

Reflecting on “*Setting out for Home*” – A National Gathering for Sustainability, June 1, 2017

As a history undergraduate my thesis investigated the impact of environmental history on Australian Identity. I came back last night inspired by the historic location and amazing views to remind myself of Canberra’s environmental history and the possibilities, both positive and negative that may engulf environmental historiography in the future. As I read, I came across the following quote by environmental historian Richard White. He stated:

“The best scholarship will take its inspiration from ecology, not in any mechanistic sense which eliminates culture as a creative force, but rather by stressing the interplay and reciprocal influences between cultures and the natural world.”

For me, this sums up the combined and varied sentiments from the past two days in Canberra. We need to recognise the connection between our actions as individuals and leaders and the cultures which we promote within our schools, as places of educational excellence, spiritual connectedness and champions of peace and justice, within the context of the natural world around us. A culture which is even more imperative now than ever before, as highlighted in *Laudato Si*.

Our Edmund Rice culture, ethos and Touchstones are creative and innovative in their approach to educating young people in a holistic and transformative manner. The challenge is how we can use our established ability and philosophy of pioneering education to be a creative force in addressing issues of sustainability, an imaginative force which Tim Flannery suggested in his address as one of the fundamental requirements in tackling this global issue.

The idea that scholarship must be inspired from ecology is an integral point in the journey forward. Our challenge by Pope Francis is to educate for a sustainable future, one which identifies the interconnectedness of the environment and social injustice. Without education there will be no action. Without action nothing will change. Therefore, stressing the interplay between our principle role as educators and the spiritual call for ecological conversion is essential in creating real and sustainable changes and developments in conserving and improving our home, our natural world, for the betterment and justice of all God’s creatures.

Thank you for the opportunity for conversation with wonderful members of our special network and for allowing us to share some of our story. I appreciate all of the time you and the sustainability committee put into this conference and hope that we are able to empower and inspire our communities to live the gospel and take up Pope Francis’s challenge to be better in our actions with each other and the world which nurtures and sustains us.

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