

EREA BIRTHDAY MESSAGE 2021

CELEBRATING 14 YEARS

We are being called to open the minds, hearts and hands of all our students to the wonder and freedom of a faith that does justice.

OCTOBER 2021

Dear EREA Community,

In what has been a tumultuous year for EREA, we rest temporarily and take this opportunity on the birthday of our 14th year to reflect. Our brief pause gives us a chance to recall the fruits of our labour, the commitment of our staff across all 55 schools and celebrate our charism and culture inspired by Blessed Edmund.

Generations will look back on these times and quite rightly marvel at the achievements of the EREA community. They may well wonder at our ability to carry on during the tough times and take inspiration from the tenacity and professionalism all across the EREA community have shown. On-line learning, on-line meetings, planning, student and family support, communicating to ensure all are included are but a few of the many tasks our staff continue to complete. Distance may have exponentially increased the challenge but always being aware of family, staff and student wellbeing.

However, the challenge is not over. The year ahead requires us to look

beyond COVID-19 and never forget that we are focused on and committed to a *Liberating Education, a Gospel Spirituality, an Inclusive Community and to Justice and Solidarity*. It is these, our Touchstones, that will prevail well beyond the pandemic that has challenged us so deeply.

Pope Francis laid bare our true challenge:

"How do we help our young people not see a university degree as synonymous with higher status, with more money or social prestige? It is not synonymous with that. How can we help make their education a mark of greater responsibility in the face of today's problems, the needs of the poor, concern for the environment?"

For us at EREA, this is a call to remain true to our Touchstones. A call to reflect on our culture, determine what is most important in our work and constantly remind ourselves where we have come from and where we are headed. We cannot achieve this staggering challenge as individuals.



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But we can as a community united behind a common commitment to our charism as expressed in our Touchstones. It is this life-giving community to which we all belong that is cause for celebration, especially as we turn 14.

The challenge set before us by Pope Francis requires us to go beyond our work, beyond our achievements and to walk humbly together with the love of Jesus in our hearts. We are being called to open the minds, hearts and hands of all our students to the wonder and freedom of a faith that does justice. With Christ at our centre, we can be courageous, collegial, respectful and inclusive. This is the leadership at the heart of EREA, a 'servant leadership' made manifest in the life of Blessed Edmund Rice.

We pray that we may build on the unity that binds us to our common goals. That we may extend this unity through a deep and abiding relationship with each other, our Church and our Saviour. It is in building our community with these foundations that we can truly become liberated, inclusive and gospel centred. This is indeed something to celebrate and take pride in during the course of this most difficult year.

Let us also pause a while and reflect on the great legacy left to us by the Christian Brothers. Not only the 55 schools across the country, and the almost 40,000 students we reach out to,

but also the rich tradition and culture focused on a gospel spirituality and commitment to a liberating education. A culture of inclusion, acceptance, equality, integrity and unity. It serves us well to dwell on these foundational aspects of who we are for it helps us determine who we will become in the years ahead.

In the year ahead we ask you all to invite all our students into the story of Jesus and strive to make his message of compassion, justice and peace a living reality within our community. We ask you to open the hearts and minds of our students 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. Let us make this coming year an opportunity for all our students to ground themselves in a spirituality of action and reflection and assist them to stand in solidarity with those who are marginalised and the Earth itself.

Finally, let us challenge each student to not only tolerate difference but to value and welcome all standing together as one. If we have learnt anything this last 18 months, surely it is that going forward, our power and strength lies in the compassion, love and care shared among us all.

Thank you for all you do for Edmund Rice education across Australia. We deeply appreciate it.

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