



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

Edmund Rice
Education Australia

Submission to the
Plenary Council
Phase 2

December 2019

Submission to the Plenary Council – Phase 2

Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal

This submission is made by the Council of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA), 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. The Council of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) is the body ultimately responsible for the governance of EREA. It is made up of five persons who, in civil law, together constitute “Trustees of Edmund Rice Education Australia”. In Church law, the members of Council together constitute a PJP – a “public juridic person of pontifical right”.

EREA’s Purpose and Charter is to conduct educational institutions, in fulfilment of the mission of Jesus Christ in the Catholic tradition, serving approximately 39,000 students, their families and 5,120 staff across 54 schools in all states and territories. EREA is the most substantial national education network within Catholic Education in Australia. With such a large population, EREA is deeply concerned that whilst our families and staff identify and commit to the charism of Edmund Rice within the communities of our schools, there is an increasing disconnect with the Church as is evident across Australia according to a number of research studies¹.

Within this context and following prayerful discernment, the Council of EREA recommends the following to the Inclusive, Participatory and Synodal Writing and Discernment Group:

- The **urgency** of committing to being an **inclusive and participatory** Church bringing to life the ‘variety and unity of gifts’ (1Cor: 12). This requires of all entities within church – episcopal, clerical and lay:
 - To open up opportunities for **participation and leadership** in all aspects of Church, including governance, especially in the pastoral life of the Church with authority rather than just advisory capacity – thus the need for revised Canon Law and courageous pastoral interpretation which is possible now.
 - To be willing to significantly **renew the liturgy**, especially to be inclusive in the ritual and language of church. To enable more inclusive leadership in liturgical celebrations.
 - To ensure that the **language of church documents** and of prayers, is accessible, inclusive and reflective of 21st century whilst maintaining fidelity to the Tradition.
 - To be **inclusive of all** seeking God and membership of a faith community by addressing the current exclusionary teachings on ‘remarriage’ and sexual orientation.
- The urgency of being a **synodal** church that commits:
 - To **processes that invite participation** and draw on the gifts of the Spirit of the Church of the Baptised – putting flesh on the teaching of the ‘*sensus fidei*’, the Holy Spirit speaking through all the faithful continues to be alive within the community though not always acknowledged. The retrieval of this fundamental understanding of Christianity in the Catholic tradition is critical at this point in the story of the Australian Church

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census; National Church Life Survey (2016), Pastoral Research Office Report on the 2016 Census (2017) – Church Life Profile Report on the Catholic Church in Australia.

- To ***listening to the experience and wisdom of the majority of the church*** – the People of God i.e. the lay faithful (95%+ of our church) at best have had a consultative but not a deliberative voice in ecclesial decision making, to say nothing of women’s exclusion from ordination.
- To ***courageous leadership*** inspired by authentic commitment to shared wisdom of the Spirit.

We engage with the Plenary Council process in the spirit of Jesus striving to establish a united and loving Church, welcoming all, especially those most vulnerable and marginalised.

EREA is 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 practise the values and spirit of a renewed and Gospel-inspired church in Australia.

We are appreciative of 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 fully participate in decision-making processes. We need a Church that will better support and inspire our students, families and staff, encouraging them to take up the challenge of our EREA Touchstones - creating a hope filled future and better world for all.

EREA Council

Br Paul Oakley cfc (President), Kathy Freeman, John Honner, Philomena Billington, David White

