



Journeying with Edmund

EDMUND RICE PILGRIMAGE IMMERSION

REPORT BY

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From Kenya to Ireland | 23 November – 13 December 2019

Introduction

Journeying with Edmund: From Kenya to Ireland was an opportunity to walk the pilgrim's path around Ireland and encounter the people of Kenya, their culture and spirituality and extreme poverty where Edmund's charism has found life in a vast variety of forms that the following report gives a snapshot of.

Charism, which can be described as an insight into the Gospel that meets the needs of the time, is an ever- evolving thing. During our journey we explored the ways in which Edmund's charism and the Gospel call have led women and men to build a world where all may live well. A world that moves substantively forward through a liberating education and faith in Jesus Christ.

Joyce Rupp, writing about the Camino de Santiago, offers an insight into what it means to be a pilgrim. *'To be a pilgrim is to be willing to live with the mystery of what will happen both interiorly and exteriorly as one walks day after day after day toward the destination of the sacred site. What happens inside cannot be planned or mapped out in the same way that the physical route is mapped. Becoming a pilgrim means there are no maps of the heart . . . In being a pilgrim, the journey itself is of prime importance.'*

As pilgrims we hoped to be open to all in the experience and to enliven this spirit within us and in our own Edmund Rice inspired place when we return.

Pictured, the Edmund Rice Icon at Westcourt Visitor Centre, Callan, Ireland.



Itinerary Kenya

The journey proceeded as follows:

Day	Date	Details	Accommodation
	KENYA		
1	Sat 23 Nov	Transit day, group via Dubai, me via Tanzania	Plane / Dar Es Saleem
2	Sun 24 Nov	Arrive Nairobi, Kenya	Mary Ward Centre
3	Mon 25 Nov	Mary Rice Centre, Kibera slum	Mary Ward Centre
4	Tues 26 Nov	Ruben Centre, Makuru Slum Meal with Christian Brothers community.	Mary Ward Centre
5	Wed 27 Nov	Edmund Rice Advocacy Network (ERAN) Bro Beausang Catholic Education Centre Reflections with Bro George Massay.	Mary Ward Centre
6	Thurs 28 Nov	Safari drive, Nairobi National Park Reflections with Br Tom Kearney	Mary Ward Centre
7	Fri 29 Nov	Woman for Woman Centre	Mary Ward Centre
8	Sat 30 Nov	Edmund Rice Camps Reflections with Karanja	Mary Ward Centre
9	Sun 1 Dec	Public mass at St Michael's Cross cultural talks – Kibera volunteers Missioning Ceremony	Mary Rice Centre
10	Mon 2 Dec	Elephant & Giraffe sanctuaries Transit day to Dublin via Dubai.	Plane

Accommodation throughout our time in Kenya was in the Mary Ward Centre, a centre for spirituality and leadership training run by the Loreto sisters. We always felt safe and comfortable there, however, security and safety in Kenya are a constant concern so the facility is enclosed by high walls and has 24-hour armed guards.



Itinerary Ireland

The journey continued as follows:

Day	Date	Details	Accommodation
	IRELAND		
11	Tues 3 Dec	Arrival Dublin and transfer to Cork.	Ennismore Retreat Centre
12	Wed 4 Dec	Nano Nagle Centre Edmund Rice Heritage Centre Blarney Castle	Ennismore Retreat Centre
13	Thurs 5 Dec	School visit: Edmund Rice College Carrigaline Nano Nagle birthplace (Ballygriffin)	Treacy Hotel Waterford
14	Fri 6 Dec	School visit: Ardscoil Na Mara Tour of Callan Tour of Rice family home	Treacy Hotel Waterford
15	Sat 7 Dec	Walking tours of Waterford Edmund Rice centre & tomb.	Glendalough Hotel
16	Sun 8 Dec	Glendalough spirituality & labyrinth walks Mass with Fth Michael Rodgers	Jury Hotel Dublin
17	Mon 9 Dec	History talk – Daire Keogh School visit: O’Connell Street Dublin	Jury Hotel Dublin
18	Tues 10 Dec	Edmund Rice Centre tours & reflections Final dinner: Marino Institute	Jury Hotel Dublin
19	Wed 11 Dec	Final free day. St James Gate Brewery Tour	Plane
20	Thus 12 Dec	Flights via Dubai.	Plane
21	Fri 13 Dec	Arrival Melbourne	Ballarat!

I should also note that immediately in front of the journey I was also away from 19-23 November 2019 as a personal immersion to Tanzania to visit St James Kilolo Secondary School. My family has a personal connection to establishment of this school. This report does not comment on this journey.

Pilgrims

I am grateful to each and every member of the pilgrimage group, for their companionship, reflection, laughter and faith along the way. Whilst I have not included the names here, they came from 11 different EREA schools, 2 Christian Brother ministries and 5 States. One of the pilgrims included a 1997 St Patricks College Ballarat Old Collegian.

People

I am grateful also to various individuals met along the way through the journey. Again, I have excluded the names in this report as with the experiences before us the personal names seemed not to be the most important matter. One of those in active ministry in Kenya included a former Principal of St Patricks College Ballarat, the reach of the College is immense.



Mary Rice Centre: Kibera Slum - Mon 25 Nov

Morning one of our pilgrimage started with a challenging, hands on and inspirational visit to the Mary Rice Centre where its mission statement says, “Our Caring Hearts Build Hope.” At the edge of Kibera Slum, home to approx. 1.2 million souls the Centre is a lifeline of hope for 71 disabled students where they receive care from Teachers, OTs and other professionals bringing them education, music, therapy, daily meals as well as vocational training for parents and students. They give hope in life for children who had none especially in a society that saw disability as coming from sin or incest.

We spent time in class, served meals and played games with them where I in particular spent time with non-verbal kids George and Linnet (pictured).

The centre largely survives from the contributions from the Edmund Rice Foundation (Australia) and Edmund Rice Development (Ireland). Key contributors from Australia are St Virgil’s Hobart and St Edmunds Gosford.





In one of the most inspirational moments of the whole pilgrimage we then spent time doing extraordinary home visits in Kibera where time with Dixon (head of family of 7) his wife and son Obama will live in my heart forever. Incredibly poor conditions, wet, unstable, dangerous dwellings controlled by crime cartels and where the police dare not go. In a dark and cramped room lit only by a small candle and displaying an image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, our group of 7 listened

to Dixon's amazing outlook on life, his gratefulness for what he has and faith in God that the future will improve for them through the work of Edmund Rice.

Returning to Mary Rice Centre afterwards its meagre facilities now appeared an oasis.

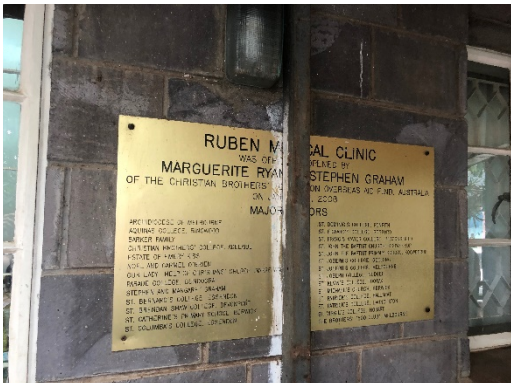
<https://maryricekenya.com/>

Moment: Dixon and the light of Christ that shone there through his tiny candle.

Ruben Centre – Thurs 26 Nov

Moving onto Mukuru slum the focus today was on the work of the Ruben Centre, a multi-service centre running 31 concurrent projects including a level 3 maternity clinic (over 1200 babies in the last 12 months), bands, OT, an acrobatics program, employment agency, market gardens, vocational training, a primary school for 2700 kids and more.

Run by the innovative Br Frank O'Shea



(uncle of Nic Joosten) this very authentic work is a model of professionalism and commitment beyond compare to this community. Again, largely supported by the Edmund Rice Foundation (including contributions from Ballarat as evidenced by the honour board (pictured) it effects real change in this community. Puts itself out there as a one stop shop and is certainly a broad venture of support.

Finished the day with the local brother's community having dinner with us and sharing the journeys of their ministries. <https://www.rubencentre.org/>

Moment: Getting 2700 kids into one playground (pictured to right).



Edmund Rice Advocacy Centre / Br Beausang School– Wed 27 Nov

Another day with Kibera kids, the ERAN centre (founded in 2008) is a work of advocacy training for primary school kids to learn in fun ways their rights to education, shelter, food, child protection (amazing and thorough attention to this) and more. The centre formed from the challenge of a Christian brother's chapter in 2008 that wanted to challenge oppressive systems and structures that continue to impoverish and marginalize people, thus undermining their inherent dignity.

Spent time with the kids doing songs, games, discussions, posters etc. in a fun and engaging day with them. It is largely a holiday program for poor kids from a multitude of schools to provide relief from the slum and education in positive life skills. Great work with professional and committed teachers with as always very limited resources that would be condemned if they stood in our Australian schools.



Had particularly engaged time with two boys Paul and Jacko.

<https://edmundriceadvocacy.net/>



We moved in the afternoon for contrast of works to a fee-paying primary & secondary school in a marginally better area (Embulbul) called Br Beausang Catholic School (formed in 2000 & soon to be changed to Edmund Rice). There we had thoughtful discussions with the students before they sung for us and then performed their award-winning Scottish Dancing routines (learnt from YouTube). A heartwarming and entertaining visit.

<https://bbcec.sc.ke/new/curriculum/>

Evening reflections with Bro Francis (Tanzanian) encouraged us to listen to multiple stories, not single stories that may be true, but not complete. As a village raises a child so to do multiple stories build a fuller view of traditions and build connections.

Moment:

Connecting the multiple stories with Br David Curtin. Kenya. Iringa. St Pius X. Family.

Nairobi National park – Thurs 28 Nov

After 3 days of intense immersion this was a well-timed day off to reflect, build collegiality and relationships with other pilgrims and experience a safari. Not seeing the big 5 but a great experience none the less.

In matters of connectedness our evening reflection was led by **Br Tom Kearney** (St Pats Ballarat – 1985 to 1988) discussing the Australian East African mission development since 1988 with all its listening, discerning and false starts towards the diverse ministries and growing vocations of today.

Moment: Multiple Giraffe sightings.



Women for Women – Fri 29 Nov

Women for Women in Nairobi works with the women and children (boys and girls, it started as a women's only refuge, hence, the name) of Kibera, by providing education and resources to enable them to live a life of dignity, happiness and hope for the future. We were enthusiastically met at the gate by children singing hakuna matata closely followed by dancing that we were drawn into. It was an awesome day of engagement with primary, secondary and tertiary Kibera kids who go out to financially sponsored places in schools, colleges and



unis.

It was started in 2004 by Australian brother Frank Chappell (now 92) and today is run by an indigenous Loreto Sister. The participants do not study or live at the centre, however, very much see it as their community and family. It is a happy place with such hope, sense of family and more than anything a deep desire from the older students to give back to the younger ones so that they too can

receive the hope and real pathways gifted to them. An inspiration to our group with so many more resources at our disposal in Australia.

This is another type of facility again, very innovative and very organised with no darkness or despair, only genuine light and hope. A work deeply connected to Edmund creating opportunities to feed, clothe and educate the poor towards a better future. Whilst it's a charity it does not simply give things away, it is a lifeline that allows people to forge a better life for themselves and their families. Sponsoring a child or two or more here is a real change in someone's life through just US\$1,000 - 3,500.

One innovation that as a Business Manager really struck me was their "Table Banking" system (pictured) where community members deposit whatever spare funds they have and can take loans with a 10% flat interest rate and no set term to commence an array of small businesses that assist their family make progress.



<https://womenforwomenin africa.org.au/about-us/>

Moment: The powerful sharing of giving back by the uni students.

Edmund Rice Camps – Sat 30 Nov

An idea borrowed from Australia this was just a day of all out fun and games with Kibera kids, we witnessed again the tremendous responsibility taken on by the older kids to give back to the younger ones.

The poorest of the poor kids being gifted and gratefully receiving time, dignity and hope. The team totally get that learning is about relationships and engagement.



Evening sharing was from our guide Karanja speaking of his personal journey out of Kibera and Mukuru to studies, a family and a job that allows him to support others. If that's not hope I don't know what is. Earlier in the week I naively thought no-one could make their way out of the slums. It was great to be wrong.

Moment: Simple Rugby passes that smiling kids continually joined in for.

Mary Rice Centre Leaders – Sun 1 Dec

The day started with a parish mass at Our Lady Queen of Peace, a much longer mass, with a more active and engaged congregation than we are used to. Very curious communion with many not going due to various levels of understood sins and the notices including one-month warnings for any objections to proposed weddings. They apparently get a lot!

The afternoon was time with the youth leaders from the Edmund Rice Camps openly and honestly sharing of our respective experiences and beliefs with respect to faith; homosexuality; gender equality in church and leadership; HIV Aids and politics. Many brilliant and articulate young people that are an inspiration making their country and the world a better place. I have not met a group of Australian students who can openly discuss such complicated issues so well. A Canadian brother also took a through a talk and role plays that gave us insights into the extent and cultural reasons behind the HIV Aids issues in this country and these young adults face.



The evening was a missioning ceremony with Karanja (pictured crouching) prayerfully sending us on our way with bread and wheat from this holy ground for the journey ahead. Calling us through the song Micah's Theme to live justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with our God, having the faith to call on him daily to guide you.

Moment: The girl in pink happily articulating and sharing of opposing ideas.

Tourist and Travel day. – Mon 2 Dec

The Mary Ward Centre is in the district of Karen, named in honour of Karen Blixen, a Danish author and former coffee farmer in the district. With an evening flight to Dubai/Dublin we had the opportunity for some touristy time visiting an Elephant sanctuary, Giraffe Sanctuary and the Karen Blixen Museum (featured in the 1985 movie Out of Africa) all within a few minutes of our accommodation. It was a wonderful experience to be engaged in and another time to build the collegiality of the pilgrimage group.

On Leaving Kenya

At this point of the journey I wondered what more could the Ireland leg bring? I had much to learn. On leaving Kenya I was left with a few unshakable understandings:

1. Africans have a deep belief in the power of education to change the world and they grab every precious opportunity (and \$) granted to them with both hands.
2. We encountered many and varied ministries making fruitful efforts to provide a liberating education and a future. They were broad ranging and creative.
3. The authenticity of the works is resoundingly clear. The ministries bring food, shelter, useable skills, relationships and education. Edmund's practicality was everywhere to be seen. He would love it!

Whilst it is not possible to respond to every human need, it is possible to make a difference to the lives of some. Since coming here in 1988 the Christian Brothers have certainly done that. In Swahili the Africans have the word **Ubuntu** which essentially means we are people through other people, we cannot be fully human when alone. As one local explained it to me, my joy is linked to your joy. It was evident in so many moments such as those that I shared with Lincoln & Simon (pictured) on this day. I think Edmund got ubuntu without ever visiting Africa.

The works here are authentic and make real change happen that binds back to Edmund 200 years ago and to Christ 2000 years ago.





Arrival in Ireland. – Tues 3 Dec [DUBLIN]

Day 1 in Ireland was simply getting there and taking a 3-hour drive to our accommodation in Cork at the Ennismore Retreat Centre.

In Ireland we were to walk in the footsteps of Blessed Edmund Rice grounding this call in the historical reality of 18/19th Century Ireland and the lived reality of current times by visiting some Edmund Rice schools.

Nano Nagle Centre – Wed 4 Dec [CORK]

As with Kenya we were straight into it on morning 1 with reflections on the journey so far and orientating ourselves to the region we were now in.

Went to the Nano Nagle (1718 – 1784) centre and tomb (pictured) to learn of her work with starting the Presentation Sisters and seven schools for poor catholic girls that had so influenced the life and work Edmund even though they never met (she passed away when Edmund was 13). At the time of Nano, the oppressive Penal laws imposed by the English were in place that meant that if she was found to be educating Catholics she would be imprisoned and deported to the likes of Australia! At great personal risk to herself she courageously created her first school (1754) with a bakery as a front to do the right thing by the poor children. In forming the first Irish congregation this too was at great risk as it was also forbidden by law.

She so influenced Edmund in creating schools for boys (as the Penal laws were being repealed) that the first rules of the Christian Brothers before Rome were those of the Presentation Sisters, he just changed the pronouns.



Edmund Rice Heritage Centre. – Wed 4 Dec

In the afternoon we spent time at the Edmund Rice Heritage Centre run by the Presentation Brothers (the first congregation Edmund founded) where they took us through the circle garden that displayed the sacred place of women in Edmund's story, honouring their influence on his life. Briefly these were:

	Person	Role
1	Margaret Tierney	His Mum. A kind woman who cared for the poor.
2	Mary Rice	His daughter. Disabled in some way, cared for by family.
3	Mary Elliott	His wife. Her untimely death refined his trusting faith.
4	Mary Power	His great friend. Directed him to poor Waterford boys.
5	Nano Nagle	Like her used wealth, time, energy to school Irish poor.
6	Teresa of Avila	The Interior Castle guided his inner journey.
7	Mary of Nazareth	Rosary was central to the Brothers prayer & actions.

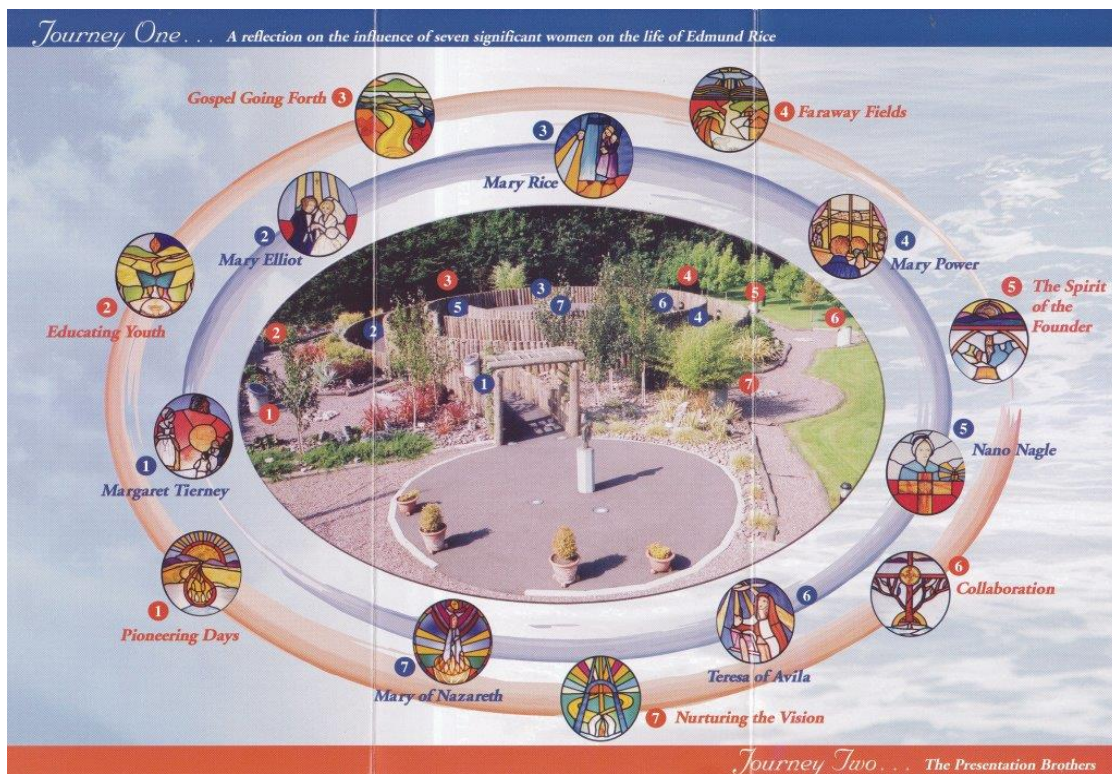
The providence of the connections in Edmund's life, of the various moments that these 7 women with wisdom, input and guidance influenced his life is so beautifully and symbolically done. The garden is an inspired work of art. You take a journey to the centre, journey back out, water (life) flowing out from the centre. The circle is strong in Celtic spirituality, you are always close to the centre and the outside. See it in the link below for detailed discussion of the garden:



<http://www.edmundrice.net/edmund-rice/lives-of-edmund/1519-edmund-rice-garden-at-the-presentation-brothers-mardyke-house-cork>

There was a call in this experience to many of us in our pilgrim group from a variety of EREA schools to share this story with the boys in our schools, the sacred place of women in the story of all boy schools. As someone who has decades of experience being associated with the Christies, I had never heard it.

Moment: The centre of the garden giving life to the outside.



The day also demonstrated the reality of the educational need of Ireland at that time. Strongly connected and ingrained in Celtic Spirituality, Edmund responded to the reality that was fermenting around him, by challenging the prevailing belief that the poor did not need education. In the book, *A Tree Is Planted*, the following is recorded about Edmund's rejection of the contemporary opinion regarding the education of the poor.

Why should Mr Rice waste his money and talents in opening a school? It was a foolish idea and had no chance of succeeding! If the boys carried out the wishes of the priests, could any more be expected of them? Moreover, the boys were probably better off without any education. This opinion was indeed the accepted one in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Nowhere in northern Europe or in America was it considered necessary or even advisable to educate the poor. (A Tree is Planted, M.C. Normoyle p 42)

According to Normoyle, Edmund Rice in deciding to educate the poor youth of Waterford, took a prophetic stance that challenged the established norms of the times. This detail gives us a glimpse into Edmund the person. According to **Daire Keogh** [a historian we met a few days later], Edmund Rice was not a 'meek and mild person,' he was a very real person who challenged people. He was a man who would at times polarize people. We know too that he experienced deeply his own fragility and the fragility of the fledgling congregation of Christian Brothers. The day greatly enriched my understanding of Edmund's story.

The day concluded with the opportunity to see Blarney Castle for a short time. Yes, I got to kiss the Blarney stone.

School visit / Nano Nagle birthplace. – Thurs 5 Dec

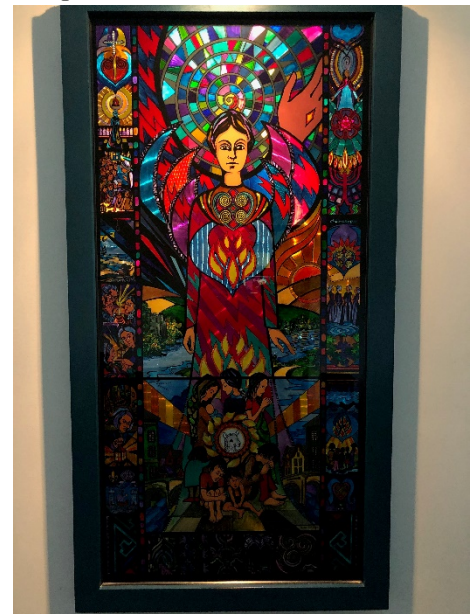
The day began with a school visit to Edmund Rice College, Carrigaline, a non-fee paying 'Catholic' school where that aspect seemed to make little to no difference to the curriculum or pastoral care. It seemed to largely function as what we would call a State School, all, salaries directly paid by the Government. The parents, students and community apparently have little to no religious knowledge much to the frustration of some of the staff especially there very passionate REC. A difficult journey ahead for this new school (Sept 2016).



The afternoon was spent with the Presentation sisters at the birthplace of Nano (full name Honora) Nagle in Ballygriffin. A peaceful quiet place with a great heritage room (pictured) that gives a deep sense of connectedness of the Edmund / Nano stories and the movements of God when we are open to listen. Nano selflessly educated the children by day and visited and



nursed the sick by night becoming known as the Lady with the Lantern and is much revered by the Irish and is on the road to sainthood like Edmund. The original icon of Nano (pictured) is at



the centre, made by the same artist (Desmond Rushe) that created the Edmund Rice one (as seen in our ERC).



The centre also has a cosmic walk that demonstrated the very short time that humanity and Christianity make up in the history of the world. A humbling experience of making one feel most insignificant.

We moved onto Waterford in the early evening.

Moment: The enthusiastic welcome of the Presentation Sisters.

School visit: – Fri 6 Dec [WATERFORD]

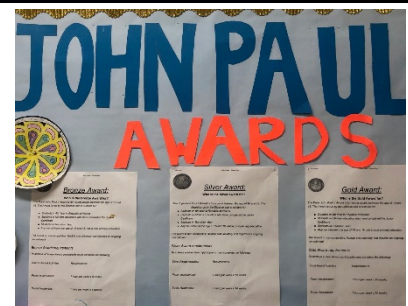
The first location of today was a visit to **Ardcoil Na Mara Catholic Secondary School** which in vast contrast to Carrigaline yesterday, seemed deeply engaged in the spirituality of Edmund and were particularly connected to works of catholic identity represented by their John Paul II (non-competitive) awards for the students voluntary commitments to parish and social justice works (Years 9-12), as well as an active Young SVP Society. In social justice they have an Advocacy group that requires written submissions to join and have an impressive array of sustainability projects eliminating single use plastics, performing beach clean ups, implementing recycling projects and more.



The Edmund Rice Icon was evident in several places around the school and in the overheads (such as the one above) that were part of the student leaders' presentations.

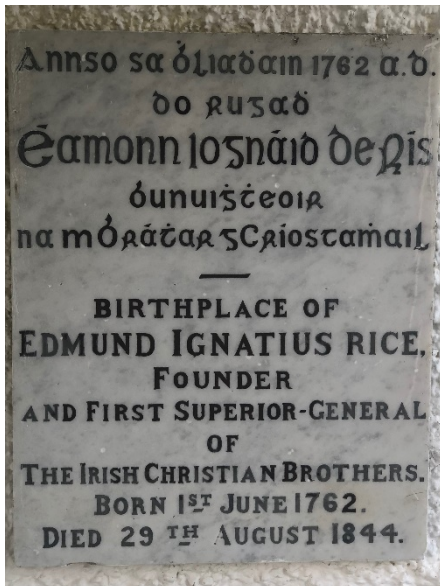
They look to bring Edmund Rice's messages to life and the students are seeking (successfully it appeared) to be building catholic identity and globally aware citizens. The Principal (**Padraig Crawley**) regularly asks the question "**What would Edmund do?**" An impressive leadership group, I got copies of their presentations.

Moment: The energy of the College student leaders.



Rice family home. – Fri 6 Dec [WATERFORD]

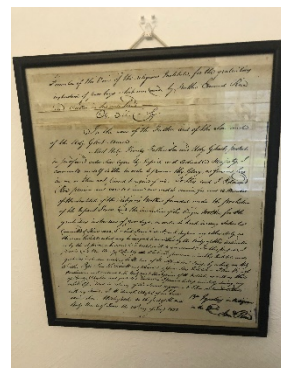
In Callan we then had the opportunity to take a walking tour of Edmunds town of birth with local historian (Joe Kennedy) taking us around. We were also taken to the Westcourt visitor centre which includes Edmund Rice's family home.



Seeing into the life and time of Edmund was valuable, his streets, the Norman history, his handwritten vows, his personal writing box, rosary beads and relics. We prayed in small groups the Blessed Edmund Rice Prayer in the room where he is said to have been born:

*O God, we thank you for the life of Blessed Edmund Rice.
He opened his heart to Christ present in those oppressed by poverty and injustice.
May we follow his example of faith and generosity.
Grant us the courage and compassion of Blessed Edmund as we seek to live lives of love and service.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Moment: Very real and sacred time in the family home.



Waterford Tours / Edmund Rice Centre – Sat 7 Dec

An informative walking tour of Waterford with Brother Peda provided insights to where Edmund worked, established business, recognized needs, established schools and would have seen the Viking influences on the town.

More importantly in the day we spent time at the Edmund Rice Visitor Centre, inclusive of the original Mt Sion school and Edmunds tomb / chapel.



The latter included time of great group reflections of how we have come to know Edmund better through the journey. Many of us had come to see him as a creative thinker who used his business acumen and contacts to make things happen, to do what was right for the needs of others, for the needs of those unable to fend for themselves. A practical guy who knew that boys would not learn unless they had clothes, shoes and a good feed. Also, it was evident to us all that he would cleverly work within the systems around him (e.g. local British soldiers) and be open to take counsel from Bishops, women and God by contemplation in prayer.

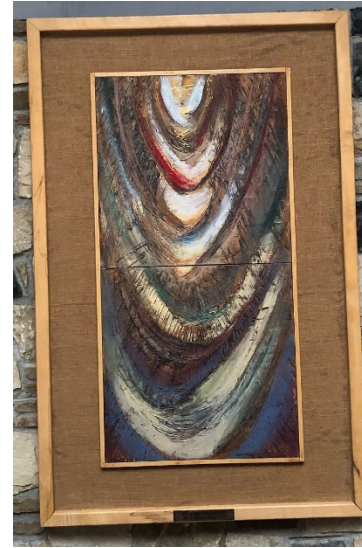
The four images standing behind his tomb are to represent the four Gospels and the grounding that these gave him. An image above his tomb called 'Transcendence' speaks to his ability to Transend his own tragedy losing his wife Margaret and with encouragement

of his friend Mary Power to not go into monastic life, but rather to focus on the real action of attending to the needs of poor boys on the streets of Waterford.

Our guide in this space referred to the balance that Edmund seemed to have between good works as well as prayer. He referred to a question once put to Richard Rohr about which is the most important word in “Action and Contemplation”, he replied “And!”. Edmund’s life demonstrated that he understood this.

There was always life in the tree of his works, but they were grounded in good foundations.

Drove into the evening to Glendalough.



Moment: The group sharing around the tomb of Edmund.

Tearmann Spirituality Centre– Sun 8 Dec [GLENDALOUGH]

On an utterly dreary day weather wise with heavy driving rain, we may have been sodden by the end, however, we were uplifted by the spectacular environment of Glendalough and the spiritual walks led by **Fr Michael Rodgers** connecting us to the 6th Century hermit St Kevin who lived here and the unrivaled natural beauty. The architecture alone was amazing like the 11th century chapel dedicated to Kevin.



It was a prayerful day reminding us that there should always be a place for silence and the inner contemplative journey for our spiritual beings to find and be at home with self. To hear the call to be present to God with nature as being part of the world and not away from it. It is very hard to convey in words what this place is like without experiencing it, however, as Michael says *“we have to be prepared to let go of the accustomed patterns and controls that we impose on our daily lives, and instead be ready to be open to what lies beyond – and what is most often expressed in symbol, image, poetry.”*

The poetry piece inserted in **appendix 1** is perhaps best to consider this further.



A labyrinth walk for a 20-30-minute contemplation (pictured) by all of us as pilgrims was another. Again, an experience difficult to convey in the written word.

The whole day was a joy for the soul.

Moment: Shared Mass with Michael was most peaceful.

Edmund History talk – Mon 9 Dec [DUBLIN]

A visit to Dublin City University where the President **Daire Keogh** treated us to brilliant, practical and eloquent Edmund Rice history talk.

Daire as a historian was only a believer in verified facts and noted that there are few on Edmund (or his family), a man who wrote very little, was marginalized within his own congregation later in his life and was only really held up again as a model of Christian leadership from the 1970s. And whilst there is no suggestion of any skeletons, there are many gaps.



Daire Keogh (left) at DCU with the Pilgrimage group.

So, what do we know?

Edmund was a practical businessman, who sort employable outcomes for boys and to lift Ireland (I think Edmund would say well done in Ballarat!). He was not an educator. He was a multi-faceted character who shows the benefit of taking broad counsel and not listening to a single story. With so little known of Edmund it is also important not to listen to a single story about him nor to be “*blinded by what we think Edmund ought to have been like, or what we think may have been right for a pious congregational leader.*” You left desperate to get a copy of his book on the subject to be sure of all the verified facts.

School visit: O'Connell Street – Mon 9 Dec

The afternoon was a visit to the inner-city school of O'Connell Street. A down to earth experience in so many ways, good boys, great teachers, tired facilities and a challenging environment with poverty, inability for the majority to pay fees and known drug dealers at the front gate, though they respect that boundary.

The story of the day goes to the DP asking a concerned looking Year 7 *“Are you worried about your exams?”* The boy replied

“Miss, that’s the least of my concerns!” His worry was that his family of 6s broken toilet was unable to be fixed until after Christmas. If nature called in the middle of the night the children had to go down an ally way past the drug dealers to the toilet at their Nannas house. A gentle enquiry led to the school maintenance manager fixing it now. What would Edmund have done? Exactly that I imagine.



Pictured above to the right is the school, to the left (with the red door) is the original general house established by Edmund himself and the current Edmund Rice Centre that we would visit the next day.

Edmund also with the meagre budget that they had would have found a way (as they do) to provide breakfast and lunch in this poor school with tired facilities built for 1,000 but only currently with 200 students. The library has few books and the bus is broken down with no funds to fix it. The challenges were everywhere to be seen, yet the staff were motivated and certainly engaged with their students.



As explained to us earlier in the day Edmund was not an educator, none the less, as the honour board indicates he was O'Connell Streets first Principal 1831 – 1838.

Quite a claim on history.

Moment: The DPs story.

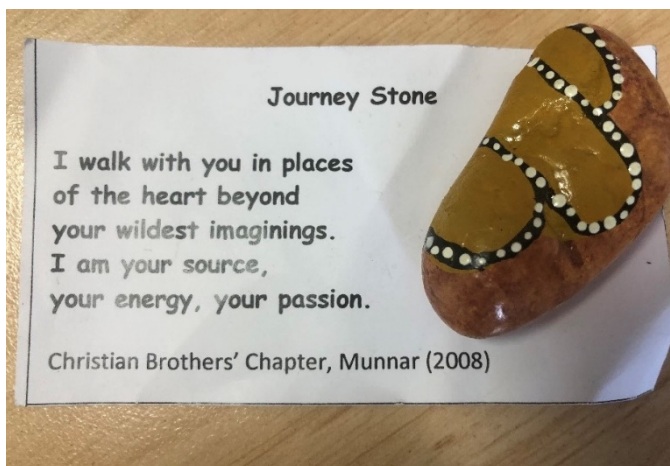
Edmund Rice Centre / Marino Institute – Tues 10 Dec

Our final pilgrimage day was a visit to the Edmund Rice Centre, the first General House purpose built by Edmund and lived in by him 1831 – 1838 while he was Superior General and Principal of O'Connell Street next door.

We explored the museum aspects of the house including his office and bedroom (pictured) and the Brothers took us through various reflections on the life of Edmund in the very room where in 1838 he held his Counsels, stepped down as Superior General and made the decision to send Brothers to Australia. His will written that same year refers to his life's work being to:

“Raise boys to the dignity of men.”

It struck me deeply that this was so close to St Patrick's vision statement of “Raising Fine Boys to the Status of Great Men.” This gave me a sense of connectedness in our journey in Ballarat back to the thoughts and decisions of Edmund in 1838. A great sense of responsibility to share the experience and be part of continuing the mission.



The session concluded with a ceremony in which we received a Journey Stone (pictured) to conclude our Pilgrimage that like a stone in our shoe, may not always be comfortable, yet will remind us of where our hearts have been taken and who we are through those experiences.

The evening was a concluding dinner at the Marino Institute with various representatives of Edmund Rice works and the Brothers. Then to the Airport.



Personal time / travel home – Wed 11 & Thurs 12 Dec

As with Kenya we had an evening flight departure and managed a little touristy time which I appropriately used to go to St James Gate, the Guinness brewery for a final cultural experience.



Arrival home – Fri 13 Dec

Losing a day home on the flight I arrived home to Melbourne on the morning of the 13th Dec to the awesome welcoming hugs of Bron and my very excited children + 1. After three and a half weeks away, I was grateful for the journey, but it was good to be home.



On Leaving Ireland

Hopefully the preceding comments reveal enough that I learned plenty about Edmund in his homeland, returning more deeply connected and grateful for my ministry and work in EREA schools and indeed Ballarat. There was much richness in the Ireland leg after all.

The last words then should I think go to some of the few written words attributed to Edmund himself:

“If you only acquire this virtue (humility), it will always guide you safely let your paths be ever so cross or difficult.” 1826

“Be intent on prayer and whatever may happen will turn to our good.” 1829.

“Have courage the good seed will grow up in the children’s hearts later on.” 1837.

Live Jesus in our hearts, forever. Blessed Edmund Rice. Pray for us.



Overall Reflections



In both countries we had the opportunity to reflect upon the Charism response to the Gospel today and the lived reality of our own experiences in Australian EREA schools. Are these authentic? How can we enrich these places from this experience? Is Edmunds story alive in our schools? If not, how might we help this happen?

We could see how the practical Edmund that we came to understand in Ireland would have liked the grounded works such as the Ruben Centre, Mary Rice Centre and Women for Women in Kenya. There are stories to be told here to our Australian communities.

It was indeed a privileged opportunity to engage with and be welcomed by communities in Kenya & Ireland while being immersed in the story of Edmund. After a personal life with such presences of Edmund Rice it was amazing (embarrassing really!) how I much I did not know. My grandfather who once trained as a Christian Brother would offer a wry smile.

Those I met through the journey clearly hold a great faith, believe in their various ministries and are especially passionate about the power of change that can come through education. A liberating Edmund Rice Education. An education that in Kenya needs financial assistance from Australia (and Ireland) to continue to thrive and make authentic change in the world.

Nelson Mandela was known to use the expression “*Education is a Weapon*”, expressing positively that it is a means of liberation, of learning English, of giving to the poor a means of a future and a hope. It’s an expression well used as I moved through Kenya (and indeed Tanzania). One of the former staff members of St James College Iringa (Lucas Kiswili – pictured with me) perhaps put it better to me by saying that “*Education is water*” referring to the work of many that brought classrooms, power and water. “*They brought life!*” It was a moving and passionate reflection as it was to be received as honoured guests wherever the pilgrimage group went. It was most humbling.



The work of Edmund was equipping young people mentally, morally and religiously, to stand on their own feet, and change lives for themselves, and, in time, to struggle for change in the society that caused and allowed them to be poor. I believe Edmund would like what is happening today in Kenya.

So, what now? I have many personal reflections from the journey and considered many possible steps for action that I will discuss with the Principal before seeking to engage specifically with the Leadership Team, Pats community or the Edmund Rice Foundation. Various other photos (**Appendix 2&3**) of the journey follow for your enjoyment.

Lastly, I am grateful to EREA, John Crowley and Stephen Hill who supported my application and in so doing granted me an opportunity of a lifetime.

Appendix 1

Tourist or Pilgrim?

*I stand on the edge of myself and wonder,
Where is home? Oh! Where is the place where beauty will last?
When will I be safe? And where?
My tourist heart is wearing me out. I am so tired of seeking For treasures
that tarnish.
How much longer, Lord?
Oh! Which way is home? My luggage is heavy It is weighing me down I am
hungry for the Holy Ground of home. Then suddenly, overpowering me with
the truth, A voice within me gently says:
'There is a power within you, a truth in you That has not yet been tapped.
You are blinded with a blindness that is deep, For you have not loved the
pilgrim in you yet
There is a road that runs straight through your heart.
Walk on it.'
To be a pilgrim means to be on the move, slowly, To notice that your
luggage is becoming lighter, To seek for treasures that do not rust
To be comfortable with the questions,
To be moving toward the holy ground of home With empty hands and bare
feet.
And yet, you cannot reach that home Until you have loved the pilgrim in
you. One must be comfortable as a pilgrim Before one's feet can touch the
homeland.
Do you want to go home?
There is a road that runs straight through your heart.
Walk on it*

Marina Wiederkehr

"to give to the poor in handfuls."

Appendix 2
Miscellaneous other photos: Kenya.



Appendix 3
Miscellaneous other photos: Ireland

