



The Spirit Moving in Our Midst: **Be My Disciple**

Christian Brothers • Chapter 2008 • 2-27 March • Munnar India





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Our First Steps: **Inviting the Spirit**

Chapter Delegates, invited brothers and members of the wider Edmund Rice Network gathered in Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata to begin preparations for the 30th Congregation Chapter.

We had been invited by the Congregation Leadership Team into an immersion experience of various World Religions that sit side by side in India, a land of ancient culture and wisdom.

As we entered their sacred stories, temples, places of worship and rituals, Sikhs,

Buddhists, Hindus, Baha'i, Jains and Muslims invited us into their lives. With growing awareness, we pondered the common search for the Divine in these other religious traditions. We became aware also of their many ministries to the disadvantaged.

Our experiences deepened our understanding of the powerful presence of the Spirit within these religions. Searching questions surfaced for some of us. The mystery of God is deeper and more inclusive than we had ever imagined. It was indeed a revelation to discover how our concepts of God had been constrained within the horizons of our own tradition.



The words of the poet Hafiz in *Tired of Speaking Sweetly* rang in our ears:

*“The Beloved sometimes wants
to do us a great favour:
Hold us upside down
And shake all the nonsense out.”*

The scene was set as we entered the Chapter.



Discerning The Way: Encountering the Spirit

As we gathered, these words from the
Congregation Leadership Team Report
Dare to be Disciple (p.8) accompanied us:

*The Spirit is always hovering over the waters of chaos,
bringing forth life. It is the wind that brings change
into life and turns it upside down and inside out. This
is what the disciple always has to deal with:
the Spirit is in the storm.*

This time together seemed on occasion like
a storm and throughout was a profound
experience of the Spirit. Our exploration
together engaged us in struggle, frequently
in confusion, but was always faith-filled.
An unexpected sickness disrupted the
first ten days of Chapter. Many of us
experienced fragility and dis-ease. What
was being disturbed in us?



The Spirit entered our lives to unsettle us, to encourage us to leap into the Mystery of God, thus far revealed to us in the Jesus story, in our religious traditions and through our lived experience as brothers in community and on mission.

Our expanding understanding and knowledge of the cosmos continues to deepen our awareness of this Mystery in all creation.

The Congregation journey was given a new direction with the re-writing of our Constitutions in 1984, the articulation of the Four Directions in 1996 and with the emergence of the Seven Insights in 2002. And yet here in Munnar we felt that the Spirit was asking something new of us.

What was this new thing?

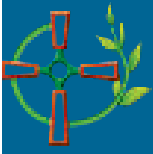
St. Edmund Rice



Acknowledging Our Heritage: **Recognising The Spirit**

Before we begin to share our vision for the future, we affirm all our brothers, who today are living their commitment faithfully. We honour those who have gone before us, our ancestors in religious life. We also make special mention of

our senior brothers, the 'Elders' of our Congregation who have carried our sacred stories and the inspiration of the Charism for many years. Today, some carry the burden of ageing with its associated diminishments.



We look to all of you with deeply grateful hearts and invite you to journey with us into this vision with trust and faith.

Over the years, we have been companioned by the Presentation Brothers, and by men and women of faith who have been inspired by the Charism of Edmund. They have gifted us with insight and encouragement. We are profoundly grateful.





Arnold Ruiz

Revelation: The Spirit of the Risen Jesus Speaks



The time is now! The place is here! You are the people!

This is my invitation to you.

Come, follow me to the edge, into the deeper and wider dimensions of Living that you may discover the God who awaits you.

It is at the very heart of Existence that you will find Life in its fullness.



*I came to bring Life and I wish you to live it to the full,
and to carry it to the very edge of the Universe.*

Enter into the core of your being, into your stories.

*You know me in your stories, in your living traditions
and in your deepest moments of joy and pain.*

Have courage!

.../



Edmund Rice

Let go the chains with which you would bind me.

*I am waiting for you beyond your boundaries,
your concepts, your understandings.*

*I walk with you in places of the heart beyond your
wildest imaginings.*

I am your source, your energy, your passion.

*Fly free as Edmund did before you to new horizons,
to the unknown, the not-yet-imagined.*

*Throw open your windows and let the fresh air in ...
open wide your shutters and allow me to inflame you.*



*Dare to enter my Mystery and become hope
for the world.*

Risk being different!

Risk leaping and falling!

*Remember, falling is the privilege of the living
and even as you encounter loss, fear, despair and
death, know I have been there before you
and will be with you always.*

Trust me.

Dare be my disciples. In you I am doing something new!

Edmund Rice



A Vision For Our Times

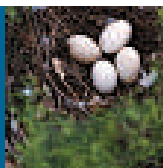
We, the assembled brothers at the Thirtieth Congregation Chapter, affirm a new consciousness of being brothers of Edmund Rice in the 21st Century.

As disciples of Jesus we are called:

To be ever open to exploring the Mystery of God in all of Creation.

To reflect on the Jesus Story in the light of our evolving understandings of the Cosmos.





To build healthy, compassionate communities living a heart-centred spirituality and supporting one another in mission.

To open our hearts to the cry of the poor and the earth and to be moved to prophetic action through advocacy and works for justice.

To allow the charism of Edmund to 'fly free' with freshness into finding new expressions.

This is our vision. We entrust it to you our brothers and to all who wish to share in Edmund's charism. Our strength lies in complete trust and in the recognition that Providence is indeed our inheritance.





Edmund Rice

Expanding The Vision

When our ancestors reflected deeply on Mystery in creation, they came to understand that Earth, Air, Fire and Water were at the heart of this great Mystery. Modern science has given new significance to these ancient intuitions. When the imagination enters into the world of symbol and metaphor, these four primal elements become charged with meaning, potential, passion and possibility.

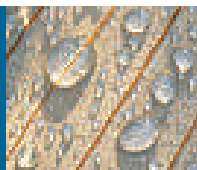
We offer these four elements as symbolic ways into realising the vision which invites us to explore in wonderment the presence of Divine Mystery in all of Creation.

Earth

*And may the whole earth
be filled with God's glory.
Amen and Amen.
(Psalm 72:19)*

Earth invites us to be grounded in healthy, intimate relationships within community. We are called to live our brotherhood in deepening relationships with men and women who wish to share Edmund's charism. We open our hearts and respond to those whose hearts are broken through isolation, sickness, injustice, ignorance, poverty and violence.





Air

The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit. (Jn 3:8)

Air calls us to wander freely across boundaries of spirituality and culture while anchoring ourselves firmly within our own religious tradition. It invites us to be open to deepening our understanding of Divine Mystery in all of life.

Fire

I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! (Lk 12:49)

Fire inspires us to be a passionate and compassionate presence within the wider community. We are inflamed with the Spirit of Jesus and Edmund, daring to be different, 'to be the change that we wish to see in the world' (Gandhi). We risk ventures in community and ministry in a new way.

Water

Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. (Jn 13:5)

Water energises us to flow freely in collaboration with others. It invites us into action, to engage in ministry with people at the margins and be open to conversion through the dislocation we experience. We do this through education, care and actions for justice and eco-justice. Water nurtures the desire in us to be advocates for the voiceless, especially the young and those who are being deprived of life by exploitation and systemic injustice.



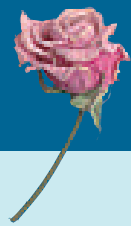
Edmund Rice

Living The Vision

In order for the vision of the Congregation Chapter to be implemented, the Chapter delegates encourage:

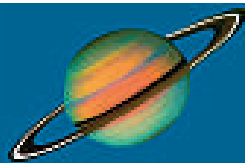
Personal

1. *Each of us to live the vision* of this Chapter by taking responsibility for his own ongoing formation through activities such as contemplative prayer, spiritual direction, accompaniment, professional supervision, immersion experiences, and reading related to the Chapter vision.
2. *Each of us to discern* with his community and with leadership where and how his ministry engages with people at the margins, challenges injustice and is a voice of advocacy for the whole earth community.
3. *Each of us to commit himself* to living with integrity in his personal and ministerial relationships and with all creation.



Community in Mission

4. *Brothers to commit themselves* to heart-centred spirituality, and to deepening their relationships with one another in community and in ministry.
5. *Each community to explore* how we engage with people at the margins. This fundamental questioning of the reason for the community's existence may lead to the relocation of some communities.
6. *Each community to walk* with young people and accompany them in their spiritual search as they engage in outreach with people at the margins.
7. *Each community to be open* to inviting people attracted by the charism of Edmund to explore living the vowed life in community.
8. *Each community*, in consultation with their Leadership Team, to be open to inviting men and women of faith who identify with Edmund's charism to live with them for specified periods of time.



Congregation, Province, Region and District

9. Province, Region and District Leadership Teams to assist communities with Actions 4 to 8
10. The Congregation Leadership Team to provide a brief to the Congregation Renewal Team to research, design and deliver educational and renewal programmes to implement the vision of the Chapter.
11. The Congregation Leadership Team to ensure that the Congregation Renewal Team works in collaboration with the Congregation Coordinators for Advocacy & Justice and for Eco-Justice.
12. Province and Region Leadership Teams to set up Renewal Teams to implement the vision of the Congregation Chapter. These Teams will work in close collaboration with the Congregation Renewal Team.
13. The Congregation Leadership Team to initiate a process to rewrite the Constitutions, taking note of developments in Congregation life and evolving understandings in science, theology and cosmology, with a draft to be available prior to the 2014 Congregation Chapter.
14. The Congregation Leadership Team to explore how best to co-ordinate vocation promotion internationally.





Finally, in the light of *"Admission to the Novitiate: A Congregation Policy"*, and aware of the urgent need for all our brothers to engage in holistic education in the area of HIV/AIDS, Province and Region Leadership Teams are urged to take responsibility for directing a programme of such holistic education.


Sharing the Vision: Edmund Rice Network

At the chapter we were graced with the presence of invited members of the wider Edmund Rice Network, who brought their wisdom and lived experience of the charism of Edmund Rice. They inspired us with their commitment to the charism, and challenged us with their conviction that we need to walk together into the future as followers of Edmund. There was a growing realisation that only together can we make this journey. Their experience of sharing heart-centred spirituality with us was mutually enriching. As one of the invitees said, 'Imagine your future with us rather than without us.'

In response we:

1. **affirm** and acknowledge that the wider Edmund Rice Network encompasses all those (groups and individuals) who identify with, share in, or are in intentional relationship with the charism of Edmund Rice. The commitment may be life-long or temporary.
2. **affirm** that the Christian Brothers are a group within the Edmund Rice Network.
3. **believe** that formation is integral to the future development of the wider Edmund Rice Network.
4. **commit** ourselves to practical means of encouraging the growth of the wider Edmund Rice Network.
5. **recognise** that networking, the building of relationships and communication at the province, region and district level are the keys to developing the wider Edmund Rice Network.
6. **encourage** provinces, regions and districts to appoint Edmund Rice networking co-ordinators.
7. **recommend** that a member of province, region and district leadership teams takes responsibility for the overview of wider Edmund Rice Network issues.
8. **encourage** the CLT to explore how best to co-ordinate the networking internationally. We recommend that a CLT member have responsibility for the wider ERN portfolio. We suggest that these explorations be undertaken in consultation with the Presentation Brothers' CLT.
9. **recommend** that the CLT commission a study on forms of commitment to the Edmund Rice charism.





And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind,
and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. (*Acts 2:1,2*)