

February 2019

A Message from the EREA Executive Director

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

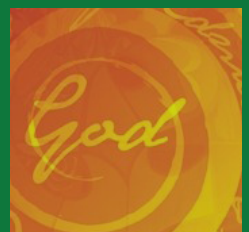
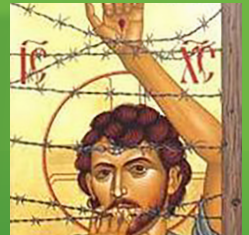
I send you the warmest greetings from EREA National Office at the start of another school year.

To those staff members who are returning to our schools and offices, I hope that you've had a calm, renewing and refreshing break. To those who are new to Catholic education in the Edmund Rice tradition, I welcome you to our national family and thank you for choosing to work with Edmund Rice education. We look forward to your contribution to our community.

At this time each year, I reflect on how fortunate we all are in having the opportunity to contribute to the future, through our contribution to the formation of our young. It is a special privilege that is enjoyed by those who work in education. It does not matter what your role is, you all contribute to the creation of a new world through our combined work with the young, who will create this new reality. The road maps that we offer them will chart their future, and ours. The moral questions that we encourage them to ask, will guide their contribution.

I was recently in India working with a group of Christian Brothers. Together, we examined the various Charters and expressions of mission from our Edmund Rice education family throughout the world. I was asked what I believed to be the common threads in our vision as it is expressed throughout the world by those involved in Edmund Rice education. What do we hold in common as our core beliefs about education and what potentially makes our contribution distinctive among Catholic educators?

In the hope that they are helpful to you, here are a few thoughts that I offered to the Brothers.



A group of young people, mostly women, are smiling and holding up signs. The signs have text on them, including "Our Voice in the World" and "Our Voice in Learning". They are wearing casual clothing like t-shirts and jeans. The background is slightly blurred, showing more people and what appears to be an outdoor or semi-outdoor setting.

As educators in the tradition of Edmund Rice:

- We believe in the worth and dignity of all young people.
- We believe that education is a noble and sacred vocation, since we touch the future by our belief in and care for the young.
- We believe that education must champion the right for all young people to live full, engaged and creative lives.
- We believe that education must skill the young to negotiate their right to full participation in society.
- We believe that education should celebrate the good within our cultures but also offers alternatives to all that oppresses and enslaves the human spirit.
- We believe that education must challenge and skill the young to become co-creators of the world they live in by critiquing the demands and promises of their dominant cultures and these cultures' versions of what constitutes the good, the well lived, the important and the meaningful life.
- We believe that education must entreat the young to unshackle themselves from unexamined opinions and inherited prejudices and live lives consistent with their own inner moral compass; engaging with the world on their own terms.

- We believe in education that encourages a life independent of the approval or good opinion of others. A life lived intentionally, selectively, and harmoniously amid wins and losses, success and disappointment.
- We believe in education that promotes the cultivation and nurture of an inner life; helping the young to discover stillness in their lives and to know silence and the joy of the infinite.
- We believe in education that identifies what is of lasting importance; the knowledge that is sometimes lost in information; the wisdom that is sometimes lost in knowledge.
- In a world where borders are closing, we believe that education must aim to free people from insular thinking, narrowness and intolerance.
- We believe in education that defines lasting happiness and inner peace as coming from living in accord with one's deepest values.
- We believe in education that celebrates lasting happiness as contentment and peace and stresses that happiness cannot be travelled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed.
- When encouraging excellence in education, we believe in a broad canvas, always respecting diversity of talents and abilities and the primacy of personal authenticity, strength of character and uniqueness of contribution.

- We believe in education that teaches the young that the freedom they may enjoy through the good fortune of birth, is not license to do whatever they want. Rather, it is freedom to do what they must do for the making of a fairer and more just society.
- We believe in education that promotes freedom and service as inextricably linked and asserts that with privilege comes social responsibility.
- We believe that our main purpose in this life is to awaken to our true nature; oneness with the Divine. That every human being is connected since we all share this common nature and, that if we live in awareness of our Divine nature, we can't help but be compassionate and loving because this is the essence of the Divine.
- We introduce the young to Jesus, who lived his humanity so deeply and reflected the love of God so totally, that he reveals the very essence of God.
- We believe in religious education that treats each of our great traditions of spirituality as a call to the mind of the One God; different roads converging upon the same point; the same voice in different languages.
- We believe that Christian mission gives priority to those whose humanity, hence, whose capacity to experience God and know Divine love and compassion, is compromised through circumstances of birth or the trajectory of life.

- We believe that our option for the poor and marginalised is core to our identity as Christians and that the vision of Jesus cannot be separated from a commitment to stand with those who are marginalised and excluded.
- We believe that exclusion in its many shapes and forms risks betrayal of the Gospel.
- In a world of closing borders and emerging walls, we believe in building bridges between cultures and creating a global community in education based on dialogue, cooperation and mutual enrichment.
- We believe in a generous and inclusive Church that shows deep love for the poor and marginalised; a Church that strives to usher in the Reign of God: the promise of fullness of life and true freedom for all in our troubled world; a Church strives ceaselessly to tell the poor and excluded that God loves them and that the Gospel is good news for them as well.
- We believe that authenticity in Christian education is measured by resolve within our communities to build happiness and resilience in students and embrace solidarity with the excluded ones.
- We believe that, when all is said and done, our mission and purpose is simply to be the loving, compassionate and inclusive face of the Divine to all we meet.

My friends, don't just read and accept these ideas. This my understanding of what constitutes the core of Edmund Rice education and mission. Do they make sense to you? How would you articulate what motivates you to be the educator that you are? What challenges you and what would you add?

As we begin our school year and another phase of our work in Edmund Rice education, I would ask you to reflect on these ideas, discuss them with your colleagues and use them as a springboard for your own perspectives on what constitutes the core of our mission. This is how we form one another as a national, and international, community in mission.

Many of the themes that we hold to be essential to an education in the Edmund Rice tradition; inclusion, authenticity and fullness of life, are expressed by Michelle Obama in the final words of her book *Becoming*:

Let's invite one another in. Maybe then we can begin to fear less, to make fewer wrong assumptions, to let go of the biases and stereotypes that unnecessarily divide us. It's not about being perfect. There's power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice. And there's grace in being willing to know and hear others. This, for me, is how we become.

Thank you for your belief in the vision of Edmund Rice and for all that you do for the young people entrusted to your care.

With best wishes

Wayne

