



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION  
AUSTRALIA

Edmund Rice  
Education Australia

Submission to the  
Plenary Council  
Phase 2

December 2019

# Submission to the Plenary Council – Phase 2

## Open to Conversion, Renewal & Reform

This submission is made by the Council of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) which 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. 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 studies<sup>1</sup>.

Within this context and following prayerful discernment, the Council of EREA recommends the following to the Open to Conversion, Renewal & Reform Writing and Discernment Group:

- The **urgency** of committing to Conversion, Renewal and Reform – the 3 are integral to the future of the Church in Australia and universally, given the current rate of disconnection from Church.
  - **Genuine commitment to conversion** – metanoia – the wholeness of response to the Spirit through authentic listening and dialogue in all aspects of church. The various generations and cultural traditions still identifying as Catholic, respond to God’s revelation in many ways – it is critical to retrieve and to enliven the teaching of the ‘*sensus fidei*’, the Holy Spirit speaking through all the faithful.
  - **Renewal and Reform** are interdependent – apart, they are less than what is urgently needed. Key areas of focus include:
    - **Leadership:** that the Conference of Bishops (ACBC) work together with the people, inviting the wisdom of others to the table and listening openly rather than entrenching diocesan independence and the clerical status quo, resulting in disparate responses to the critical matters of faith and life that confront the Church – ***embracing honest and open ‘unity in diversity’***.
      - **Lay women and men** are included in the dialogue and decision-making processes at diocesan and national church levels, especially in the pastoral life of the Church with authority rather than just advisory capacity – thus

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

the need for revised Canon Law and courageous pastoral interpretation which is possible now.

- **Spiritual Renewal:** that this be a core focus through genuine commitment to new and inclusive models of ministry and pastoral leadership, especially in regional Australia, that embrace the gifts of women and men – including more inclusive options for ordination. Restore the Third Rite of Reconciliation which brought such a prayerful and healing response to the faith community – this is possible now.
- **Care of Priests:** deep concern for the morale and pastoral care of priests who continue to be expected to do and be more within a conflicted context at national, diocesan and parish level – where is their voice in this whole Plenary Council process?
- **Transparency:** that processes and decisions are open and that communication processes are accessible.
- **Inclusion and Outreach:**
  - To be inclusive of all seeking God and membership of a faith community by **addressing the current exclusionary teachings and practices** on ‘remarriage’ and sexual orientation
  - 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 and reflective of 21<sup>st</sup> century whilst maintaining fidelity to the Tradition.

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 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 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