

EREA Principals' Sustainability Statement

Solidarity through Care for Our Common Home



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.

On June 1 2017, Principals and Ecological Educators gathered at the National Arboretum in Canberra to contribute to the development of this EREA Ecological Sustainability Statement. A declaration aimed at informing all within Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) of the importance EREA places on opening ourselves to live in solidarity with all life on this fragile planet was subsequently developed. It would give guidance to all school communities as they recognise that the education of young people provides a rich platform for nurturing the legacy of a more hope-filled planet.

This statement recognises and values the unique character and story of each school, while, at the same time, it calls each to respond to the challenge issued by Laudato si' and our Touchstones. It acknowledges that each EREA school serves its own community in its unique ecological, geographical, social and cultural context. Yet, at the same time, it echoes the call for each school to addresses key challenges which relate to the sustainability of the entire planet.

This statement also informs all outside the EREA community that its schools are places which value ecological justice as it is expressed in the Touchstones, particularly those of Justice and Solidarity and Liberating Education.

Our Aspiration

In his encyclical Laudato si', Pope Francis declares, "A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out in the long path to renewal." As educators, we have a unique opportunity to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature." (Laudato si' #215)

Inspired by this urgent declaration, we the leaders of EREA Schools, invite our communities to:

- Contribute to a cultural transformation, whereby an ecological conversion of heart and mind can take place.
- Come together to care for our common home as a way of embodying our commitment towards becoming a national community in mission.
- Be awakened to a new reverence for life and a firm resolve to achieve sustainability. (Earth Charter 2000)
- Come to experience our common home as a "joyful mystery to be contemplated." (Ls' #12)

The Touchstones - Our Inspiration

A Liberating Education that seeks to 'open hearts and minds', proposes an "attitude of the heart, one which is capable of being fully present, one which accepts each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full." (Ls' #226) Gospel Spirituality comes alive in our "remembrance of the way in which Jesus recognised all creatures as loved by God and revelatory of God." (Denis Edwards). Our intention for Inclusive Community finds expression in the "radical interconnectedness of all life, where genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from mutual support, justice and faithfulness to others." (Ls' #70)

Our commitment to Justice and Solidarity, is renewed by our "desire to educate in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God's world, in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment." (Ls' #214)

Our Challenge

It is the responsibility of school communities to demonstrate leadership and proactivity in responding to Laudato si'. In the words of Professor Tim Flannery, when "climate change impinges upon us" we need to follow the superb act of leadership by Pope Francis "and take the message to our schools and homes". Because our times call for a "distinctive way of looking at things" (Ls' #111) and a shift from separateness to wholeness, we commit to:

- A strategic approach to creating a sustainable community, integrating ecological goals and outcomes into the intent of our planning
- Establishing strong communication channels and forums within our schools so that the message of ecological sustainability finds an authentic voice
- Providing opportunities and resources to staff and students to grow in and demonstrate leadership in this critical area
- Developing partnerships with organisations committed to ecological and sustainable practices

Because our contribution is to provide educational experiences that "facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning" (Ls' # 210), we commit to:

- Investigating and creating real opportunities within the curriculum to embed an understanding of ecological sustainability
- Enabling staff to collaborate in developing resources and processes which highlight and strengthen an understanding of Laudato si' and ecological sustainability
- Committing to the development of learning spaces which facilitate an appreciation of the created world and encourage reflective practice

Because our challenge is to meet the demands of contemporary education by weaving together the ecological and the social, "to integrate questions of justice...so as to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (LS #49), we commit, through our learning programs and activities, to:

- Highlighting the causal relationship between ecological harm and poverty through our justice programs and immersions
- Learning about the connection between environmental degradation and the displacement of people and communities
- Affirming and promoting the scientific research which confirms the crisis of climate change

Practical Applications

- All in EREA are encouraged to embrace these Principles of Sustainability according to their role in EREA.
- The Principles are to inform approaches used for implementing an action plan and determining the accompanying indicators of success.
- The EREA Council, EREA Board, EREA Executive and school communities will determine the way in which the Principles of Sustainability will be implemented at their level.