



CHARTER

*for Catholic Schools in the
Edmund Rice Tradition*



**EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA**





We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia as the traditional owners and custodians of the land of our schools. We are inspired and nurtured by their wisdom, spirituality and experience. We commit ourselves to actively work alongside them for reconciliation and justice.

Preamble

In 1802, Edmund Rice commenced his first school for boys in Waterford, Ireland. Joined by men who became known as the Christian Brothers, Edmund extended his mission of providing education to poor youth throughout Ireland and beyond. From 1868, beginning under the inspirational leadership of Brother Ambrose Treacy, schools and orphanages were established throughout Australia and New Zealand. The Gospel-centred charism of Blessed Edmund has continued to inspire Christian Brothers and members of the Edmund Rice Network in their ministry.

In 2004, the Province Leaders of the Christian Brothers in Australia proclaimed the *Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition*, a document that captured the character and culture of our schools. Challenging the schools, their leaders, staff, students and families to be faithful to this character, the *Charter* was seen as a 'living document' which 'will continue to evolve through review and reflection as the demands of our changing times are read and interpreted in the light of the unchanging Gospel' (*Charter*, 2004).

The *Charter* together with *Foundations*, *Formation*, and *Renewal* describe our distinct, though not unique, identity as Edmund Rice Education Australia. The *Charter* provides a practical expression of this identity and so is of crucial use in decision making, planning and review.

Now, a revised *Charter* is being proclaimed. In the light of several years of reflection and wide consultation, the *Charter* uses four touchstones* to describe the culture of an authentic Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition.

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

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

Edmund Rice Education Australia Council
22nd August 2011

*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. Hence authenticity was verified.

Our Story

God's living presence

Since the beginning of time God has been present. This presence was expressed poetically in the biblical creation stories and can be found in humanity's modern understanding of the value of creation and responsibility to live in respectful harmony with the earth. Over the millennia, life on earth developed to a point where it could reflect upon God's presence in history leading men and women to seek to understand the "breadth and length and height and depth" of God's love (Eph 3:18). They also sought to live in accordance with this understanding and to share this gift with others.

This story of discovery is encapsulated in the story of a people who responded to a call to listen and be God's people. Their wisdom brought to the generations a concept of a God who is One and who desires all humanity to be one also. It was into this story that Jesus was born.

Jesus Christ

Empowered by the Spirit, Jesus named and inaugurated his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth drawing on the wisdom of the prophet Isaiah:

*'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)

Nurtured by his Jewish tradition in this way and inspired by the Spirit, Jesus proclaimed a message of justice, peace and solidarity, especially with the poor and marginalised. The challenge Jesus issued in Nazareth and enacted in his ministry – the challenge to include those who are so often excluded because of their situation in life - has continued in the lives of his followers down the ages. It is the same challenge that inspired Edmund Rice to "open his whole heart to Christ present and appealing to him in the poor" (Christian Brothers' Charism Statement, 1982).

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. Married to Mary Elliot, in 1789 he experienced her tragic death soon after she gave birth to their daughter Mary. Deeply saddened by her loss, Edmund entered a time of mourning. As his daughter continued to open the depths of his love, his relationship with God deepened. In his own brokenness, he was moved with compassion to recognise the brokenness of those around him. He entered more deeply into their struggle and found in the story of Jesus the call to liberation that is at the heart of what Jesus preached and in which his church is engaged. 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. In 1802 he set up a free school for boys living in poverty. His aim was to promote an education that recognised the dignity of each individual and thus he sought to liberate them from their ignorance of God of their Catholic faith, while at the same time empowering them with an education which would enable them to rise from the demeaning poverty and sense of hopelessness in which they were trapped. Thus Edmund sought to liberate individuals and indeed to free his society from oppression.

Christian Brothers

Other men were drawn to Edmund and his work of justice for those made poor. They lived together in community and were professed as Brothers, along with Edmund, in 1808. 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' response to God's call to provide the same liberating education for the poor in countries beyond Ireland, including the establishment in due course of over 120 schools in Australia. Christian Brothers and other members of the Edmund Rice Network are now working in over 30 countries across the globe. They are continuing to discern the signs of the times and respond to the needs of the poor and the earth, while working towards a just and sustainable future for all. The work of the Brothers continues to inspire all involved in our schools.

Edmund Rice Education Australia

The Christian Brothers story in Australia is a vibrant and creative response to the educational needs of the day. The formation of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) by the Christian Brothers in 2007 continues and renews this creative response. EREA, as part of the mission of the Catholic Church, is charged with the responsibility for the governance of the Christian Brothers' schools throughout Australia, to ensure that Edmund's charism lives on in this work at a time when the Brothers are being called to new directions within a shared vision.



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.

As Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition, we aspire to be faithful to these four touchstones



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.

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.

Expression

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 realise their potential and to strive for equity and excellence;
- 2 serves the needs of each person, providing teaching and learning experiences that are authentic, relevant, dynamic and creative;
- 3 provides a learning culture that enables students to experience success within a safe and healthy environment;
- 4 provides a holistic education integrating faith with culture and learning while giving 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 a 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.



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.

Expression

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

- 1 lives and grows as a faith-sharing community by fostering a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ;
- 2 celebrates as a Eucharistic community, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ;
- 3 nurtures and encourages the spiritual growth of each person through reflection, prayer, symbols, sacred stories, rituals and sacraments;
- 4 models the Gospel values 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 legacy of the Christian Brothers by calling its community to discipleship and playing an integral part in the evangelising 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;



Inclusive Community

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

Expression

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

- 1 provides pastoral care that nurtures the dignity of each person as a child formed in 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 promotes social inclusion and views diversity as beneficial to a liberating education;
- 5 works in collaboration and partnership with the local Church;
- 6 acknowledges the service and contribution of the Christian Brothers and welcomes them into the life of the school;
- 7 acknowledges the primary role of parents and guardians in the growth and development of the child and provides opportunities for their participation in the life of the school;
- 8 recognises the traditional ownership and cultural heritage of Indigenous 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.



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.

Expression

A Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition:

- 1 develops a curriculum that integrates the themes of justice and peace, underpinned by Catholic Social Teaching;
- 2 adopts prophetic stances in the light of Gospel values 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;
- 5 is committed to working with and walking alongside the Indigenous peoples of Australia, advocating justice and promoting reconciliation;
- 6 demonstrates a deep respect for and partnership with the environment, promotes eco-justice and works towards a sustainable and regenerative future for all creation;
- 7 recognises that its members are part of a global community and actively supports the development of all humanity;
- 8 nurtures a culture of critical reflection and prayerful discernment in justice and peace issues.



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 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 2016.

Live, Jesus, in our hearts forever.



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