



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

Blessed Edmund Rice Feast Day

MESSAGE FROM THE EREA COUNCIL

Dear Members of the Edmund Rice Education Australia Community,

We know Edmund's story. Today, May 5, Edmund Rice Education Australia particularly celebrates his legacy and the power of his story. It is truly honoured through the work of our schools in educating our young people today. Our world is in crisis with a global pandemic and there are many challenges and unknowns ahead. How do we educate, protect and care for our students so that they can embrace our planet and compassionately care for all its peoples?

Through EREA's current strategic plan and particularly the Liberating Education touchstone there is a strong commitment to giving our students a voice. The uncomfortable truth is that we may not like what they say. In fact, if we have educated them well in curriculum, values and faith, it would be most surprising if they don't passionately challenge, for there is much to confront. In the past few months our world as we know it has fundamentally changed. Our students may not be in the classroom but our hope for the future must be that exponential learning is happening right now.

Pope Francis, in his "Urbi et Orbi" message, compared the viral outbreak plaguing Italy and much of the world to an unexpected, turbulent storm.

"We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us are now called to row together, each of us in need of comforting each other."

Before the pandemic, Francis said, people were rushing through life, "greedy for profit," undisturbed by "wars and injustices" and not hearing the "cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick."

Edmund challenged the ailing system of his time. He could not disregard those in need even if his own life was disturbed. How and to what extent are we prepared to be disturbed today? This will be a year we will always remember – it has disturbed, but as Bill Gates reminds us it can be considered "a correction".



Bill's spin on the virus is not so much about what the virus is doing to us but what it is doing for us.

He suggests:

1. It has taught us we are all equal and all just as vulnerable
2. It reminds us that we are all connected and what affects one affects another
3. It reminds us how precious our health is
4. It reminds us how short life is and what is truly important
5. It challenges our materialistic tendencies and how little is really essential
6. It reminds us that family comes first and our true work is to look after and protect one another
7. It reminds us that the power of free will is in our hands - the power to choose to share, to support and to help to co-operate

These are lessons that cannot be packaged in a neat, well-resourced and approved curriculum. They are lessons learnt through life's experiences and by the modelling of the people worthy of admiration. They are not necessarily those considered hugely successful. It includes the mum struggling to teach her three children under 10 online lessons with only one computer. It's the hard working and exhausted front-line people who have chosen to put their own needs on the back burner. It's the particular politicians who challenge the system to put the needs of people first above all else. It's the students who use their voice to challenge the status quo and who dream up a future that ensures the protection of our planet and the life it sustains.

A 93 year old woman who has seen many other crises across the span of her long life observed that she hoped that the power of simple kindness, evident around her everywhere across the world, continues. Now that's something important to learn – be kind. Put kindness in your survival backpack along with caring deeply and accepting of the need for change. Zip the pack up with resolve and passion. Put the pack on your back and get out in the beautiful sunshine and fresh air. Walk and walk until the pack no longer feels heavy and it just becomes part of you.

Now that's really how to celebrate the feast of Edmund.

Thank you for all you do to bring Blessed Edmund's vision alive today, especially during these challenging times.

Yours in Edmund,

Kathy Freeman

On behalf of the EREA Council

5 May 2020