



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

Edmund Rice
Education Australia

Submission to the
Plenary Council

5th March 2019

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Grounded in the Charism of Blessed Edmund Rice

Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) was established by the Christian Brothers in 2007 to ensure the continuation of the charism of Edmund Rice in school ministry within the mission of the Catholic Church.

Serving over 40,000 families across 54 schools in all states and territories, EREA is the most substantial national education network within Catholic Education in Australia. With 37500 students and 3500 staff, EREA is faithful to a '*Liberating Education*' for all; a '*Gospel Spirituality*' within our range of communities; an '*Inclusive Community*' which is accepting and welcoming; and a commitment to '*Justice and Solidarity*' for all those vulnerable and marginalised within our ministry.

EREA's Purpose and Charter is to conduct educational institutions, in fulfilment of the mission of Jesus Christ in the Catholic tradition. Holding the Church close to our heart, our submission to the Plenary Council reflects our conversation across the network of schools, flexible learning centres, staff, EREA Executive, Board and Council.

We welcome and appreciate the opportunity to prayerfully, respectfully and humbly contribute to the future direction of the Church within Australia and the world.

A Vision for the Church in Australia

We engage with the Plenary Council process in the spirit of Jesus striving to establish a united and loving Church, welcoming all. Working together with Bishops and Priests our hope is to ensure Gospel spirituality is the strong foundation for all we do as Church. Such a church will be more hope-filled and joyous, compassionately welcoming and inclusive; a Church where all work together in a spirit of respect and empowerment.

We will not be able to enact this vision unless all parts of the Church respond with conviction to the cry for protection of children and vulnerable people generally, and to the needs of those who have suffered from abuse by Church personnel and from the often inadequate response to those who have been abused.

Such a Church will:

- be compassionate and open, showing humility, justice and respect in its dealing with the community, and with all people in the Church;
- be more fully a Church of the heart, reaching out with generosity and deep compassion to those living in poverty or who suffer;
- demonstrate shared leadership, celebrating the richness of skill and spirit emanating from a truly inclusive community – a community where discrimination on the grounds of gender, lifestyle or circumstance has no place;
- offer a vibrant liturgical and community life that speaks and listens to the youth of today;
- embed within its theology a deep commitment to passionately defending and protecting our Earth;
- respectfully and gratefully acknowledge and learn from our First Nations Peoples so that responding to God's call to stewardship, we can fully celebrate and share our Australian heritage;
- raise a fearless voice against injustice, including those complex issues that deeply affect the lives of individuals and families: loneliness, drugs, family pressures, violence in the home, consumerism.

If the above vision is to become a reality, our Church will need to act with urgency across the following areas:

Spirituality

The Gospel message is the one true foundation of our Church. The scripture must be foundational to reimagining how we live as Church today responding to the 'signs of the times'. Such thinking will imbue our liturgies, especially the Mass, with messages of hope and love ensuring a nourishment of the heart and soul for all. The contemporary church must be prophetic and needs to find a new way of praying as well as being Church – a Church that does not have all the answers but that listens to and responds together with its people.

Leadership

Within the Church, current hierarchical structures are inhibitors to authentic effective leadership. These structures need to be reviewed ensuring a devolved model of leadership with high levels of accountability and inclusion. Clericalism is a barrier to the life of the church. The female voice needs to be given space throughout all levels of leadership.

Role of the Lay People

Currently most work of the Church is carried out by lay people. This demands a rethinking of “Church” that extends beyond the clerical, with its traditional structures, to include those working in schools and services dedicated to living and promoting God’s mission in the Church. This will require lay people being empowered and encouraged to assume active and vital roles with the Church, with the authority to make decisions in collaboration with those affected by the decisions.

Role of our Young People

Today the majority of young people are disengaged from Church. They see little relevance in either liturgy or Church community in their lives. Despite this, their need for a spiritual dimension to their lives has never been more critical. The challenges of the future presented through the rapid growth of technology, the push to succeed at all cost, violence, inequality, discrimination and critical environmental issues have resulted in high levels of disengagement and mental health issues across many of our youth. As Church we must engage with this urgently as one lost generation challenges the very existence of the Church into the future. Our church must harness the richness and idealism of youth. Their voice must be nurtured and heard. We have to give up any superficial old ways.

EREA hopes to fully participate in this renewed vision of Church. We are committed to celebrating diversity and inclusion in our schools, parishes and communities. We aim to encourage leaders who will bring the Church alive and who will cherish and practice the values and spirit of a renewed and Gospel-inspired church in Australia.

We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the Plenary Council in the hope of being part of reimagining and reshaping our Church. We wish to do more than contribute our thoughts, however, and hope that lay led groups can assist in the discernment of all the contributions that come to the Council, and participate in decision-making processes. We need a Church that will support and inspire our students, families and staff, encouraging them to take up the challenge of our Touchstones - creating a hope filled future and better world for all.

“Nothing else will change a person’s life except the experience of God. You may use all the other terms you want – but – at the heart of it – it is a spirit that flows through our universe that always demands from us a response”

Brother Philip Pinto