

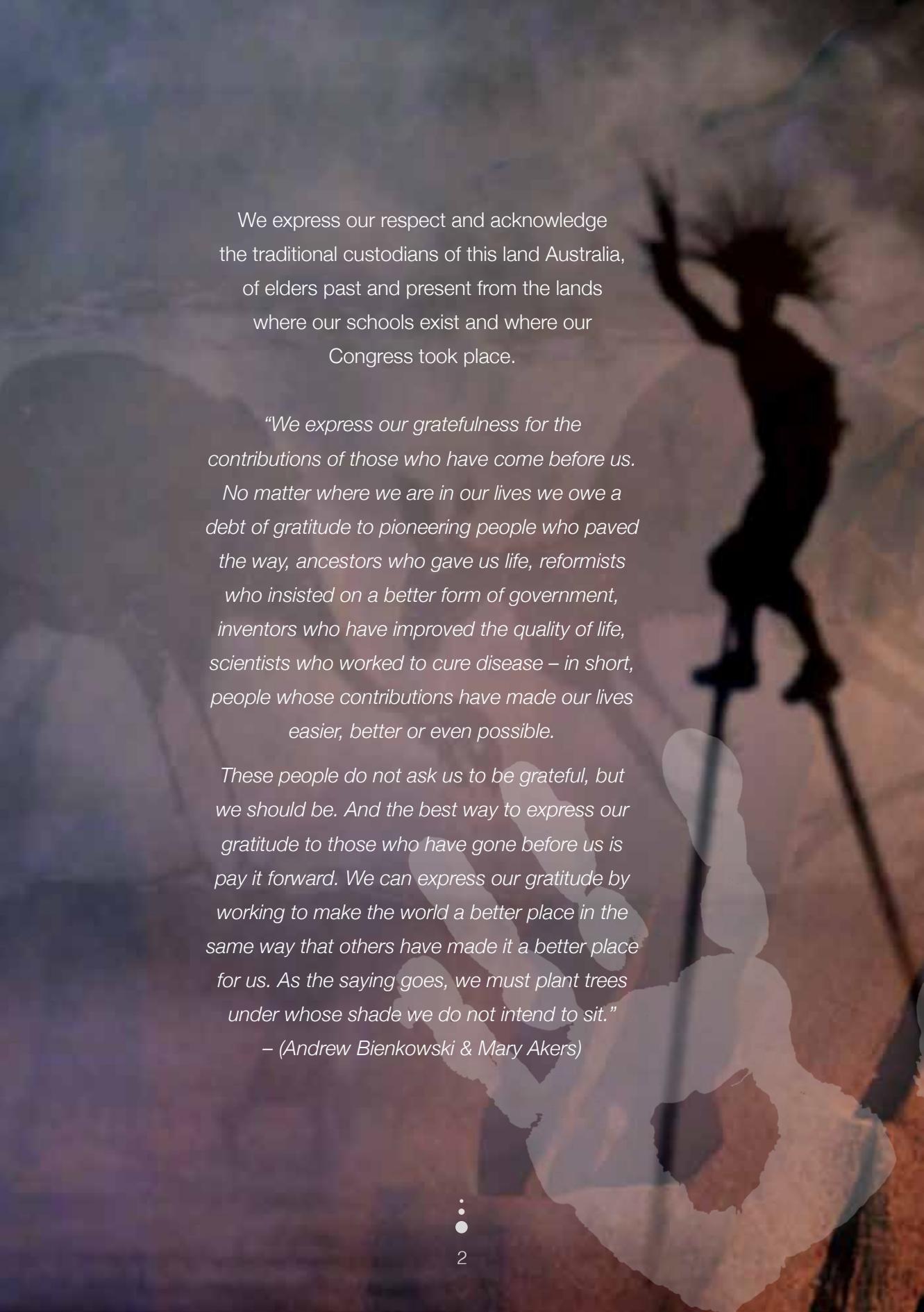


EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

...educating for liberation and possibility

STEPPING *stones*

*Advancing towards
what can be ... continuing
the Congress story*

The background of the page is a photograph of a person climbing a tree, with their silhouette visible against a warm, orange-toned sky. A large, semi-transparent handprint is overlaid on the right side of the page, with its fingers pointing towards the top right. The text is centered and reads:

We express our respect and acknowledge
the traditional custodians of this land Australia,
of elders past and present from the lands
where our schools exist and where our
Congress took place.

*"We express our gratefulness for the
contributions of those who have come before us.
No matter where we are in our lives we owe a
debt of gratitude to pioneering people who paved
the way, ancestors who gave us life, reformists
who insisted on a better form of government,
inventors who have improved the quality of life,
scientists who worked to cure disease – in short,
people whose contributions have made our lives
easier, better or even possible.*

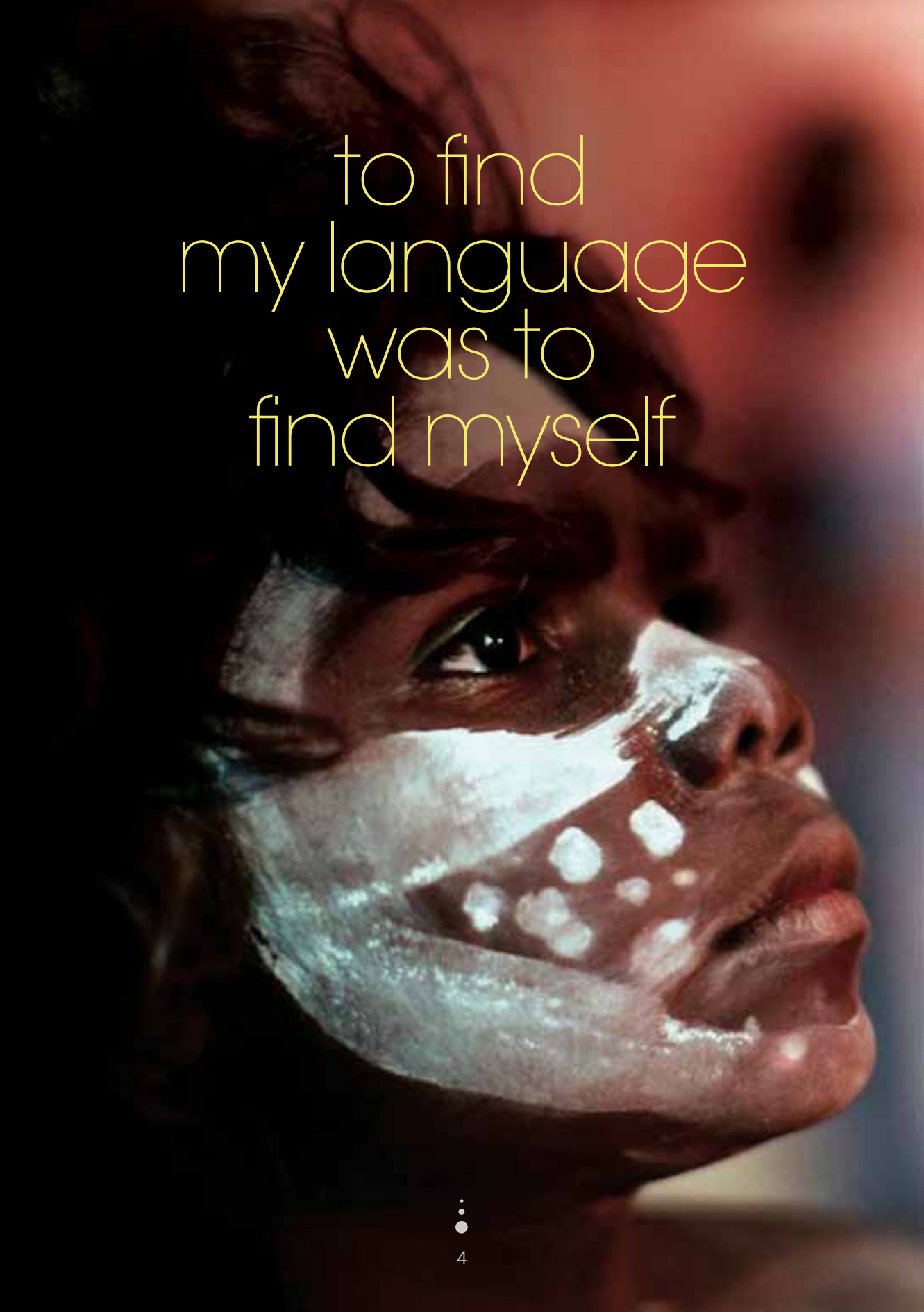
*These people do not ask us to be grateful, but
we should be. And the best way to express our
gratitude to those who have gone before us is
pay it forward. We can express our gratitude by
working to make the world a better place in the
same way that others have made it a better place
for us. As the saying goes, we must plant trees
under whose shade we do not intend to sit."*

– (Andrew Bienkowski & Mary Akers)

The Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) Congress was held from the 7th to the 9th of September in Melbourne, with over 240 Australian and International participants. This event was a milestone in the evolution of EREA. Rather than being an event in its own right, however, the Congress was conceived of as being a catalyst for the ongoing growth of EREA, and therefore it was necessary to find ways in which the “event” of the Congress could continue to resonate in the lives of EREA into the future.

To keep the spirit of the Congress in our hearts and minds, let us consider the future impact and implications of the following *Signposts* that were articulated during the Congress as we **advance towards what can be...**

- ✎ Advocacy
- ✎ Co-responsibility
- ✎ Internationality
- ✎ Relationships with Church



to find
my language
was to
find myself

... a metaphor of voice & language

Kutcha Edwards is an Aboriginal man who was stolen from his mother, who had been denied contact with his culture, with his country, with his people. With incredible generosity he shared with a group of strangers something of his pain, his loss, his love for his mother. Early in his sharing he said the words: To find my language was to find myself. Kutcha sang a song – a lament really – of the sense of loss at not having received his language and culture at the feet of his parents and grandparents. What Kutcha was probably saying, at least in part, in this sad and lovely song, was that language gave him a key to his identity. It is that simple and that complex. This is Kutcha's story, and the story of his people, and needs to be heard and responded to in its own right by all people of conscience. At the same time, there are also lessons for us. Are we not all on a quest like Kutcha's? Less poignant and less ridden with pain and injustice, but nonetheless fundamental!

Reflect – Opportunities for us to discover our story and tradition

- 🌀 See, I have engraved you on the palm of my hand. Isaiah 49:16
- 🌀 Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion. – Brennan Manning

Respond – Challenges that may assist us to advance towards what can be!


- 👤 How do we articulate our language and how does it empower us for mission?
- 👤 Develop an identity statement for our team, board, school that embraces our language.



the world is God's agenda!

*What's happening
in the world matters to God.*

*What matters to God,
matters to us*



The congress challenged our thinking, often in the form of the seeming paradox of a “both/and” proposition. The welcome from Brother Philip Pinto, Congregation Leader of the Christian Brothers, embodied one such challenge – how can we be both part of the world – present to it – and yet provide an alternative perspective. Take some time with what Br Philip had to say. Consider the ideas he expresses relating to presence and being alternative. For example, he defines presence as the ability to be in a place and feel a part of that place. The place where he challenges us to be is ... the world. A tough challenge!

Reflect – Opportunities for us to discover our story and tradition

- ☪ Christianity is an alternative way of life. But the great temptation to an alternative community, because it wants to be accepted, is to imitate the dominant culture.
– Philip Pinto
- ☪ Humility will consist in recognizing that being in the universe can teach us what we ignore. – Rumi
- ☪ If you respect someone and respect their history it's because you believe they belong to the same human race as you do, not to some inferior version. – Amin Maalouf

Respond – Challenges that may assist us to advance towards what can be!

- ☪ How are we really present to the world we inhabit?
- ☪ Do we hold presence and being alternative in balance?
- ☪ As a team, how much time do we spend with areas of society we do not usually engage with?

the Congress through the eyes of the Touchstones

*... a vision for education
that is liberating, inclusive
and reaches out in justice and solidarity
within a spiritual context
founded in the gospel.*

The Charter and its four Touchstones figured prominently throughout the Congress. The spirituality of the Charter was reflected through the use of the Touchstones. This spirituality is at the heart of the Charter and calls us forward to explore building a vision for education in our schools that opens the hearts and minds of the young for a better world for all. The Touchstones promote a vision for education that is liberating, inclusive and reaches out in justice and solidarity within a spiritual context founded in the gospel. We were and still are continually invited to enter into the world of the Charter to explore the richness of its intent and the lived reality of its core within our communities. Embracing the fullness of the Charter remains the challenge.

Reflect – Opportunities for us to discover our story and tradition

Spend some time reflecting on the impact of the touchstones in the life of the school/community:

- 🌀 Liberating Education – We open hearts and minds, through quality teaching and learning experiences, so that through critical reflection and engagement each person is hope-filled and free to build a better world for all.
- 🌀 Gospel Spirituality – We invite all people into the story of Jesus and strive to make his message of compassion, justice and peace a living reality within our community
- 🌀 Inclusive Community – Our community is accepting and welcoming, fostering right relationships and committed to the common good.
- 🌀 Justice and Solidarity – We are committed to justice and peace for all, grounded in a spirituality of action and reflection that calls us to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalised and the Earth itself.

Respond – Challenges that may assist us to advance towards what can be!

- 👉 How do we integrate the Charter Touchstones into our school programs?
- 👉 Consider the role the Touchstones play in the reflection processes in the school/community.
- 👉 Do we embrace the Touchstones within our varied meeting structures?

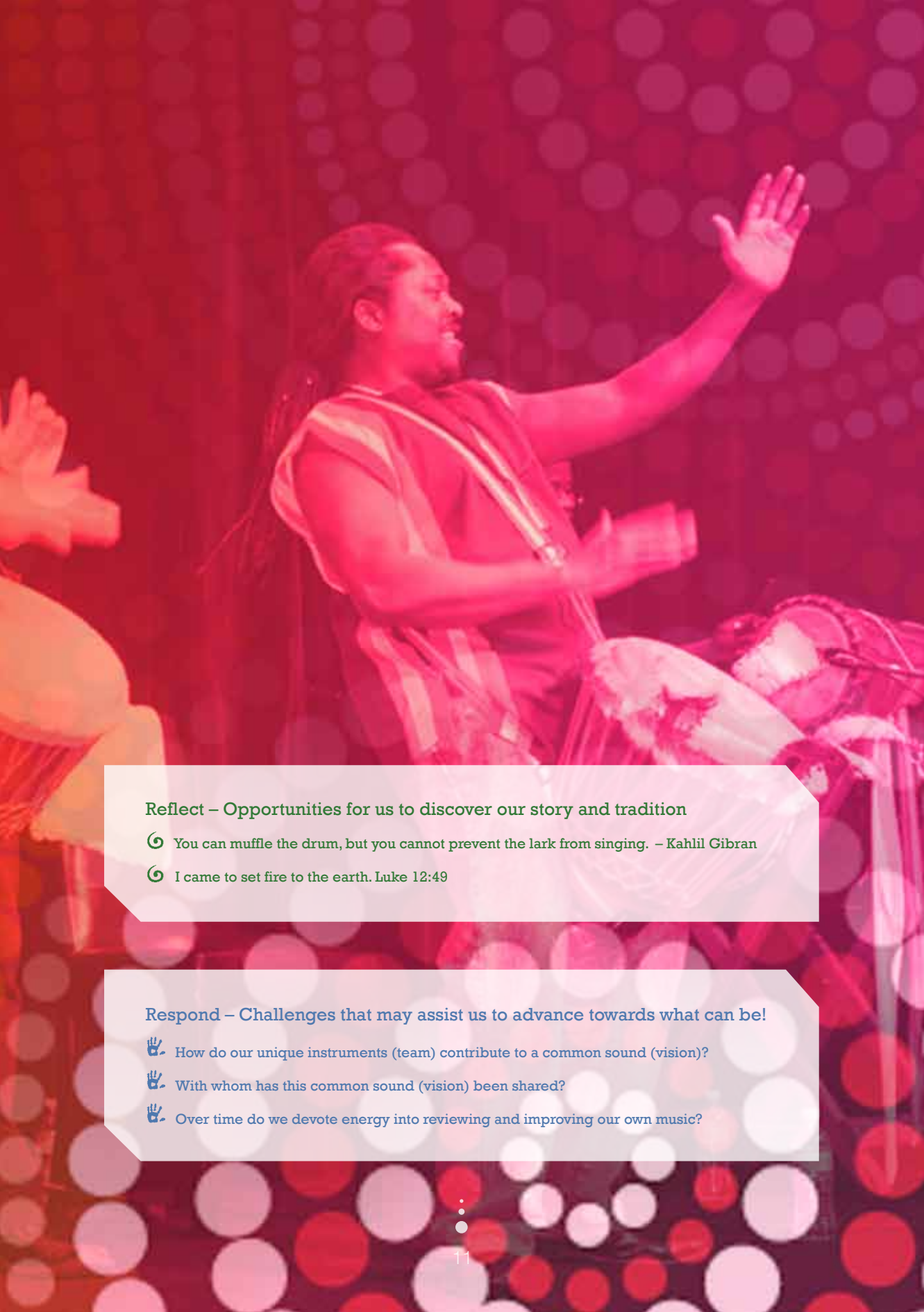
the rhythm of life

*During the Congress the last morning
began in suspense!*

Gathered in the vestibule, we waited at the series of doors that gave access to our usual gathering space. The doors were firmly closed. There was SOMETHING going on behind them – they had told us – but we weren't quite sure what. What was going to be asked of us?

The doors opened on a sea of traditional wooden drums – one on each chair. What? All those drums! Where should I sit? Will I be asked to do something that will make me uncomfortable ... embarrass me? OK. This one will do. Not too close to the front, not too close to the edges. The music started. Wouldn't it be great to play like that? I wonder how my drum will sound? Hesitant thumps and bangs from around the room. The Master Drummer strode onto the stage and started indicating that there were things we needed to be doing – sometimes together, sometimes in separate groups. Underneath it all there was the steady beat of the big bass – the dun – that transformed a couple of hundred people making noise into something that was beginning to resemble an ensemble.

And as the driving pattern continued, and people played their appointed part, there was still space for people to improvise – adding richness to the mix, or even to falter, to rest, to make mistakes. And because we were all carrying the underlying beat, it didn't matter; because that's the way we make music together.

A person with long hair, wearing a striped shirt, is shown from the side, playing a drum. Their right hand is raised in the air. The background is dark with many small, out-of-focus lights, creating a bokeh effect. The entire image has a red color overlay.

Reflect – Opportunities for us to discover our story and tradition

- 🌀 You can muffle the drum, but you cannot prevent the lark from singing. – Kahlil Gibran
- 🌀 I came to set fire to the earth. Luke 12:49

Respond – Challenges that may assist us to advance towards what can be!

- 👋 How do our unique instruments (team) contribute to a common sound (vision)?
- 👋 With whom has this common sound (vision) been shared?
- 👋 Over time do we devote energy into reviewing and improving our own music?

we are the church!

*... the Church has always been
an alternative way of life.*

Robert Fitzgerald, an Australian Productivity Commissioner, provided a provocative viewpoint. As Brother Philip Pinto encouraged us to remember that the Church has always been an alternative way of life, Robert Fitzgerald took us to the inner life of the Church, and recognized the growing cynicism of many about institutional Church, and the problems of allowing this to grow unchecked.

Reflect – Opportunities for us to discover our story and tradition

“So many today are critical of the attempt to reassert the former model of church, based on the notion of centralised clerical authority. For many, this is not the solution to our problems but a sure way to increase them. You have the chance, the opportunity and the obligation to show a better way, to shape a better future. But it is crucial to remind ourselves of what a radically different approach to the role of the laity existed for much of our nation's church life. Pope Leo XIII, around the end of the 1800s said this:
‘It is beyond dispute and quite unambiguously clear that two ranks exist in the Church that are of quite different nature, the pastor and the flock, in other words the leader and the people. The first of these two ranks has the rank of teaching, governing and directing people in life and establishing the necessary rules.’ Of you and I, he said ‘the other has the duty of submitting itself to the former, obeying him, carrying out his orders and paying him honour.’




This sentiment was embedded in the Canon Law of 1917. But then, following the Second Vatican Council the Code was rewritten in 1983. Under the heading "The People of God" the new Code stated: *"The Christian faithful are those who, in as much as they have been incorporated in Christ through baptism, have been constituted as the people of God. For this reason, since they have become sharers in God's priestly, prophetic and royal office in their own manner they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world, in accord with the condition proper to each one."*

Each of you are here present as a member of Christ's faithful, as a member of the people of God and are individually and collectively called upon to exercise God's priestly, prophetic and royal office. But as leaders you have the chance to shape and model church within each of your educational communities.

Recently I was listening on the ABC to Captain Richard de Crespigny the Qantas pilot of the A380 which on 24th November 2010, just 4 mins after take-off, suffered a catastrophic explosion in one of his engines. Over 120 warnings flashed up with consequential problems and faults. He recounted that at a critical time he realised that he had to stop looking at what was wrong and start looking at what was working. Based on the data he said: *"We have a plane and we can fly it"*. Today we also have to look at what is right and good in church. My view is *"We have a church and we are it"*.

Today, whilst recognising all that is problematic in church surely it is time to celebrate that which is good."

Respond – Challenges that may assist us to advance towards what can be!

-  Can we continue to connect to the broader church and its communities in the parish, in Catholic welfare, health and aged services?
-  As leaders what are the values you cherish and practise in bringing church alive in your school?
-  Do you celebrate what is the good in Church in your community?



being authentic is an accounting of the heart

*The Executive Director of EREA
Wayne Tinsey addressed the Congress
at its conclusion.*

If EREA is called, as Wayne said, to an advocacy of the heart – then this was an accounting of the heart. It named the strength of the “freedom of the congregation of Christian Brothers”, the creation of the space to celebrate priorities, and the commitment to pursue elements that are not easily measured. This is an accounting that needed to be pursued with the same seriousness as the more traditional measures with which schools have long been familiar. He spoke of the ways in which EREA could become a natural force of leadership in Catholic education generally and in the Edmund Rice network in particular.

Reflect – Opportunities for us to discover our story and tradition

☪ We must not let fear, attachment to the past or seduction by other agendas deter us from being single-minded in our commitment to a vision for Edmund Rice education in which we proclaim education as liberation, as a means of experiencing full humanity and the vehicle of 'good news' to those who are at the margins of our society. Let us continue to challenge one another and have those difficult conversations as we journey into deeper authenticity. To do anything less is to betray the mission we have been given and the foundations upon which we stand. – Wayne Tinsey

☪ Perhaps the day will come where the validity of one's spirituality will be judged not by the correctness of one's theology but by the authenticity of one's spiritual life. When that day comes, an authentically spiritual Buddhist and an authentically spiritual Christian may find that they have more in common with each other than they do with those in their respective religions who have failed to develop their spirituality. – David N. Elkins

Respond – Challenges that may assist us to advance towards what can be!

- ☪ How can we both respond to parent needs and influence their thinking to new and different priorities?
- ☪ How can we serve both those within our communities and those beyond?
- ☪ What is our voice as EREA – and for whom do we raise it?
- ☪ What leadership role are we as EREA prepared to take in rethinking Catholic education?



to include
or not to include!

*If you want to exclude the poor
from your school, make rules.*

Sister Cyril Mooney ibvm has taken on the educational conventions of a nation of over one billion – India.

Having taken over a school whose reputation was built on providing an education for the rich and privileged, she began to be challenged by what she called the “vicious cycle of affluence”, going on to say that “unless your eyes are open to see it, you don’t even see the poverty”. She told the story of how initially she opened up her school to the street children and slum dwellers, and then opened the eyes of her privileged students as they took education out to the streets and the countryside.

She offered the challenge that we need to interrogate our structures at least as closely as our curriculum if we are serious about inclusion.

Reflect – Opportunities for us to discover our story and tradition

- 🌀 Look very carefully at your structures, and weed out all the structures that are made purely for the convenience of the staff. – Sister Cyril
- 🌀 A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being. – Pope Francis
- 🌀 Poverty calls us to sow hope.... Poverty is the flesh of the poor Jesus, in that child who is hungry, in the one who is sick, in those unjust social structures. – Pope Francis

Respond – Challenges that may assist us to advance towards what can be!

- 👉 To what extent are we prepared to face up to Sr. Cyril’s challenges?
- 👉 What are the elements of inclusivity in our community?
- 👉 Do we truly believe that diversity that comes from inclusion improves and adds value to our school/community?
- 👉 How are we exclusive?

a band of brothers

... searching new horizons.

The story of the Christian Brothers is a beacon for the educational mission of EREA. The incredible work of the brothers was pioneered by the Irishman Patrick Ambrose Treacy and his brothers, whose twin capacities for faith and hard work became so much a part of the charism of the Australian Christian Brothers.

This Australian story has had its highs and lows along with deep regrets; however the contribution of these men to Australian Catholic education cannot be underestimated. EREA has been founded on the shoulders of the Christian Brothers whose vision continues to inspire us today – searching new horizons.

“As he (Ambrose Treacy) stood at the threshold of his Australian adventure, he was not to know that he would see more of the country than any of his fellow passengers. In the years ahead his travels would take him from Melbourne north to the Gulf of Carpentaria and west to Kalgoorlie and Perth, with all places in between.....However all his energies were now directed to the mission that had brought him to this new country, It was more than a country. It was a continent. He would not baulk at the challenges it presented and he would come to know it as few others did.”

– Br Regis Hickey

Reflect – Opportunities for us to discover our story and tradition

☞ *God's Spirit is on me; he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the burdened and battered free, to announce, "This is God's year to act!"*

– Luke 4:18-19

☞ *A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter
the course of history.* – Mahatma Gandhi

☞ *I will meet the uncertainty and challenge of the days ahead with an open heart.*

– Blessed Edmund Rice

Respond – Challenges that may assist us to advance towards what can be!

- ☞ How do we articulate the essence of Edmund's charism in our community?
- ☞ Does Edmund's vision help us to more clearly understand and live out the Gospel of Jesus?
- ☞ As a lay group inheriting the charism of a Religious order, what are the lessons (positive and negative) we need to discern from the story of the Christian Brothers in Australia?



we are the world

*... the limitless possibilities of belonging
to a global community*

The Congress experience challenged us to look beyond our shores and provided us with richness such an opportunity offered.

We gathered with our colleagues from around the world as an Edmund Rice Education family representing all continents. This experience opened our eyes to the limitless possibilities of belonging to a global community – we are the world.

The Director of Caritas Australia Jack De Groot helped us see the potential that this understanding has for how we might educate young people as global citizens.

Reflect – Opportunities for us to discover our story and tradition

🌀 “Addressing the structural justice; how our lives are linked to the experience of ‘the poor’; the causes, interrelationship of poverty etc..

We so rarely challenge the structural; we so rarely challenge sense of entitlement; our lifestyles and the sustainability of them; corporate behavior. This is the world our young people need to be educated for. Not a popular message. But without it we ain’t going to solve the injustice thing.....and the link to Catholic Social Teaching encyclicals etc. is brilliant.

We must prepare our students for a planet under threat. Environment and sustainability and human behaviour are curriculum areas that are therefore essential.

The increasing gap between rich and poor is the challenge in terms of poverty. We talk about the end of poverty.

What about the end of self-serving affluence?

Consistently presenting the world to our young people through the lens of our rich tradition of Catholic values is the work you must do. It’s not an option. It’s constitutive of the preaching of the Gospel which our schools are here for.” – Jack de Groot

Respond – Challenges that may assist us to advance towards what can be!

👉 What might be the key pedagogical principles for a truly global perspective and how might they be applied in your community?

👉 How can your community develop mutually beneficial and respectful links with the wider world?

👉 What are the connectors between your school community and the EREA National Network ?

who do we say we are?

This is how Mary Ellen O'Donoghue rsj, one of the Congress "listeners"
captured her first day's experience:

*From darkness to light
the mystery is held.
Invitation to truth
alive with God's spirit,
the mystery is held
in fragile vessels. The light shines
that the stories may be told
and the mystery be held
by this community.*

"It is a long way from the systematic summaries and intellectual abstractions
that can be so frequently a part of such a gathering.

Ultimately the Congress was an attempt to engage people, heart and soul,
body and mind, in our shared identity. We sang, we listened, we prayed, we
thought, we drummed, we ate and drank, we looked outward,
we made symbols, we looked inward ...

It was a Congress of experience, not of product. The Congress experience continues
to advance towards what can be ... "

Congress Blessing

The Spirit of God be upon me.
Open me to wisdom that comes
From the heart, soul and mind.

Spirit of God,
Be my mind,
Be my eyes,
Be my ears,
Be my heart,
Be my soul,

So that I may continue to walk
With dignity and pride in my journey.

Spirit of God,
We are your people.

May we hold on to what is good,
Hold on to what we believe is our truth,
Learn from the past,

Continue to engage with the present.
Hold on to what we must do as we envision the future
Even if it is a long way from here.

STEPPING *stones*

*Advancing towards
what can be ... continuing
the Congress story*



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...educating for liberation and possibility