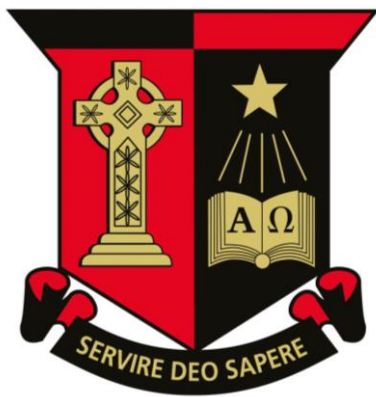


**A Conversation
with
Br Philip Pinto cfc**

**Saturday 12 May
2018**

**St Joseph's College
Gregory Terrace**



Official welcome by Mr Michael Carroll (College Principal, Gregory Terrace)

Br Marty Sanderson: I would just like us to pause for a moment and just acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we gather today. We particular remember the Turrbal people, but also the Jagerra People from the south side of the river who moved backwards and forwards across this area, particular because around Spring Hill and the water holes so much food was available and also an area for gathering and trade. So we just remember those who walked this land over tens of thousands of years, but I also remind us to remember the ancestors of the Edmund Rice tradition; Edmund, and of course this year, the 150 year celebrations, we remember Ambrose Treacy and his three companions who arrived.

I also invite you to remember your own ancestors; ancestors in faith, ancestors in family. Together, so many lives have touched this land and continue to touch it. So remember all of them. And we acknowledge the traditional elders, past and present, and also those young people with whose lives the future of their traditions are held.

Charles Brauer: I warmly welcome all of you and a warm welcome to you, Br Philip Pinto. Thank you so much for your presence. On behalf of the network thanks for your extended period of time in the country. We wanted to have you here today. A little bit of history: this is the first Edmund Rice school in Queensland (those from St James would correct me by saying that they are celebrating 150 years this year, so there's a bit of an arm wrestle about who is the oldest school, but in any case, we were established in 1875; we're in our 143rd year. And the building we were just in is the Treacy Centre, named in honour of Ambrose. And we gather in the College Hall. This is a special place today for our students; the place they gather for their first day as a Terracian and their last day as a Terracian. And I think all the photos around the room probably make sense of why we do that. So a special place for us and quite deliberately we gather here today to try to connect with the heart of the Edmund Rice Spirituality, which we're all tasked to carry in our different ways; in quite varying ways, and for me as teacher passing that on to young people, particularly the young people in our care here at Terrace.

With all that in mind we gather as quite a unique community and Br Philip here has joined several gatherings around the country; of note has been the Melbourne gathering – A Gathering of Dreamers – that occurred last week across three days. And in the room down in the Treacy Centre in Melbourne, a similar mixture of people gathered in the same spirit. There were celebrations for 150 years of the Edmund Rice ministries being on the shores of our country, but what I took out of the two days of the gathering I was able to attend was discernment for the future. So today as we honour Ambrose Treacy and the brothers' presence in our country for 150 years, we gather today to see if we can open ourselves to the future. Br Philip here will hopefully enlighten us with that.

Philip, would you mind shedding some light on your experience today. I know you've been to our country several times; in your latest visit what has stood out to you as you gather in the different communities?

Br Philip: I would like to start by saying that I enjoy coming here, and particularly for two reasons. The first reason is that when I came for my first time to Australia I found myself as one of the youngest brothers. Back in my home country I am the third oldest Indian brother. But on a more serious note, there something about the spirituality in the land which I've encountered here among Edmund Rice people that nourishes my soul. I feel like an outcast in my own country because of the spirituality that has grown within me. The bishop, when I went back to the diocese I work in, he's a lovely man and an ex-member of ours; he said *'What's it like coming back here?'* And I said to him, *'I feel as if I've entered into a time warp. It's as if I've come into the 16th Century. None of the emerging strands in spirituality is noticeable here. When I mention certain things to people, there's just a blank look as if they've never heard of these things.'* Language which is common over here, England, Ireland and also parts of America, is totally foreign there. So when you ask what it's like coming back – it's energising! In a sense, it's like coming home. And home is not a country. Home is a state where you feel that you're not alone.

Charles: That concept of 'Home' was actually presented to those who gathered in conversation circles in Brisbane over the last few months. And the concept

of home was directed to us in one key question and it was a simple one. And so I pose this question: What connected you in your home to the Edmund Rice story? What was your first encounter with that Edmund Rice spirit?

Br Philip: I went to an Edmund Rice school. And in New Delhi I was with the Brothers there. And in those days we joined quite young as many of our Brothers here would have joined. I would have been fourteen when I left home and my younger brother, he was thirteen when he found that I had joined, he said *'I want to join, also.'* So my mother lost her whole family in one shot. It was the first thing people would ask me: *Why would you join the brothers and what was it that called you to them?* There was two reasons, really. I remember putting pen to paper and writing *'I want to be a Christian Brother.'* And even as I wrote it I said *'Why did I write that?'* I never had thought of becoming a brother. At home, there was always want and expectation of becoming a priest. I was one of those who kept all the laws, all the rules. It was only when I joined the brothers I began to break them.

So I think it was watching the brothers in their unguarded moments, which means outside the school. And watching the ease and the way they interacted with each other. Something there must have grabbed me. I try to put a reason on it – all these are subconscious images that come up. To ask you why I joined, I won't know. But I could write a book on why I stayed a brother. Many, many different aspects of my life; went through lots of difficulties, but I never ever wanted to leave. I just felt *'This is it. This is where I am going to find out who I am and where I'm going to be to do any good that I can do, it is going to be this road onwards.* Then I just went on the Christian Brothers journey; school, I loved teaching. And I remember being told by my Provincial I'm wanted to go for further studies, I'm wanted to go to college. They want to put me to college teaching people studying for degrees and going back into the classroom again. And I found that I enjoyed teaching the knowledge. It satisfied so much; it satisfied things intellectually as well as spiritually. I was able to meet young people at a different level. And almost straight from there I went into leadership ministry, and I was in leadership ministry until four years ago, when I went back to where I am.

So my connection with this Edmund Rice story has been amazing. One more little piece that might throw some light on it: when I was in Rome I was asked to go to Ireland for a visit because they were moving the remains of the founder from one church into a new place that they were building and the body had to be exhumed and a representative of the diocese had to be present and some representatives of the province had to be there. I was visiting, so I was there. We opened the casket and we saw the bones there and we picked them out and verified. And I remember picking up the skull and looking at it and I said *'Do you know the trouble you have gotten me into.'* But it was at that moment that it struck me that this person born two-hundred years earlier, totally different culture, and look how our lives have enmeshed. And there's something that I believe very strongly today is the emerging spirituality is reminding us time again that we are connected. In fact, **not only are we connected, we are one. We are one. The stranger is my brother I haven't met.** We are one. I see that in India time and again coming up. Now, I'm seeing it through a different lens, and watching all these people and the crowds and crowds of people just passing each other. And I often have to stop and say *'These are my brothers and sisters.'* Trying to hold that to give my life some sort of awareness as I'm moving on. Particularly in that hall (pre-gathering) listening to that buzz that went on, saying that again to myself. We are one.

The spirituality that we are trying to imbibe is to show that, as a species, as created beings, we are not separate people. Neither are we separate from God. No matter what people tell us; *'You have sinned. You're not with God'* That's not true. Nothing separates us from God. Nothing. It's the hardest thing for us to realise. We hammer ourselves so much as human beings of not being worthy. The guilt of the past. The only thing that matters is realising that at this moment ***'God sees me and God just falls over in love with me.'*** Hard for us to accept that. We want to earn goodness. I've diverged a bit from spirituality and Edmund Rice. It's a journey. And it's a journey that deepens and deepens and I'm constantly amazed at what happens. I wonder if ordained ministry would have been a block for me in reaching the awareness that I have now. I just wonder. Maybe it wouldn't have been a block, because there are some wonderful priests that are able to see this as practice and talk about it. But I also, in my own country, come across priests that don't understand what I'm saying. But age lends a certain respectability. And I can say things to them now

that I could not say before I left India twenty years ago. And so they take it from me. They may not agree but they won't argue. So I have that freedom at the moment. That's part of my Christian Brother's journey, ongoing.

Charles: Gathering in the Edmund Rice Room, not too dissimilar to this, down at the gathering in Melbourne, as I sat back and listened I was struck with the way that emergence was embraced and the self-awareness of the brothers as a congregation and the network as a community. What else emerged? Your role as listener, and you didn't say much in those two days, and to feed that back to the group. What did you hear in that listening?

Br Philip: Well, the first thing that struck me, and it struck me like this (clicks), was the energy in this room to see these people over here and really just connected. And I wasn't the only one who was struck. The lady who was facilitating the gathering, Debbie Aspley from the United States, she spoke about it and she said *'Just look at yourselves. You are from different ministries; you have the school ministries, you have the camps, you have the funding office, you have spirituality groups, you're all over here and you're all connecting so easily.'* And she said *'That's amazing! And then I see the disparity in age; young people and the old people. And then the gender differences. And yet none of these are seen as differences in this group.'* And that struck me too. And I was saying to myself *What is it that holds us? What is it that is holding us together?* And that was the thing that was fascinating me. And then you say Edmund Rice, yes. But *what* Edmund Rice? And I began to feel that in that group there was a safety. There was a safety to be who we were without anyone passing judgement and saying 'You can't be like this' and 'You can't be like that.' That we could share things over here and we would be understood. I thought that was phenomenal. I also believed that in that group there was a common search for something deeper than we were getting traditionally. That was the very first thing. And it led me often, as I think back, to ask *"What's this that's emerging, that is already there but we're not recognising as a group?"* These were big questions for me, because part of the gathering was *'Where to now, Edmund? Where do we go from here?'* And I felt, and it was verbalised

one day when someone said *'This gathering is a post-Church gathering.'* It took me aback a little bit when I heard it – 'post-Church'. And I was saying there is huge wisdom in that. If I may, let me just say something about it, this 'Post-Church'. I agreed with this statement very readily five years ago. In fact, I'd often say that I'm hanging on by my fingernails to hierarchical church, institutional church. But then a miracle happens – Pope Francis. So when we say we're 'post-church', and I ask myself 'post *which* church?' So just as a sign that church is much bigger than the flame that is commonly presenting itself. We are the church. *We* are the church.

I used to love going into a little church in Rome; It was actually in the Vatican. There were about twenty people at six o'clock in the morning. As I sat down I watched the people coming in. And I realised that I was going to mass every morning not for what the priest thought was happening at the altar, but to make my own commitment to begin my day. As we say in India, I've come to thee to take thy touch before I begin my day. And the young people that come to their grandparents to touch their grandparents' feet. And I'd go to mass there; I don't need to go to *mass*, but for me it was going over there to touch and into the ministry before God before I began my day. And to make the same commitment that Jesus made: My body I give to you, my blood I pour out for you.

So, 'church' for me was watching those people, many of them were street people coming off the street and beginning their day, because I would see them coming and going with their bags. *That* was church there. So when I have to speak about a post-church movement for us, I see a lot of truth in it. I'm not moved and I know many of the people that join us are not moved by the doctrine and dogma of the official church. It just is not relevant to our lives. I think it's not relevant to the lives of many of the people we teach; many of our children. But there's another side to this church that Pope Francis is trying to remind us of, and I think this movement is very much part of *that* church. It's a church that is mindful again of the weaker members in our universe. Whether those members are human or not. And so the Pope brings out an encyclical, reminding us to care for the non-human members of our family. And our home, planet Earth. *That* church I identify with. The church that reminds me

that the Gospel is only good news when seen through the eyes of the poor.
That church I identify with.

But there are also elements of this church that are kind of hard to reconcile with. And one of those elements would be the church's whole stance with the feminine; I find it hard to reconcile with that. And I know that Pope Francis would want things to be otherwise, but even being Pope you can't do all the things you want to do. So, yes, these be some of the elements that came up with the emerging spirituality; the church, the feminine. The question is *Where are we going to go with this now?* We've had this gathering. *What are we going to do?* And the realisation that the question is not so much the 'what' as the 'how'. *How are we going to live into the future? How are we going to live into the future? That will determine what we do.* Every one of us has the responsibility of the 'how' – *How am I going to live?* I want to live *connected*. I want to live *mindful* of those less fortunate. I want to be able to stand up and say to the 'Empire' when the empire is Caesar or the church, the temple, and say to them 'This is not how life is meant to be.' If I aim to articulate the 'how I want to live' – how I'm seeing my own life unfolding – I think the 'what' will unfold as we walk.

We were told that the movement was in us, and we are the movement. The future is in us. We are the future. And we go outside – and I love doing this in my own campus in Chandigarh – and there's a beautiful tree there; I love that tree. And I can go and hold it and touch it and feel it and the leaves, and say that the seeds of my life are here in this. And I wonder what seeds I am carrying for the future. And the next stage in evolution is in me. The future is in me and I am the future. Science tells us that today, and I know people here far better qualified than I am to say that. But to try and live with that – *Am I going to be someone who just joined the future or am I going to be someone who is laying the foundation for the future? Will the brothers live on? will the brothers die?* Not really important questions. But will what we stand for live on or will it die? *That* is more important. Many of you have heard this quote before: We are going to die, the important thing is what you going to be caught dead doing. What are you passing on?

And I'm so proud of my brothers around the world, the many parts of the world, who have taken us seriously and decided that *this* is what I am going to

be caught dead doing. So these are some of the things that came up that I see as hugely thoughtful for us. “We” are not a lone movement in the world. We are one of the millions of movements that are ushering in the future. And as long as we continue to be relevant to the future, we will live. As long as we are walking in alignment with evolution, with the universe, we will live. Different forms, different shapes, but we will live. What we stand for will live.

Charles: One of the questions I have as an educator is how do I share the spirit of Edmund Rice with young people? But also, how do I share the story of Jesus? And as we’re looking forward, I think that as we look forward and discern the future, oftentimes we have to retrace our foundations. So, our foundation is in the Jesus story. What is an important understanding of the Jesus story to enable both me as educator and to enable us in our ministries?

Br Philip: I love talking about Jesus. If it wasn’t for Jesus I wouldn’t be here. I also recognise that Religious Educators today have what is an almost impossible task because any of us who are really committed to walking this journey I cannot give what is not inside me – that is the *Odium*. Any of us who now have the responsibility of passing on the tradition to young people, we ourselves see that the distance between us and the official teaching of the church is widening. There is huge responsibility of how to connect with young people and at the same time be faithful to my Christian vocation and the trust that has been given to me to pass on the message. How do I do that?

I often say ‘Thank God I’m not teaching kids any of this.’ I do have circles of conversations with young adults, which means 16 to 20. They’re willing to debate because they themselves are asking questions. I find that very helpful. But to me the secret lies in Jesus of Nazareth. So, how do we take this on? The understanding I have of Jesus of Nazareth as brother, as a young brother, as a boy growing up, was very different to my understanding of Jesus now. The Church tells us that Jesus is *true God* and *true man*, and we accept that. But having said that the Church then takes that ‘true man’ and parks it and then speaks about Jesus as ‘true God’. And so everything we have in our Church is about Jesus as ‘true God.’ And the only response to ‘true God’ is adoration and

worship. I can't follow a God. I can *worship* a God. But then it strikes me that Jesus never ever said to men 'Worship Me.' All around in the scriptures, you go to anywhere in the Gospels and it says 'Follow me. Follow me. Follow me.' So it is the man that is the model for me.

I also know that scientifically Jesus never knew the universe story as we know it to be. That he never saw Earth rising – the picture from the moon of the planet coming up. He never saw that. Edmund Rice never saw that. But the mystic intuitive understands what science confirms for us today. And I'm speaking out of that because I've been spoilt as a young religious and as a religious growing up. From the time I joined the novitiate and I took my vows my spiritual director and guru was a mystic. And he's walked with me in my whole life until January last year when he passed away. An Irish brother in India. He taught me how to pray. He taught me how to read the scriptures. And I can't think of any greater gifts that can be given to young people than these two. How to pray and how to read the scriptures. Not only that, he taught us how to *love* the scriptures. How to try and get into the mind of the person who is writing and that early community. How to see connections because they're brilliantly written. These people told stories that way. They connected that way.

I would invite you to speak about this Jesus as someone who, like them, was seeking to discover God. And you know what happened? The people that opened Jesus's mind to God were women. Just go to the scriptures, go to Mark's Gospel. You see it there the whole way, right from the first incident in Mark's Gospel, the first woman, Peter's mother in law; to the last woman there before Jesus dies, to the incident of the woman taking the two coins into the temple. And you'll see that they understood what Jesus was about, even if they never met him. From them he was picking up how he was supposed to keep himself open to this mystery called God. She put in everything she had and the voice inside would have said 'And that's what I'm going to ask of you.' Because straight after that we go into the Passion. So who is telling him stuff? Where is he picking it up from? The intuitive elements of what it is to be human is learned from women. And I don't have to be a woman to learn that. There's enough of the feminine in me to be able to learn that. *Do I accept the feminine in me?*

I come from a very macho congregation. Once as young brother I was told 'You're going to be teaching boys. You'll be a *boys man*.' And then, as I got older, I learned to learn to embrace the feminine in me if I want to be whole. Teach your children that Jesus never came to make us good. Jesus came to make us whole; a *whole* human being. I come that you may have life and have it to the full. Over here on Earth, not up *there* wherever 'there' is. Jesus is not interested in the afterlife. It's this life you have to live. You have no control over the afterlife. *This* life, *live* this now. Be a whole human being here. What does that mean – to be a whole human being? Again, we go to Jesus. We're told right in the beginning of his ministry when he starts getting an idea about what he wants to do. 'How do I flesh out this thing that's in my head about being in touch with the mystery we call God of not being separated?' He goes up to a mountain and calls those he would. He doesn't say 'I'm looking for volunteers.' He says 'I want you... you... you... you...' He's making the choice there for people that he thinks would be able to come together. And he got it wrong. One of them betrayed him. The church then, for people writing the scriptures, made them all men. Would that be the way Jesus was? They had others being around and the word they used was to 'serve' him. The word 'serve' is the same word as the word from deacon that we have – 'Diaconia' – which is 'service'. It's the mark of discipleship. So they were a part of that. Men and women.

And what did he say to them? They were to be with him, they were to cast out demons and they were to preach. And preaching means you model it. People who look at casting out demons, the demons are in the group. This group is captivated by *fear*. That demon has to be cast out. There is a demon of *envy*. *Ambition*. Lord, put me on the right and my brother on the left. You see all the little demons that are around in a group – get rid of those. Then you'll be able to see that you are not separate. All these demons tend to separate you and fear, the greatest demon of all, will not allow you to love. That's the Jesus that you share, and it's the group trying to discover how to continue this. These are some of the things that I would ask you to share with the children when you are teaching them. Forget about dogma! You can just do a lesson about the church, then say 'Now, let me tell you something interesting...'

Questioner: A week ago when a number of us in this room were able to be in Melbourne at the Gathering of the Dreamers it's theme was on *Edmund to Ambrose to Us*. So I guess the people who have gathered here today have an interest in that vision of Edmund. As people who are part of that Edmund Rice movement in some way. As we take it into the future in this country, in this place, what do you think might be some of the challenges or the questions about what we might consider to take it forward. And the phrase have in my mind comes from Edmund Rice Beyond Borders. It's something that began within EREA but now it's a wonderful life in each of the school communities building relationships and connections in other parts of the world. It doesn't rely on someone in a central office. It certainly gets nurture and support there but the energy is in the school communities. I'm thinking of 'Edmund Rice Beyond the Brothers.' So, what are some of the challenges or questions that we, gathered here today in this place might want to consider as we wonder how to take that vision and charism forward.

Br Philip Pinto: I want you to understand and recognise here the changing role of the Brother. We were starting off as teachers and so on. An image that was used in Melbourne with the brothers – there were some elderly brothers there – someone said 'You are like our Grandparents.' And I thought that was lovely. And you're not in the job of parenting, you're in the job of accompanying, of listening. I see that as the changing role. So for that aspect of this movement, I think the brothers pull back and stay in their accompanying role. To be there when you're needed. No easy to let go, but that's where growth takes place. To allow that to happen and for the others to come along and see how is it connected. To try and get your sustenance from the conversation like this. The only way movements grow is through conversation; to allow the ideas to percolate and then to bubble and blossom. It's out of here.

Help each other to be the sort of person that is going to be the citizen of tomorrow. Don't worry too much about the other things. They'll be there. We're so focussed on having *this* outreach and *that* group and so on. Those will flourish if you are whole, if you can find your wholeness. Not just as individuals, but as a group, so that people looking at you will say the same

thing that they said in the early church: 'See how these people love each other.' Don't underestimate the wisdom that is already here.

Questioner: What's the one line that we can take away from all you have said today to bring back to our schools.

Br Philip Pinto: The real thing that makes a difference to children is not what you *say* to them, it is when they *see* that you are really there for them. That's the one thing – you can say whatever you want and they will listen.

I'm awestruck by one thing that has happened to me a few months ago in my home school in Chandigarh. There was this little kid and he was obviously upset about something and a group of teachers were talking to me and he came and was standing there and this teacher went to him and she stood with him and gave him her full attention and listened. She never gave him any advice, she said 'Are you okay, love?' I was so motivated by her and I said that is such a lovely relationship.

Relationships are everything. If you want to say something to your children, get them just to pause for a moment and think of two boys in their class who they are friendly with and to ask themselves 'Am I really friends with them?' And then name one boy that they don't really like and to ask themselves 'Why don't I like him?' Even if they create that awareness in some way they might ask 'Is that reason enough to cut someone out?'

Questioner: You spoke about some of the early lessons you had in life, and in particular about the two of the most important things you were taught were around reading scripture and around prayer. What advice could we give to our students, as educators, about how to pray and how to pray and how to read scripture in a world where they are more disconnected with the institutionalised version of that?

Br Philip: Prayer is very simple. Just say to them ‘I want you to pray. Don’t use words.’ Remember what scripture tells us: ‘The spirit is praying in you, and through you’. Every time you start using words we start going up here (to our heads) and we complicate it all. This brother I was talking about, Br Barrett, he would sit with me and we’d take a text and then he gave me to hold a crucifix in my hand, and he would put his hands around mine. We would be facing each other. And every now and again he would just read a text of scripture and I could feel the pressure of his hands as he would read that, trying to mean it. And then one day he took this text and he said ‘Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole being and with all your strength. And when he said the words ‘with all your strength’ he just pressed in (painfully). But I realised that day that when you say the spirit is inside praying for you, it’s not up here (head), it’s right through you, you whole body praying. So I’m saying pray with that today – it’s all of me trying to realise that this God is deepest within me, and to hold this God, and to ask God to hold me. So if I really want to pray I don’t go into the chapel, because I don’t have the space and privacy in the chapel to allow my body to pray without making an exhibition of myself. So, you want to pray? They will learn from you what prayer is when they see you in prayer sitting down. And there will be many people here that know century prayer when you pray without using words.

The scripture – the only way I can tell you how to teach the scripture is actually doing a passage of scripture with them and you do it in the new way really of trying to understand what the text is all about. Don’t worry about the harmonies you hear. **The scripture is not so much about God and about Jesus as it is about you and me and my relationship. It’s about discipleship.** If they can see that the text is about discipleship you’ve given them one key to read the scripture.

These are very short answers to hugely profound questions.

Questioner: What makes you happy?

Br Philip Pinto: That's easy... life! Everything in life. The very fact that I'm alive. That I'm out there. I think a part of it is also awareness. I said right at the very beginning 'Nothing separates you from God.' And I try and walk in that awareness. It doesn't always work. There are times when you get frustrated, annoyed, angry. But the underlying thing is optimism that life is good and that I am with God. I don't not have to go to Heaven to be with him. I'll just be in a different way with God there.
