



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION  
AUSTRALIA

CHARTER FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE  
**Edmund Rice Tradition**

*Our Touchstones*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia as the Traditional Owners of the land on which our schools and offices are placed. We are inspired and nurtured by the wisdoms,

spiritualities and experiences of our First Nations Peoples.

Together we work actively for reconciliation, justice, equity and healing.



## Our Context

“ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to  
the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. ”

LUKE 4:18-19

Two hundred and fifteen years since Edmund Rice commenced his first school for boys in Waterford, Ireland, one hundred and forty-nine years since Brother Ambrose Treacy stepped onto the dock at Station Pier in Melbourne and ten years since the commencement of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA), a third edition of the Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice tradition has been prepared. This revised Charter deepens our understanding of the Touchstones and confirms our sense of the call of the Holy Spirit into the future.

This Charter is intended to assist schools to offer a liberating education, based on a Gospel spirituality, within an inclusive community committed to justice and solidarity. In this way, schools will share in the prophetic mission of the Catholic Church to continue the work of Jesus and bring good news to the poor.

These schools reflect the diversity of the Australian community – early learning, primary and secondary, all-boys and co-education, alternative education, boarding schools, education for those with disabilities, for refugees, inner-city, urban, rural and remote schools. They operate within an increasingly challenging national and global context whereby the Church has less authority than in the past and while the demand for Catholic education is only increasing, the reasons for this are not always faith related.

Within the global concept of solidarity, our schools are called to live out the radical message of love and inclusion which Jesus lived and preached, particularly in regards to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, refugees, people of other faiths, races, sexual orientation and gender. This hope for transformation calls EREA communities into critical reflection, ensuring that the charism of Edmund Rice (his unique gift of service for the people of God) is lived out faithfully within the agenda of

this world. This charism of liberation, compassion and presence drives us and draws us into closer relationship with Christ, with each other and with the earth itself.

The Charter, together with the three documents on Foundations, Formation, and Renewal, describes our distinct, although not unique, identity as Edmund Rice Education Australia. The Charter provides a practical expression of this identity and so is crucial for use in decision-making, planning and review.

Now, a renewed Charter is being proclaimed. In the light of reflection and wide consultation, the Charter continues to use four touchstones\* to describe the culture of a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition which is striving for authenticity.

These touchstones give us ideals authentically linked with the charism which underpins the ministry in our schools and educational endeavours. They help us set our direction and define our goals as, following Blessed Edmund's vision, we continue to reflect and seek to make the Gospel a living reality in our communities.

The Council of Edmund Rice Education Australia proclaims this Charter and invites its implementation by all in Edmund Rice Education Australia.

Edmund Rice Education Australia Council  
September 2017

\*A touchstone is a fundamental or quintessential feature. In earlier times a touchstone was used to judge the purity of precious metals. A streak left on the touchstone was compared with a streak made by the pure metal. In this way authenticity was verified.



# Our Story

## God

God is beyond all words. But the words that come closest are love and truth. From the beginning of time, humans have built their lives around beliefs that were beyond full understanding. We have known that life is mysterious and also wonderful. The Bible tells a great story of the encounter between God and the human family. God's love is creative and liberating, healing and invigorating. The Bible constantly challenges us to laugh at our pretensions, and our needy and incomplete selves, but also calls us to find peace and purpose as children of God. Psalm 62 says 'my soul is thirsting for you, my flesh is longing for you.' The Edmund Rice family is a community that thirsts to know God and longs to work with God in caring for creation and building God's kingdom. We are people who make a daily leap of faith.

## Jesus

Jesus shows us the unbounded love of God. The most common title given to Jesus in the New Testament is 'rabbi', which means 'teacher.' Jesus was a teacher who asked his followers to be teachers also, by both word and deed. Throughout his life Jesus taught all he came across to act with justice and compassion and to challenge unjust structures that diminished people's humanity. These lessons also call us to express God's love and compassion, how ever painful that reality may be. Christ calls us to help carry the cross of all those in the world who suffer through injustice of any kind. The cross tells us that the Gospel is never convenient. The raising of Jesus to new life gives us hope: that God's love is true and real.

## Church

The Church exists to continue the historical work of Jesus. The Christian community has a history of many colours. It has been a vehicle for great creativity, discovery and wisdom. It has fostered the life of the mind and imagination, and called and challenged people to reach out beyond themselves to make a difference in the world. But there have been many times when the Church has added to the burdens of humanity. At the start of this millennium, St John Paul II asked forgiveness for all the wrongs of the Church. As time goes by, we become only more aware of our need for humility and honesty. At the same time, we know that our home, the Church, is the heritage we hold for our young people. We invite them into a community and a tradition in the hope that it will energise them to mend the world. The Eucharist is the extraordinary table God shares with very ordinary people. There we offer our simple gifts to God and find Jesus present again among us.

## Edmund Rice

Born in Callan, Ireland, in 1762, Edmund came to the bustling city port of Waterford as a young man. He was talented and energetic and soon became very wealthy, selling produce to ships that transported emigrants. He married in 1789 and the couple had a daughter, Mary. The tragic death of Edmund's wife led him into a time of mourning during which his relationship with God deepened. In his own sorrow, he was moved with compassion to recognise the needs of those around him. Edmund Rice left little in writing but some of the passages he marked in his Bible show where his imagination took fire. The



Ireland of Edmund's day was an unjust place where many lived in poverty and social structures deeply oppressed the majority of the population. He found in the story of Jesus the call to liberation that is at the heart of what Jesus preached. In 1802 he set up a free school for boys living in poverty. He wanted to help them have the life God meant them to have. He arranged for them to have food and clothing and a place to sleep. They were taught about God and about the Catholic faith. They learnt how to read and write and use numbers. All this enabled them to rise from a demeaning poverty and sense of hopelessness in which they would otherwise have been trapped.

## Christian Brothers

Other men were drawn to Edmund and his work of justice for those made poor. They lived together in community and, in 1808, were professed as Brothers, along with Edmund. By 1825 Edmund Rice and his 30 Brothers were educating, free of charge, over 5,500 boys in 12 different towns and cities. Many boys were also being clothed and fed. The year 1825 also saw the expansion of the Brothers beyond Ireland. In 1868, Brother Ambrose Treacy and three companions arrived on the Donald Mackay at Station Pier in Melbourne, unable even to pay the landing tax but still ready to begin their Australian adventure. They shared their historical moment with Mary Mackillop, St Mary of the Cross, who started her first school in 1866. In that one decade, Australia was forever changed. The Brothers were eventually to open over 120 schools here. They began with little but their faith and vision. They have acknowledged painful shortcomings in their own history but are thankful for what God has achieved through them.

## Edmund Rice Education Australia

The formation of Edmund Rice Education Australia by the Christian Brothers in 2007 continues this creative work of education. EREA, as part of the mission of the Catholic Church, is charged with the responsibility for the governance of over 50 schools throughout Australia, serving more than 38,000 students. Each school has a separate character and history but all draw life from the same charism of Edmund Rice and from the Gospel. We have been joined by a number of Associate Schools and we are reaching out to the world through Edmund Rice Education Beyond Borders.



# *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.

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

1. encourages all members of the school community to work to the best of their ability, to become the person that each is created to be and to strive for equity and excellence;
2. serves the individual needs of each person, providing teaching and learning experiences that are authentic, relevant, rigorous and creative;
3. is committed to enabling students to experience personal achievement within a safe, supportive and healthy environment;
4. provides an holistic education integrating faith with culture and learning, while instilling an appreciation of the need to strive for the greater good of all society;
5. challenges all to prophetic leadership within the school community and beyond;
6. gives priority in the allocation of resources to provide services for students with particular needs;
7. enables students to experience and value critical awareness of justice and peace issues through the curriculum, service and solidarity learning, environmental practices and the culture of the school;
8. promotes ongoing renewal by providing opportunities for reflective practice, formation and professional development.

## Reflective Questions

How are the vision and hope for a better world for all expressed and celebrated in our school community?

What experiences most awaken our young people to the need for liberation in their own lives?

What knowledge and skills do we equip our young people with so that they are able to discern the liberation needs of others?

Who amplifies the voices of those most in need of liberation within our school community? How is that voice received?

“

*I have come that they may have life  
and have it abundantly.*

”

JOHN 10:10







## **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.



EREA offers a Liberating Education based on a Gospel Spirituality, an Inclusive Community, and a Commitment to Justice and Solidarity.

## **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.

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## **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.



“

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us from God.

”

1 COR 2:12



# Gospel Spirituality

We invite people into the story of Jesus and strive to make his message of compassion, justice and peace a living reality within our community.

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

1. lives and grows as a faith-sharing community by fostering personal relationships with God through Jesus Christ;
2. celebrates the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as a Eucharistic community committed to the service of those in need;
3. nurtures and encourages the spiritual growth of each person through reflection, prayer, symbols, sacred stories, rituals and sacraments;
4. models the Gospel practices of forgiveness and reconciliation by the manner in which conflict is resolved;
5. provides religious education in line with Diocesan guidelines and faith formation experiences as fundamental components of a Catholic School curriculum;
6. continues the work of the Christian Brothers by calling its school community to play a prophetic role in the mission of the Catholic Church;
7. provides formation opportunities for its members in the mystery of God in all creation, the spirit of Jesus, the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice, the inspiration of the Christian Brothers, their own sacred story and their call to mission;
8. recognises and acts upon the central place of the Gospel commitment to the marginalised, through a preferential option for the poor;
9. is engaged in inter-faith dialogue and respects the spirituality authentically lived by those who come from other religious traditions.

## Reflective Questions

In what ways do newcomers or visitors to our school community tangibly recognise our relationships and actions as being Gospel inspired?

What opportunities exist in our school community for people to explore more deeply their understanding of and commitment to a Gospel spirituality?

In what ways does our school community utilise its gifts to witness to the Gospel practices of inclusivity, forgiveness and compassion?

# *Inclusive Community*

Our community is accepting and welcoming, fostering right relationships and committed to the common good.

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

1. provides pastoral care that nurtures the dignity of each person as uniquely reflecting the image of God;
2. demonstrates a preferential option for the poor by standing in solidarity with those who are powerless and marginalised, and strives to provide access to those who otherwise would not seek enrolment;
3. is sensitive to the economic situation of each of its families, designing school programs to empower all to participate with dignity and confidence;
4. welcomes and values all members of the school community regardless of religion, race, disability, gender, sexual orientation or economic situation;
5. promotes social inclusion and views diversity as beneficial to a liberating education;
6. works in partnership with the local Catholic community and Church in serving the broader mission of the whole Church;
7. acknowledges the services and contribution of the Christian Brothers and works in partnership with Edmund Rice Ministries in furthering the Charism;
8. acknowledges the traditional ownership and cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, and welcomes them into its community;
9. looks beyond itself to contribute, according to its means, to the overall growth and development of Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition and to Edmund Rice ministries in Australia and overseas.

## Reflective Questions

How does our school community open its doors, not only to welcome and support all who come, but also to go out and meet those who don't, constantly seeking ways of inviting everyone to the table?

What opportunities does our community have to ensure its mode of operation meets the diversity of needs of those it openly welcomes?

What challenges does our school community face in aiming to be 'open to all'?



“

*This is my commandment, that you love  
one another as I have loved you.*

JOHN 15:12

”



“

And what does the Lord require of you,  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God.

MICAH 6:8

”



# *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.

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

1. develops a curriculum that integrates themes of justice and peace, underpinned by Catholic Social Teaching;
2. adopts prophetic stances in the light of Gospel practices and is involved in advocacy for just causes;
3. promotes participation in service and solidarity learning programs in partnership with those on the margins;
4. seeks to provide opportunities for involvement in immersion programs in which students and staff form relationships, work with and learn from those on the margins, leading to mutual transformation;
5. is committed to working with and walking alongside the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, advocating justice and promoting reconciliation;
6. is actively involved in developing global partnerships through participation in Edmund Rice Education Beyond Borders;
7. is committed to promoting an integral ecology through demonstrating a deep reverence for the earth as both God's work and our home, promoting eco-justice and working towards a sustainable and regenerative future for all creation;
8. recognises that its members are part of a global community and actively supports the development of all humanity;
9. nurtures a culture of critical reflection and prayerful discernment in justice and peace issues.

## Reflective Questions

What are the benefits and challenges of committing to justice and peace for all?

How do we develop our educational mission through a spirituality that reflects upon needs and actions?

In what ways are we asked to stand with those who are afflicted and marginalised?

How are we asked to defend our wounded planet?



**EDMUND RICE EDUCATION  
AUSTRALIA**

*We must restore hope to young  
people, help the old,  
be open to the future, spread love,  
be poor among the poor.  
We need to include the excluded  
and preach peace.*

**POPE FRANCIS, 2013**

The Charter will guide schools in the quest towards greater authenticity as Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition. Each school is challenged to be faithful to the four touchstones and to reflect regularly on their embodiment in all aspects of the school. The Charter will be a foundation document in all planning, policy and practice; it will be a focus for formation and reflection.

The School Renewal process will complement and validate the reflection of schools. Through School Renewal the governing body of Edmund Rice Education Australia will accredit each school as an authentic Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition.

As a living document, this Charter will continue to evolve. It will be reviewed in 2022.

*“Live Jesus in Our Hearts – Forever”*

Resources to support the implementation of The Charter can be found at [www.erea.edu.au](http://www.erea.edu.au)