an authentically Christian life ...the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity"* (Paul VI, 1975:41).

The mission of the Church to evangelise is the shared responsibility of all its members. Every Christian has a place in the mission of the Church to the world: 'to each is given the Spirit for the common good' (1 Cor 12:7). Through Baptism all people share in the priesthood of Christ, are given gifts of the Spirit and are called to proclaim and enact the Gospel in a prophetic way. This common priesthood of all people does not deny the need for authority and hierarchy but does indicate that the community of the Church is called to exercise authority in a collegial manner and respect the gifts of the Spirit present in all.

The Reign of God seeks the transformation of the individual and the world. The education of the 'whole person' is an important element in the mission of the Church. Moreover, as no area of life can be excluded from God's reign, the Church has laid emphasis on the spiritual, social, physical, cultural, moral and intellectual development of people and the significance of this formation in their personal, family, Church and wider communities. In this way, evangelisation applies to the whole person, is applicable to all people and is given expression in the totality of circumstances that encompass living.

3.0 Charism: The Gift of The Blessed Edmund Rice to The Church and The World

Throughout the ages, various ways of proclaiming the Gospel and witnessing to the Kingdom (evangelisation) have emerged within the Church. Every era can boast followers of Jesus who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, direct their individual gifts to the service of God's Kingdom, sometimes with remarkable ingenuity and in ways wonderfully attuned to the historical situation. Although their ministry has its beginnings in their own individual gifts that are given the name charism, their ministry is always carried out on behalf of the Christian community in response to a grace from God. Often this charism becomes officially recognised and is built into the structure of the Church's mission, becomes regulated by Canon Law and is specified in Constitutional responsibilities and accountabilities. Such was the case with Blessed Edmund Rice and the Congregation of Christian Brothers that he founded.

Edmund's charism has lived among us for two centuries, not only in his Brothers but in colleagues who have joined us in expressing it through education. It is evident wherever we break open the meaning of the stories of Edmund's times and re-incarnate it in our times, whether within or beyond our established schools. For example, Edmund's insistence on the skill of writing, the passport of penmanship can be seen in the advantages of computer literacy, while resistance to proselytism is evident in the current critique of unbalanced market forces impacting upon education.

Edmund's charism is a window into the unchanging Gospel, never owned but held in trust for the benefit of others. It is not meant to 'preserved' but lived, not to be 'passed on' so much as to be shared.

It emerged from a deeply personal and human story, one fashioned in the depths of tribulation and encompassing a response of faith and love. Having generally accepted that Edmund's charism was a graced insight into the Gospel mystery, the Congregation's consensus was that: *"it came to be accepted that God revealed himself to Edmund, gradually, progressively, and more deeply over an extended period of time"* (see *Inheritance* 1, 1983:43).

The death of his young wife [1789] was a pivotal point in the spiritual life of Edmund. From this time until 1793, he embarked on a reflective and painful journey into self, from which arose a belief system that became a touchstone for the rest of his life. Searching to respond to God in the practice of his faith, the reading of Scripture and by generous action for the needy and distressed, the vision and mission of Edmund matured and became evident within the service of education.

Edmund was successful in business, yet was open to the needs of those about him, particularly poor boys in the city of Waterford, Ireland. His profound respect for all, and his recognition of the cry of Christ in the poor, spawned a new and enlightened system of schooling which he began in 1802. He was soon joined by men who shared his beliefs and a desire for a spiritual way of life. Within a context where religious and social exclusion was rife, Edmund's schools provided hope for all through meeting not only immediate material needs (food and clothing), but also ensuring that educational experiences would provide a means for personal development and longer term social engagement. Education in the Catholic faith was central to this system of education as was the emphasis on right relationships which created a platform for sustained and meaningful learning.

The Papal Brief of 1820 gave Blessed Edmund and his followers approval as a Congregation, with the role to: 'make it their principal care to teach children, particularly the poor, the things necessary for a virtuous life.' In taking up the cause of the education of the masses, Blessed Edmund was, in fact, challenging the injustices of that society. His unique insight into the Gospel was a call to support the most

vulnerable, those at the margins, by means of education which was directed to personal and social liberation. His was an insightful vision that viewed education as an emancipatory process for personal growth, one that acknowledged and responded to the social needs of the time.

Christian Brothers, reflecting on the life and work of Blessed Edmund Rice, expressed the charism of their Founder as: *“Deeply aware of the Father’s providential presence in his life, Edmund Rice was moved by the Holy Spirit to open his whole heart to Christ present and appealing to him in the poor”* (*Inheritance* 1:1983). In contemporary times the charism is evident in the Congregation’s:

- faithfulness to the Catholic tradition of education by offering a synthesis of faith and culture;
- promotion of integral human growth;
- desire for students to initiate or continue a personal relationship with Christ;
- practical expression of an active inclusive care for others; and
- confrontation of injustices in economic and social structures.

These are the means by which the Congregation continues the charism: the gift of Blessed Edmund to the Church and the world. They are reflected in the *Charter of Edmund Rice Education Australia*, and more fundamentally seen in the principles of respect and relationships. These themes of respect for the dignity of all and the expression of this belief in pastoral relationships - akin to parenting - are evidenced in the traditions of school as family, paternal care of students and support to parents in their primary role as first educators.

4.0 Charism in The Australian Story

The first invitation to the Christian Brothers to minister within the Church in Australia occurred in 1832, during the life of Blessed Edmund Rice (1762-1844). After much prayer and reflection, and, because of his concerns for Brothers to receive nurturing in the charism, Edmund reluctantly declined the invitation. Notwithstanding these reservations, the followers of Blessed Edmund, initially Irish Christian Brothers, first came to Australia (Sydney) in 1843 at the invitation of Archbishop Polding. However, after a relatively short period and while conducting three schools, the pioneering Brothers had cause to withdraw in 1847 when it became clear that their capacity to remain faithful to the charism was threatened. After an absence of two decades they returned to Australia and arrived in Melbourne in 1868 at the invitation of Bishop Goold. Progress thereafter in establishing schools was very rapid, so much so that within thirty-five years, under the leadership of the remarkable Brother

Patrick Ambrose Treacy, the Christian Brothers bought properties, built schools and developed successful institutions of learning in Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney, Dunedin and Perth as well as in many country areas.

The early mission of the Brothers involved the evangelisation of the poor mainly the Irish Catholic families of the colonies. Their foundations came to include pay schools, free schools, orphanages, boarding schools and later technical and agricultural schools. Today, this mission continues to be expressed through schools, multiple and diverse education ministries and a host of outreach activities meeting the needs of the disengaged and most needy. Beyond this legacy, the sponsorship of the Brothers of many schools throughout Australia under the Governance of the Local Ordinary has been substantial.

5.0 Ministry Context

The context for contemporary Church ministry in Australia is shaped by the competing and at times conflicting value systems which flow from human nature and social dynamics. These varying and seemingly disjointed and unaligned social phenomena are evidenced in:

- a proclamation of a fair go for all and yet a social inclination to exclude people in need and potentially promote increasing divisions between the rich and the poor;
- awareness of environmental degradation and its long term consequences and yet a compliance with consumerism that can lead to environmental deterioration;
- an explosion of technological advances which have improved the quality of life for many and yet for some has added significantly to the hours given to work;
- a rapid development of communications technology and yet an increase in the isolation of individuals; and
- an intense interest and search for spirituality among the young yet a decline in communal religious observance.

Within the culture of contemporary society a sense of exhaustion is evident. Individuals are disposed towards a 'pick and choose' mentality with a strategy of avoidance dominating the development of a consistent values set. The term used for people in such a social environment is 'vagabond', people with no fixed abode, wanderers in the social, spiritual and psychological sense. Within this reality it is no surprise to discover that education exists as a critical process, and those institutions which nurture it, hold the key for a society which seeks stability and meaning as new patterns of living and learning come into being.

6.0 Contemporary Education

Within a broad social framework, education is foundational to communities realising their potential. It begins ideally with a view of what it is to be human and what it is that humans are being educated about (*educare* – being led out of and towards). This process of education involves the totality of experiences by which a community clarifies and communicates the values, knowledge, skills and commitments considered to be fundamental. It primarily involves ‘an inner voyage and an ongoing process of critical exploration and integration of values into consistent behaviours and action’ (Power, 2003).

Education in its widest interpretation is a continuous process throughout life, based on the four pillars of learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (UNESCO, 1996). This demands that education be characterized by a new and emerging learning agenda, a change in the expectations of teachers, a revolution involving new information and communication technologies, a blending of general and vocational education, new and expansive forms of leadership, a recognition of (14) student difference, an attempt to provide an equitable education for all, and the creation of interdependence among all service providers. In general, the only constant within the educational environment is change, change which is evident in new ways of learning, what learning is most valued, where schooling occurs, how teaching is delivered, who is involved in the delivery, and the nature of the of the outcomes that learners and teachers experience (see Australian College of Educators, 2003).

The current agenda for a future Australia is based on a community challenged to become a ‘knowledge nation’, or a ‘smart Australia’. The significance of education, the impact of schools and the critical role of teachers are foundational. A new culture is being emphasized, one calling for renewed confidence in the capacity of schools to make a greater difference, and one which recognizes the pivotal role of the teacher in contributing to this end. Moreover, the significance of education is understandably becoming clearer, as society becomes dependent upon knowledge, and those institutions (schools) and people (teachers) who are its protagonists. Critical to the success of the school, however, is its consciousness and interaction with the context in which it operates, the immediate environment within which it provides meaningful service (Crowther, 2001).

7.0 The Distinctive Nature of Catholic Education: Its Religious Dimension

Within a Catholic philosophy of life, an interpretation of education and those experiences that are incorporated within it, take on a particular vision. For Christians in the Catholic tradition, the fullest expression of what it means to be authentically human is found in the person and message of Christ. Hence, the distinctiveness of education delivered within a faith context rests in its capacity to know and understand who and what Christ means in terms of personal and communal development. This is its religious dimension, a view about learning and teaching that is shaped by the Spirit of Christ as expressed within a religious understanding and practice of living within the world. In this light, Catholic Education is an educational service where faith and culture are interwoven in that life is enriched by faith, and authentic human growth is fostered.

The Church's agenda for the third millennium is challenging and comprehensive, one which draws on the traditions of the Church, recognises the complexity and needs of the current social reality and the fundamental imperative to focus on Christ and the Gospel. Within this context, a 'new evangelisation,' a means for interpreting the Gospel with new vigour, ardour, which recognises the status of humanity, the culture of our times and an analysis of human needs (John Paul II, 1996).

The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998) seeks to draw together the essence of a diverse and rich philosophy of Catholic Education while attending to a new cultural context in which the Catholic School operates. This challenge applies equally to all Catholic schools where a call, in fact, a demand is made for new contents, new capabilities and new educational models. The document provides not only a reminder of the essential features for the Catholic school as society enters the new millennium, but also points to the means for generating new meaning in contemporary society and culture. The elaboration of what this means in the context of the ecclesial and social life of the community is expanded upon under the four key characteristics: the dignity of the human person, the integral relationship between Church and school, the mission of the school as servant to society, and the development of community climate. These characteristics are not isolated from a discussion of Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition, they, do draw together the essential philosophy and tradition of Catholic schooling and underscore the significant elements of its nature as the new millennium unfolds.

8.0 The Distinctive Nature of Catholic Schools in The Edmund Rice Tradition

Edmund's educational values were seldom and scantily put into words. They came to us embodied in stories about school practices and in the recording of the lives of the early Brothers. Ongoing research into these practices within their historical context is gradually uncovering their significance and providing a basis for new interpretations of age old traditions. The practical innovations, like the clock in the classroom and the emphasis upon penmanship, are admirable, yet, even more striking are the choices made and the motivations behind these activities and situations (see Christian Brothers Joint Statement, 2004). For example, Edmund was not merely concerned to provide the poor with schools, for there were already schools available to them, but these were at the cost of their faith. Rather, Edmund's intention was to offer an education that affirmed and integrated faith along with offering a practical witness and values base to a system of schools that was at the service of Church mission. Moreover, Edmund's emphasis on right relationships was not merely an exercising of good pastoral care, but more aligned with the deeply held conviction and reverence for the presence of God in all people.

The *Constitutions* of the Christian Brothers (1996) are explicit about the mission of the Brothers and the purpose of their schools. In union with all Christians, Brothers are called to evangelisation – to advance the Reign of God in all its dimensions. In particular, the Congregation is missioned by the Church for the evangelisation of youth and especially for the education and care of the materially poor' (*Constitution* 24). This overall mission is expressed through various ministries, of which schools are a key component. Moreover, these learning communities are further informed by the Constitutions as to the basic principles on which the curriculum is to be built. 'We are constantly challenged in our educational ministries to develop curricula which promote the harmonious growth of the whole person, through a synthesis of faith, life and culture. We are especially committed to education for justice, social awareness and concern for the earth' (*Constitution* 27).

The identity of a Catholic School in the Edmund Rice Tradition lies in its being an instrument of the Church's mission and motivated by its evangelization role. While all Catholic schools work for the mission of the Church, the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice is the prism through which Christian Brothers' schools look at the world in discerning the needs in the light of the Gospel. They do this within the Local Church and with the experience, joy and hope of a living tradition. Such is their mission as they strive to be part of the Kingdom vision through school ministry as Church mission.

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Live, Jesus, in our hearts forever.