




EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

the RICEAN

SEMESTER TWO – 2021 – VOL 33



Reconciliation Australia Award for St Virgil's College



EREA acknowledges the Aboriginal Peoples as the Traditional Owners of the Country/s on which our schools and offices are located. We also acknowledge the Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the Traditional Owners of the Torres Strait Islands.

We pay our respect to Ancestors, Elders, and Leaders of the future as well as to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the EREA community. Edmund Rice Education Australia values the spiritual connectedness and relatedness to Country and to all living systems of the world's oldest continuous living cultures.

We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowings and recognise and honour their stories, cultures, and achievements as we walk together for mutual liberation and a truth-telling history for all Australians. In this spirit, we accept the invitation contained in the Uluru Statement from the Heart to listen to the First Peoples of Australia and work together for reconciliation, justice, equity, and healing.

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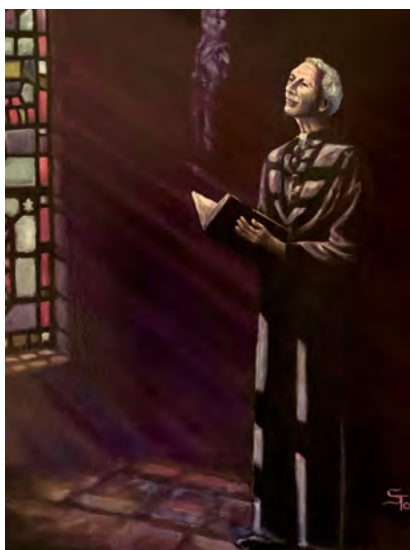
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Christmas Blessings

Message from the EREA Executive Director

As Christians we subscribe to hope because we know that through everything – the last few years in particular - we remain steadfast in the comfort and knowledge that Emmanuel – God, is with us.

Hope therefore is part of our Catholic DNA. And hope, which leads to joy, is our approach to Advent as we patiently await the birth of the Christ child. Our patience may have been sorely tested again this year, and it is fair to say that our whole society and thus our schools as well, have been challenged. However, we remain patient and to continue to be hopeful.

I know you have accepted the challenge to find new and novel ways of being community for one another, of inviting and engaging students in their learning and promoting a sense of calm and hope with them. Thank you for all of this.

I am so proud of the efforts that our teachers, support staff, school leaders, parents and friends of our schools and advisory council members have undertaken. You have all responded magnificently and ensured that our students are cared for. Thank you for living out the Gospel message of Jesus and the legacy of Blessed Edmund Rice with each other and with your families.

EREA is an organisation made up of wonderful individuals. You all have strong connections to your local community, and you also belong to a national and international movement that seeks to educate through liberating practices, and these are exercised with care, compassion, and where necessary with forgiveness and with love.

May you remain hope-filled during this Advent season and rejoice as Christmas arrives.

From all of us at the National Office, thank you again for all you do, and we wish you a blessed, safe, and peace-filled Christmas.

Dr Craig Wattam

Executive Director

Edmund Rice Education Australia

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OUR VOICE IN LEADERSHIP

Recognising Extraordinary Charter Leadership

The 2021 EREA Charter Leadership Awards were presented recently to four wonderful leaders from across our network of schools. The Awards recognise the outstanding contribution of women and men in the service of their school communities, in support of the vision and mission of EREA.

Liberating Education

Michael Gallagher – Wollongong Flexible Learning Centre, New South Wales



Michael is a teacher at the Wollongong FLC. He has worked with EREA in the Flexi space for 21 years and is regarded as an exemplary practitioner in Operating by Principles, Common Ground and Trauma Aware Practices. Michael's knowledge, expertise, skill and experience has contributed significantly to the successful delivery of meaningful educational outcomes for countless young people. He has rewritten Certificate I and II courses that have gained accreditation and are exemplars for other providers. Michael takes time to mentor, coach and train staff. He is known as the 'keeper of the four Principles' - the fundamental precepts that must be practised to ensure young people are engaged in their learning. Michael has remained passionately steadfast in upholding these Principles as a teacher and is an inspiration to others in the field.

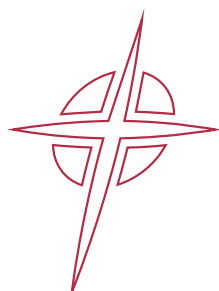
Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice tradition strive to offer a *Liberating Education* based on a *Gospel Spirituality* within an *Inclusive Community* committed to *Justice and Solidarity*.

Gospel Spirituality

Regina Rowan – Parade College, Melbourne, Victoria



Regina is teacher at Parade College, Bundoora and Preston, who has recently stepped aside as the Assistant Principal Student Wellbeing after 15 years of dedicated service. Regina currently holds the role of Special Projects Officer. Her work in establishing and embedding the College's restorative practice approach to supporting students and staff has been transformational. She continues to be an instructional leader through her witness and modelling of respectful relationships for the entire college community. It has informed how the College upholds Child Safety and agency for student voice. Both are now embedded in the College Pastoral Care Program where students are supported by Tutor Teachers to use their voice to be heard, believed and protected. Regina is a passionate champion for the wellbeing of students. This was demonstrated powerfully this year during COVID when Regina planned an online Valette Assembly video accompanied by a hamper that was sent to all families so they could share a meal virtually. Regina creates opportunities, space and prayerful reflection for those in the community suffering loss, hardship and grief. Her heart beats 'for the other' in the true sense of Blessed Edmund Rice's invocation to 'Live Jesus in our Hearts – Forever.'



Our Voice in Leadership

Inclusive Community



Andrew Kirkpatrick – Ignatius Park College,
Townsville, Queensland

Andrew is the Indigenous and Multicultural Program Leader at Ignatius Park College in Townsville.

His contribution to the College's cultural awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, land, art and heritage has been immense.

This includes his passion in maintaining a family and community space that celebrates the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Andrew's advocacy for First Nations students transitioning to employment through the Journey2Jobs program has been outstanding with over 95% of students enrolled in the program securing employment. Andrew's list of initiatives includes leading the cultural dance troupe, championing the Iggy Park Deadly Awards, coordinating the Palm Island Immersion experience, and presenting as a keynote speaker at EREA Reconciliation forums.

Andrew's cultural capital as an Aboriginal man and his commitment to Reconciliation has strengthened relationships between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to achieve exceptional outcomes towards advancing reconciliation.

Justice and Solidarity



Mark (Bushy) Smith – St Virgil's College,
Hobart, Tasmania

Mark is a Learning Support Officer at St Virgil's College, Hobart. His passion for land care, reconciliation and sustainability has made an indelible impression on the College. He has created an Outdoor Learning Environment which allows students to maintain and harvest a range of seasonal fruits and vegetables throughout the year. It has become a place of connection, engagement and purpose for many students with diverse learning needs. Mark has also included students and staff in a land care project to return the college property of 70 acres to its native state.

It includes working closely with Aboriginal ecological activist Jamie (Jam) Graham Blaire as part of the College's Tunapri Makuminya Project to conserve and regenerate native flora as part of a cultural development initiative. The project has identified 50 plants of significance on the Austins Ferry campus. Mark is also a member of the College's Reconciliation Action Plan Committee which saw St Virgil's recognised in the 2021 Narragunnawali Reconciliation Awards in November. Mark is dedicated to giving students real and practical experiences in land management, appreciation and cultural awareness.



Andrew Kirkpatrick being presented the Inclusive Community Award
by Ignatius Park College Principal, Shaun Clarke

OUR VOICE IN LEADERSHIP

EREA Conversations Celebrating 200 Years of Catholic Education

To celebrate 200 years of Catholic Education, Dr Craig Wattam hosted conversations with four prominent Church leaders, who offered insights from their unique perspectives and life experiences about Catholic education and mission into the future.

The Hon Jacinta Collins

Executive Director

National Catholic Education Commission

We can have great faith in the future of Catholic education because we are focused on our core mission of providing the opportunity of a Christ-centred education to enrich the faith lives of students and staff, and ensuring excellence in education through a determined focus on improvement and meeting the educational needs of all students.

Archbishop Peter Comensoli

Archbishop of Melbourne

At the heart of who we are is not all the buildings but the person of Jesus Christ, who enters into our lives and who we then share with others.

Fr Greg Boyle sj

Founder

Homeboy Industries, USA

The measure of our compassion lies not in the service of those on the margins ... but in our willingness to see ourselves in kinship with them.

Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann

Senior Australian of the Year 2021

We wait on God, too. His time is the right time. We wait for him to make his Word clear to us. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of dadirri (that deep listening and quiet stillness) his way will be clear ... If our culture is alive and strong and respected, it will grow. It will not die. And our spirit will not die. And I believe that the spirit of dadirri that we have to offer will blossom and grow, not just within ourselves, but in our whole nation.



Our Voice in Leadership

*... If our culture is alive and strong and respected,
it will grow. It will not die. And our spirit will not die.*

– Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann



The Hon Jacinta Collins

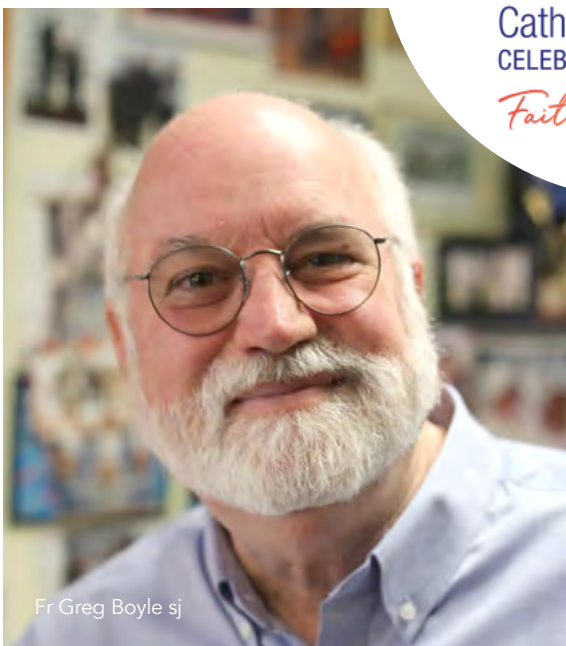


Archbishop Peter Comensoli



Catholic Education
CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

Faith in the future



Fr Greg Boyle sj

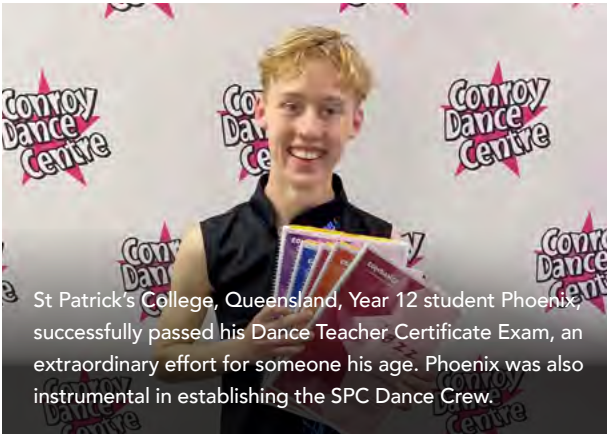


Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann

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Trinity College, Western Australia, recently celebrated Italian Week where students were treated to a variety of Italian activities, including the ancient art of gnocchi making.



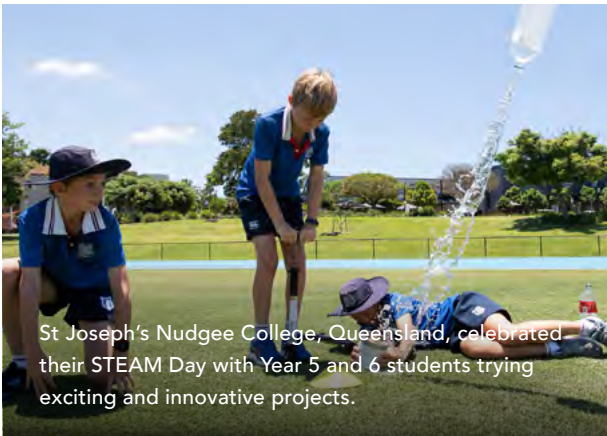
St Patrick's College, Queensland, Year 12 student Phoenix, successfully passed his Dance Teacher Certificate Exam, an extraordinary effort for someone his age. Phoenix was also instrumental in establishing the SPC Dance Crew.



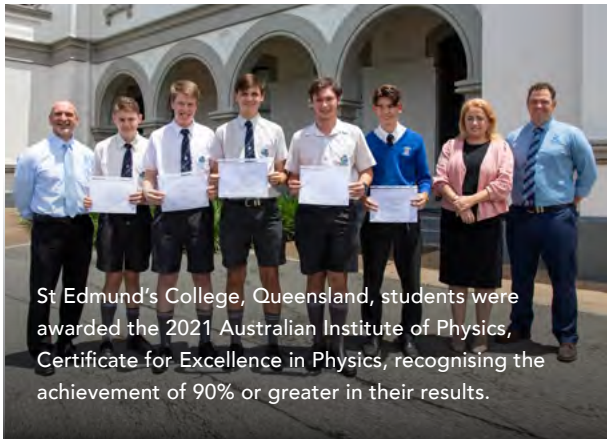
St Edmund's College, ACT, presented their donation of hampers for Vinnies Australia to SVDP member and Old Boy Don Jeffery.



CBC Adelaide, South Australia, Year 6 students introducing their Reception buddies to a chemistry class where they worked together to test candy canes in various solutions.



St Joseph's Nudgee College, Queensland, celebrated their STEAM Day with Year 5 and 6 students trying exciting and innovative projects.



St Edmund's College, Queensland, students were awarded the 2021 Australian Institute of Physics, Certificate for Excellence in Physics, recognising the achievement of 90% or greater in their results.

Liberating Education Across the Nation



Edmund Rice College, Western Australia, cattle club students presented at the 2021 Perth Royal Cattle Show.



Edmund Rice Flexi School, South Australia, students were part of the Ice Factor Spectacular Program and developed teamwork skills and built confidence in their own abilities through various activities.



St Laurence's College, Queensland, Year 9 student, Jackson, created an incredible art piece, requested by Queensland Health, for display at the South Brisbane/South Bank COVID Vaccination Centre.



St Mary's College, Victoria, students explored vision by dissecting a bull's eye to understand the components and structure of the eye, where the parts are located and how they work together to enable vision.



St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre, Northern Territory, recent past students completed Certificate 2 in Family Wellbeing at the Batchelor Institute.



Parade College, Victoria, student Kyden won the '2021 Mentalicious Mental Health Short Film Competition', with the video submission 'Reflect', that addressed themes of mental health and coping in social situations.

OUR VOICE IN LEARNING

Reconciliation Australia Award for St Virgil's College

*St Virgil's College, Hobart, has been honoured
with a Narragunnawali Award for its implementation of outstanding
reconciliation initiatives.*

Reconciliation Australia selected St Virgil's as the winner of the national school category at their recent award ceremony.

Acting Principal Mrs Heidi Senior acknowledged the award as being a special day in the life and history of the College.

"We continue to walk hand in hand with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community to achieve a just and reconciled island for all First Nation's people," she said.

**"This is a great platform to build upon
our work to date and to re-set our goals
for an even brighter future."**

Awards judging panel member Sharon Davis said St Virgil's College was chosen for the way in which reconciliation is embedded at all levels of the school, its exemplary inclusion of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community in its work, and for prioritising caring for Country on its campus grounds.

"St Virgil's College views reconciliation as a living, authentic and powerful means of achieving justice and peace for a collective future," she said.

St Virgil's, which is located on the Country of the muwinina people, was a finalist in the inaugural Narragunnawali Awards in 2017.

As part of the College's submission to the awards, St Virgil's showcased the tunapri makuminya Project, created by young palawa scientist Jamie Graham Blair.

Jamie was initially commissioned by the College in 2020 to create a biocultural survey of the Austins Ferry campus, one in which he hoped to identify every plant species on the campus which was of cultural significance to Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

However, the final project was much larger and came to include conservation and regeneration suggestions and proposals to expand cultural practice and cultural learning opportunities within the surrounding landscape.

The tunapri makuminya Project provides the capacity to significantly strengthen and deepen learning programs both in the classroom and beyond for St Virgil's students and the wider EREA network.

Our Voice in Learning



Partnerships in Action

Supporting students from Asylum Seeking Backgrounds



For the past five years, the EREA Youth Plus Foundation has been the lead agency for an initiative supporting students who have sought asylum in Australia to pursue educational opportunities.

This is a story of humble beginnings. It tells of a group of diligent, intelligent and resilient Year 12 students, and a few key people with big ideas, who dreamed of a way to include largely excluded people in an educational context.

The Maree Program, based at St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre, was the birthplace of the initiative we now know as the 'Living Support Fund'.

The Maree Program played a fundamental role in the story of asylum seeker student support in Melbourne and, despite its absence from the Learning Centre today, without it this story would never have been written.

The Maree Program was designed to deliver trauma-informed education through holistic, person-centre practices teamed with an EAL focused curriculum built around the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning.

In 2015, there was deep concern for the 12 students who had no further educational pathways available to them. Australian policy dictates that people who seek asylum on arrival in Australia are offered only temporary protection, even if they are assessed to be a refugee under Australia's new truncated "fast track" refugee processing. This meant that these students were unlikely to get a safe or legal job and at that time there were no scholarships for people seeking to get into university or TAFE.

This was and continues to be a significant structural barrier preventing full participation in Australian society.

In response, the EREA Youth Plus Foundation sought funding through the Victorian Government's Multicultural Community Grants program to provide pathways support for these graduate students, under the umbrella of what was called the Asylum Seeker Pathways Project (ASPP).

Our Voice in Learning

Several universities, corporates, state government and community stakeholders partnered with us, to set up a small but effective program allowing many of our students to access university pathways or supported paid employment on 12-month contracts.

The mission of the ASPP was three-fold:

- To develop, through grassroots networking and advocacy, a unique placement for every student seeking asylum who completed their Year 12 certificate.
- To support these students, through ongoing mentoring, regular contact through the challenges of tertiary education and/or workplace integration, so that they could remain on these pathways through the upcoming challenges.
- To implement a Living Support Fund (LSF) – a regular living payment to support students to maintain their study.

Student Achievements

Some of the wonderful achievements of the students have included:

St Joseph's graduates:

- Aamir - final year Mechanical Engineering (VU)
- Ghanieh - final semester double degree in Nursing/Midwifery (VU)
- Denes - final year Bachelor of Nursing
- Mujtaba - final year Civil Engineering (VU)
- Farhad - 5th year of fulltime work at a major superannuation company
- Erfan - completed Bachelor of Accounting (Fed Uni) and ongoing work at a major superannuation company
- Mel - completed traineeship at superannuation company, now ongoing role in a further finance company
- Sara - completed Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, now in fulltime work.
- Sohrab - ongoing position in administration in a state government department

- Hossein - 5th year as a Forest and Fire Operations Officers with state government
- Mohammad, Mohsin, Omid and Pedram - all completed at least 2 year traineeship as Forest and Fire Operations Officers with state government
- Mahmood - 2nd year Bachelor of Paramedicine (VU)
- Omid - finished Bachelor of Biomedicine (VU), now continuing with Bachelor of Physiotherapy (UQ)
- Taj - Bachelor of Primary Teaching (Fed Uni)
- Mohsen - 5th year of working at St Bernard's College in maintenance
- Mehran - Bachelor of Performing Arts (acting) (Fed Uni)

In 2018 when the ASPP formally concluded and the important transitions groundwork had been completed, a plan was devised to ensure that we could maintain our commitments to each student to provide support, mentoring and financial assistance to maintain their studies.

This paved the way for a collaborative partnership between the EREA Youth Plus Foundation and the HOPE Cooperative (HOPE Co-Op) in Melbourne. The HOPE Co-Op is a worker's co-operative, aiming for sustainability as a social enterprise. HOPE exists to help asylum-seeker background students to be supported, connected, socially and economically included. To do this they need to succeed in their tertiary studies.

This partnership has strengthened over the past three years as we continue to support our first cohort of students from St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre and many others.

These successes attest to the resilience of these young people, the power of partnership and the educational and socio-economic inclusion that is possible when you walk with people, and they are provided with appropriate support and care.

By Megan Hall and Sally Morgan

OUR VOICE IN THE CHURCH

Pope Francis – World Teachers’ Day Global Compact

Pope Francis recently joined leaders from other religions to write to educators to affirm the importance of global collaboration across education.

Greeting to teachers and educators on the occasion of their world day celebration

We, the representatives of various religions, have met today, 5 October 2021, in Rome, to share our conviction on the importance of promoting worldwide a “pact for education”, which takes into account the expectations and challenges of our time. Based on our firm awareness that religions can be sources and advocates of fundamental values for humanity, and on our shared, mounting concern for today’s crisis in education, we address these greetings to all teachers and educators the world over, since it is by a happy coincidence that today’s date has, since 1994, been designated by UNESCO as “World Teachers’ Day”.

We wish to thank you for your dedication and sacrifice as you carry out the noble mission of educating young people. And we wish to encourage you to continue on your journey, despite the difficulties and challenges of our time which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

May national leaders ever more esteem your profession, including recognising what is fair remuneration, assisting in your continuing education and creating better working conditions. We hope that each nation will give due value and recognition to your service, in the knowledge that the future of humanity depends on the quality of teachers and educators.

We ask you, teachers and educators, to put yourselves at the service of young people, keeping your feet on the ground but turning your eyes to the heavens. In order to achieve the goals of an education that is complete and inclusive, we all feel committed to:

- putting the human person at the centre of every educational process, to bring out what is special in everyone and to develop the students’ capacity for relations with others, as opposed to a throw-away culture;
- listening to and respecting the students, especially by esteeming women’s dignity so as to build with them a future of justice and peace, a life worthy of every person.
- providing the students with a holistic education – not only communicating information but also nurturing curiosity, a life of the spirit, and a sense of our ethical connections to each other and to all life on our planet.
- empowering the family and cooperating with other educational groups, educating them to be welcoming especially towards those who are most vulnerable and marginalised.
- researching new ways of understanding the economy and politics, as instruments at the service of people and the entire human family, and with a view to a holistic ecology, by teaching lifestyles that are more respectful of the environment.

In conclusion, we wish you all to continue in your educational mission with the joy of doing and the patience of listening. In these difficult times do not lose faith and know how to “look up” without fear. Let us work together for an open and inclusive education for each person and for all. We thank you once more for the work you are doing to make educational institutions places of experience, growth and dialogue. They are “works in progress” for constructing a humanism of fraternity.

*The Representatives of Religions
Rome, October 5, 2021*

Our Voice in the Church



‘Waterford Dreaming’

A tribute portrait to Blessed Edmund Rice

This portrait opposite of Blessed Edmund Rice was commissioned by John Couani, the Principal of St Pius X College, Chatswood, NSW. It was painted by Steve Todd, who was educated by the Christian Brothers and completed teacher training at ACU, Mount St Mary's Campus, Strathfield. Steve has served Catholic Education as a teacher and as a School Principal. Steve Todd now works as an artist from Start Studio.

The title of this portrait enlists an understanding for how Edmund Rice's vision became a reality. To find inspiration for connecting to this portrait of Blessed Edmund Rice, titled 'Waterford Dreaming' the following reflection is offered by two Australian Christian Brothers:

‘Edmund Rice, in a pensive moment seeking the gift of wisdom as to how best to respond to the hopes and needs of the poor, uneducated and unemployable youth who roam the streets of Waterford, Ireland.’

The spirit of Edmund Rice remains at the heart of the ministry of EREA schools around Australia. The vision and dreaming of the First Nations People of Australia ignites a renewed vision for those travelling with Edmund Rice education.

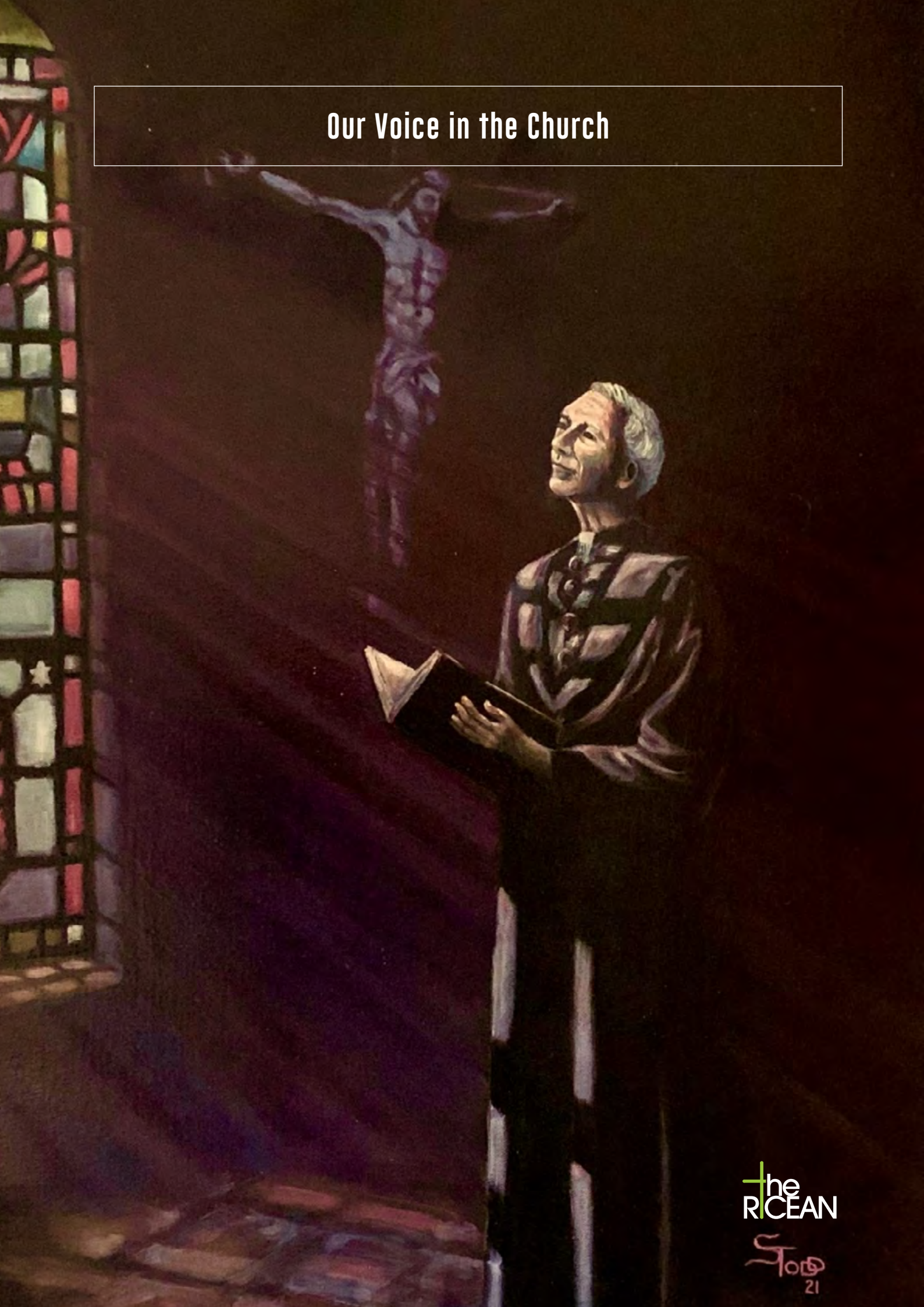
‘Dreaming’ is an Australian Aboriginal belief for which we are so grateful. It comes from this land's original culture and the world's oldest surviving civilisation.

We are inspired by the life and dreaming of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice and his strength of character in facing up to life's challenges. He encouraged each person to find hope and a way forward, knowing we are all loved by God, our family and within our community.

John Couani asked for the image of the crucifix to be added to the painting to highlight the full ministry of Blessed Edmund Rice and the work of Christian Brothers' education across Australia.

Blessed Edmund Rice,
pray for us. Amen.

Our Voice in the Church



OUR VOICE IN THE WORLD

EREBB GLOBAL CLASSROOM PARTNERS

Schools who are part of the EREBB Global Classroom Partners Pilot Program

NORTH AMERICA

St.Thomas More Collegiate, Vancouver, Canada
Vancouver College, Canada
St.Laurence High School, Chicago, US
Br Rice College High School, Detroit, US
Iona Preparatory School, New York, US
All Hallows High School, New York, US
Brother Rice High School, Chicago, US

EUROPE

Blarney Street School, Cork, Ireland
The Abbey School, Tipperary, Ireland
Ardscoil an Mara, Waterford, Ireland
Edmund Rice College, Glengormley, Nth Ireland

SOUTH AMERICA

Cardinal Newman College, Buenos Aires, Argentina
Fe y Alegria, Lima, Peru
Colegio Stella Maris, Montevideo, Uruguay

Due to the pandemic, the wonderful opportunities for our students to meet in person with other young people globally, has become impossible. EREA, in collaboration with Edmund Rice England, has developed the Global Classroom Partners Program to link young people from around the world to learn from, with and about each other, while exploring some of the world's most pressing issues. Groups of students (with their teacher) undertake two lessons then have two video conferences with a global classroom partner.

AFRICA

St. Joseph's Secondary School, Freetown, Sierre Leone
St John's Secondary School, Mongu, Zambia
St Boniface's High School, Kimberley, South Africa
St Patrick's College, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
CBC Mount Edmund, South Africa, Pretoria
Sinon College, Arusha, Tanzania
St John's College, Cape Town, South Africa
St. Ambrose Academy, Freetown, Sierra Leone

OCEANIA

Edmund Rice College, Wollongong, Australia
St Dominic's College, Kingswood, Australia
CBC Fremantle, Australia
Aquinas College, Perth, Australia
Ignatius Park College, Townsville, Australia
Ambrose Treacy College, Brisbane, Australia
St Joseph's College, Geelong, Australia
St Joseph's College Gregory Terrace, Brisbane, Australia
St Brendan's College, Yeppoon, Australia
St Patrick's College, Shorncliffe, Australia
St Pius X College, Chatswood, Australia
St Laurence's College, Brisbane, Australia

ASIA

St Edmund's College, Shilong, India
St Patrick's High School, Asansol, India
St Vincent's High School, Asansol, India
St John's High School, Chandigarh, India
St Augustine's High School, Vasai, India

Coloured dots show countries where there are Edmund Rice Schools

FINAL REFLECTION

Emmanuel – God With Us

What are we preparing for?

Emmanuel means 'God with us!' Sometimes at the end of the day I will go for a gentle walk around the suburb before retiring for the night. At present many homes are ablaze with Christmas lights.

It fascinates me that most of those homes have lighting displays that feature a Santa, mistletoe, reindeer, sleighs, snowmen and the occasional star. Occasionally, but not often, there will be a crib and magi; Joseph and Mary and the baby Jesus. All of this invites me to pause and reflect; what are we celebrating at Christmas? What is it all about? If it is just an end of year holiday are we missing something special?

On several occasions I have reflected on the 'God' question. Some people in my life struggle with the word and the concept of 'a God'! In some ways, if you look at the history of religion who could blame them. Far too often humans have killed, raped and pillaged their fellow human beings in the 'name of God'! Far too often humans have used religion as an excuse to keep the 'other' (those whose God name is different from ours) out: poor, disenfranchised, oppressed and excluded.

St Augustine of Hippo once said, "He (Jesus) departed from our sight that we might return to our hearts and find him there!" So as often as I can, I go within. I go to my heart space, my spirit space, my deepest me space. That is the dwelling place of awe, mystery, joy, peace, love, life – God! The sunrise or sunset that captures our attention and leaves us speechless, the new born baby that takes us to another sphere, the act of kindness or forgiveness that liberates us in the most mysterious of ways – all of these and more are the energy of love and I choose to call this energy God. The God

I believe in does not need a name or even to be named; it is the dancing with the love energy that matters – it is inviting that love energy to be real and core to my being that matters.

So I love Christmas. I love this Advent time as we prepare our hearts for Christmas. What are we preparing for? We are preparing our **eyes** to see love where too many cannot see anything. We are preparing our **ears** to hear the whisper and the cry of both love and pain; twins on life's journey. We are preparing our **hands** to open and not clench, to reach out and not fold away from giving. We are preparing our **feet** to walk to brother and sister, named or un-named, known or unknown – for they share this beautiful planet home with us and with us are stewards of it for our children and our children's children. We are preparing our **arms** to wrap around and hold close. We are preparing our **hearts** to give birth to hope over and over again.

The Christmas story, regardless of whether you are religious or not is one of our sacred stories. On one hand it is the story of poverty and oppression. An unwed mother, a confused father, love recognised by uneducated shepherds, no room – homeless and unwanted and in one version of the story – refugees to a foreign land escaping in fear of their lives. So much of that story sounds all too familiar in our present-day world!

But it is also the ultimate story of hope. Love, God, mystery – whatever name you choose – born, brought to life in the most unexpected of places and through the 'little unimportant ones' of life. The Temple priests were looking for a Messiah of power and privilege, of military might and conqueror of their Roman oppressors.

THE ULTIMATE STORY OF HOPE

So many had longed for and looked for a God who would come as powerful and strong.

But love never comes powerful and strong. Love never masquerades with power and privilege. Love is never at home with might and violent conquering.

So Emmanuel – ‘God with us’ – comes in the little, the small, the unimportant, the fragile and the insignificant. ‘God with us’ chooses a young girl, a village girl of no great importance and invites her to trust in the love energy within and around her. ‘God with us’ comes when unexpected, sneaks in through the back door, whispers in a voice that often only the childlike can hear and works magic in hearts that are open to wonder, awe, humility and life.

So over the coming days of holiday I will walk the beach, sit in silence, chat with friends, enjoy sunrise and sunset and just be. These days will slowly, hopefully, open my eyes to love around and within me, open my ears to love’s whisper and call, tingle my hands and arms and heart and urge my feet to once more walk the journey of love. These days will help me find love, peace, joy and hope in the little things and the little people, in the unexpected places and people (often not of my choosing) and in the heart movements that urge me, whisper to me – to trust love again!

If I do this, one small trusting moment at a time – then Emmanuel – God with us – will be born again through my and through your fragile and yet beautiful humanity! What a gift! Perhaps that gift is what Christmas is really about!

By Br Damien Price



*Edmund Rice Education Australia
offers a liberating education, based on a gospel spirituality,
within an inclusive community
committed to justice and solidarity.*



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA