

From the Postulator's Desk:

No.32, Autumn 2011,

Donal Blake CFC, Edmund Rice Postulator

Greetings from a mellow North Richmond Street, Dublin. The autumn leaves are swirling in the breeze under the gaze of a watery sun. Dublin itself is awash with blue flags, its Gaelic Football team having recently defeated old rivals Kerry in a rip-roaring All-Ireland Final at Croke Park before a crowd of 82,000 spectators. Sadly, my native Cork was not involved this year. Croke Park is just over our garden wall!

This, for reasons spelt out towards the end of this letter, may well be my final letter to you in the series 'From the Postulator's Desk.' Thanks for your company over the past eight years, and may God bless you all.

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Edmund Rice Cause

I am very conscious that there are different constituencies that have an interest and a stake in the Edmund Rice Cause, and, as Roman Postulator, I have found myself endeavouring, formally or informally, to be answerable to them all:

- (1) Congregation of Christian Brothers (CFC),
- (2) Congregation of Presentation Brothers (FPM),
- (3) Edmund Rice Network (ERN) and similar Associates,
- (4) People of Callan, Co. Kilkenny, Ireland - the Westcourt connection (1762),
- (5) People of Waterford – the Mount Sion connection (1802, 1844),
- (6) The Catholic Church in Ireland,
- (7) The Diocese of Ossory, where Edmund was born,
- (8) The Diocese of Waterford and Lismore, where Edmund started the Brothers,
- (9) The Diocese of Cork, where the Presentation Brothers developed separately (1827),
- (10) The Archdiocese of Dublin, where Edmund lived 1831-1838, and which promoted the Cause for Edmund's Beatification in 1996,
- (11) The Catholic Church worldwide,
- (12) The Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Vatican City, Rome,

(13) Devout individuals who have a personal devotion to Blessed Edmund.

All of these groups may have differing perceptions of Blessed Edmund Rice and what he stood for. Some may see him as a remarkable historical figure of the past, while others may see his spirit alive and well, with a message and a challenge for today's world and today's Church. Some may have a personal devotion to him and a deeply felt gratitude for favours received. Others may not be all that interested in his historical legacy, but may marvel at the wonderful enthusiasm and inspiration of people, young and not so young, who work in movements such as the Edmund Rice Camps (ERC) and Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). For some, Canonisation may not be all that important in the greater scheme of things, while, for others, the day of Edmund's Canonisation cannot come too soon! The reality is that we all believe that Blessed Edmund is already with God and that Canonisation, if and when it comes, is always for the edification and inspiration of the rest of us. We do our best, of course, by prayer and action, to bring about the incarnation of Edmund's spirit among us. The late Brother John E. Carroll, that great servant and advocate of Blessed Edmund, used to say that if we do not canonise Edmund in our hearts first, then formal Canonisation may take a long time.

In the meantime, we still await that elusive healing miracle that may very well decide the outcome of our campaign for Edmund's Canonisation. We participate in Novenas, Masses, historical commemorations, publicity drives and special campaigns of prayer. All the background paperwork has been concluded. All the time, there is a trickle of accounts from various parts of the world of remarkable outcomes of prayer through the intercession of Blessed Edmund. I take note of all of these, and each time I muse: 'Is this the one?' I have investigated most of these, and have got the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (CCS) in Rome to take a preliminary look at them. I spent a period of time in Rome during the month of June this current year when I had long discussions with our Congregation Leadership Team and with Monsignor Robert Sarno of the CCS at the Vatican about the progress or otherwise of the Cause. For one reason or another, all of the reported Favours - whether they came about after a campaign of prayer to Blessed Edmund or after a blessing with one of his first-class relics - were deemed to be deficient in one or other of the CCS's criteria for a miraculous cure, and no further investigation was advised. Very often, the surgeons and consultants involved were non-committal or even hostile, and sometimes the patients themselves were not willing to undergo further medical examination. At a personal level, this can be dispiriting. But, of course, there is our time - and God's time!

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Friday, 1 June 2012:

250th Anniversary of Edmund Rice's Birth

[Tuesday, 1st June 1762]

Anniversaries are times to reflect and to celebrate, and what better time than the 250th anniversary next year of Blessed Edmund's birth at Westcourt, Callan, Co. Kilkenny! I have checked to see if there is a special word for 250th anniversary, and I find there is a number of Latin-derived terms, the simplest being 'Semiquincentennial' (literally half of 500th anniversary) and 'Quarter-millennial' (literally quarter of 1000 years anniversary)! I think, on reflection, that 250th Anniversary is simpler!

Anyway, next year, on Friday, 1st June 2012, Edmund's followers in Christian Brother, Presentation Brother and Edmund Rice Network circles of influence will honour the birth of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice, their founder and inspiration, in ways yet to be decided and in various parts of the world. Naturally, one would expect a major local celebration in Callan, Co. Kilkenny, the actual place of his birth. I expect that Edmund's followers in Ireland and the people of Callan will see to that. Worldwide and Congregation-wide, I expect it will be a time of reflection on what Edmund's birth and life have bequeathed to today's world and today's Church and on how and where we may have deviated from Edmund's spirit. Since "tomorrow began yesterday", to use the memorable phrase of a New Zealand Marist, there will be much prayerful soul-searching on the strengths of the Edmundian message as a way forward into the future,

In line with this positive approach, the CLT of the Christian Brothers has spent 40 full days, over a period of more than a year, in prayer, reflection, research and discussion with a view to proposing a positive and Spirit-filled rebirth, in line with the 2008 General Chapter at Munnar, India. They presented their process, A Way into the Future, at a meeting of Province and Region Leaders in Lusaka, Zambia, at Pentecost this year. A group of 35 Brothers and others with particular expertise representing the wider Edmund Rice Network (ERN) will meet in Nairobi, Kenya, 2 – 7 October, to work in what are called five "Spark Groups" over the next six months. Appropriately, the plan for rebirth will be launched on 1 June 2012 at Emmaus Retreat and Conference Centre, Dublin, in Edmund's native Ireland, on the 250th Anniversary of the birthday of Blessed Edmund. Hopefully, the plan outlined on Edmund's Birthday next year will chart the Edmundian approach until the next Congregation Chapter due to be held in 2014.

Meanwhile, the newly-elected Leadership Team of the Presentation Brothers, fresh from their Congregation Chapter at Emmaus Retreat Centre in July 2011, will reflect on their own perspective on 1st June 2012. We congratulate them as they take up their new roles: Martin Kenneally (Leader, re-elected), Rupert O'Sullivan (Deputy Leader, West Africa), Denis Claivaz (Canada + Geneva), Barry Noel (West Indies), Walter Hurley (Ireland). Needless to say, they, too, will have a plan for next year's commemorations. Long may the historical bonds between the Presentation Sisters (PBVM), the Presentation Brothers (FPM) and the Christian Brothers (CFC) continue to flourish under the benign inspiration of Nano and Edmund.

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Book Launch:

The Way of the People: Folk Church, Domestic Church,

Edited by Br Leo Canny CFC

At a pleasant function in Marino Institute of Education (MIE), Dublin, in late May 2011, the long-awaited Way of the People was launched by Dr Daithí Ó hÓgáin, Professor at Folklore Department, UCD. Because of health problems, Br Leo Dorotheus Canny (85), its editor, had just removed to a nursing home, and so the launch was more low-key than originally intended.

“Have you ever wondered what it must have been like to grow up in a country where, for many years, the Catholic Faith of the majority of the population, mainly Gaelic-speaking, was proscribed by an unsympathetic Government, totally English-speaking, during a period dominated by the Penal Laws?” Such was the fate of Blessed Edmund Rice (1762-1844), Founder of the Presentation and Christian Brothers. The late Br Liam Philip Canny CFC, a brilliant researcher and social historian and author of many books, tried to answer that question posed to him in the 1980s by former Superior General, Canadian-born Br Gabriel McHugh CFC. Thus began a long saga of research, including a period as Loftus Research Fellow at Iona College, NY. Liam trawled through the enormous Irish language manuscript collections of the Royal Irish Academy and of the Irish Franciscans, among many, as well as the holdings of the Irish Folklore Commission, in an attempt to arrive at an authoritative answer to the question posed. Because, however, of many other literary commitments and the onset of Alzheimer’s Disease, Liam at his death in 2001 left behind him a large but uncompleted collection of chapters written in the Irish language of his attempt to complete *The Way of the People: Folk Church, Domestic Church*, research into the values, faith beliefs, practices, superstitions of the Roman Catholic people of Ireland during the period between the Battle of Kinsale (1601) and the Great Hunger (1845-1847).

Liam’s brother, Br Leo Canny CFC, a scholar in his own right, decided to try and prepare his brother’s research for publication, and thus began another saga. During a visit to Ireland from Rome in 2005, I agreed to be his unofficial editor and to help in any way I could. I was to continue in this role during frequent visits to Ireland, until I finally returned to Dublin at the end of 2007. From that time until publication in mid-2011, I visited Leo in Drimnagh Castle approximately once a fortnight. Early on, it was decided that, to reach a greater international audience, Liam’s magnum opus would need to be translated from its original Irish into English. A team of voluntary translators, all fluent in both English and Irish, was recruited: Brothers Liam McInerney, Martin Fahy, Brian Ó Foiréis CFC, and Fr Seán Ó Duinn OSB, Glenstal Abbey. Since the text came to over 1000 pages A4, the next task undertaken by Leo and myself was to abridge the English version by two thirds, not an easy task. Because of Liam’s developing Alzheimer’s, unintentional repetition had occurred. The book finally settled into 27 chapters and about 350 pages, and a team of proof-readers checked the final version of each chapter as it appeared on Leo’s computer. The team consisted of Br Leo Judge, Dr Ben Cunningham, Br PJ McMahan, Dr John Boylan – and myself.

There were many hiccups along the way, including disagreement over what to include or exclude of Liam’s vast array of detailed footnotes. In the end, Leo graciously decided to lodge all of Liam’s original papers in the European Province Archives, Marino, Dublin, for the convenience of scholars. A further crisis occurred when Leo’s computer was stolen in early 2010, containing the final version of all the chapters. Initially, Leo was inclined to give up. Luckily, however, about ten versions of each chapter, at different stages of editing, survived on discs, and Rory Geoghegan’s computer wizardry and painful rereading and rechecking by Leo and others finally recovered the most up-to-date version of the intended book. This pushed back the publication date by several months. It is no wonder that by this stage Leo almost considered the book his work rather than that of his brother!

Publication date almost became a non-event as Leo, in the throes of advanced diabetes, was transferred to St Patrick’s Nursing Home, Baldoyle, from the more familiar surroundings of Drimnagh Castle. The printer/publisher had been chosen because of his proximity to

Drimnagh Castle, but now Leo was in Baldoyle, north of the city, and about 15 miles distant. Because of Leo's illness, no final plans were made about the book's distribution.

Cardinal Seán Brady, Primate of All Ireland, states in the introduction:

“The book sets out to track as accurately and exhaustively as possible the religious mind of Gaelic Ireland, mainly through the immense manuscript literature and oral heritage of the language. Significantly, it does this for the first time. It is that rare treasure, a book that breaks new ground.”

It is an essential tool for anyone who wishes to explore how home influences played a role in the formation of Edmund Rice. Up to now, most of our sources for a study of Edmund Rice and his time were English-language based which mainly dealt with conditions in the few larger towns and cities. The book, as published, is a tribute to the zeal, diligence and scholarship of both Canny brothers, Liam and Leo – ‘all the brothers were valiant.’ The book (350 pages) retails at €30 hardback and €20 paperback.

For an update on distribution details, please contact:

Br Leo Canny CFC, Cowper Care, St Patrick's Nursing Home, Baldoyle, Dublin 13.

Tel. +353-86-331 5728 (Local: 086-331 5728)

Poetry and Edmund – Br Brendan MacCárthaigh, India

Br Brendan MacCárthaigh is an Irishman who has worked in India for many years. A gifted musician and poet, he has identified with the down-and-outs in Kolkata, and is involved with a movement called the Serve Centre which works very closely with those at the margins of society. He sees it as a great injustice that such a large portion of Indian society is denied an education that those whose parents are more well-to-do can purchase for their offspring. Brendan has taken to living simply with them while striving for education reform. He has reflected long and hard about the anomalies of religious life where, despite the vow of poverty, we do not have the worries that many of our brothers and sisters have, especially at this time of recession.

His hero is Blessed Edmund Rice (1762-1844), the wealthy merchant in Waterford who “had it all” but took the radical decision to give up the prestige of a rich lifestyle to identify with the poor in 19th century Ireland and provide them with an education that was the key to liberate them from a state of ignorance and poverty. He has written a series of Six Sonnets all reflecting on key moments in Edmund's journey. I reproduce below one of the six – I hope it gives you food for thought. I feel that all six should be unveiled for a wider audience. If you would like to contact Brendan, his email address is: serve@vsnl.net, and he resides at St Joseph's College, KOLKATA (formerly Calcutta):

5. RESIGNS FROM SUPERIOR-GENERALSHIP 1838

"This is my body." So: my hour is come.

The body I have led until today

I must surrender. Father, take away
My fear of following your suffering son.
Shall senile scorn sour me when I resign?
Shall disillusion dull me from your will?
I love my brothers: shall I love them still
For seeing visions, dreaming dreams, not mine?
What if my body's tortured by dissent,
Betrayed by blindness into foreign hands,
Straitened by Law, misunderstood by friends,
And crucified as disobedient?
Here at your daily Calvary, my Lord and God,
Your lifelong love dissolves my fear: "This is my blood."

-BMacC

Some Other Anniversaries, 2012

In addition to the 250th anniversary of Edmund's birth that is being celebrated in 2012, there are some other interesting anniversaries next year that should be of interest to the followers of Blessed Edmund Rice (This the Congregation Historian in me coming to the surface!). These include:

(1) Bicentenary of the opening of the Brothers' First School in Dublin in 1812 at Hanover Street in St Andrew's Parish, south of the River Liffey:

Dublin was to become the greatest concentration of the Christian Brothers and their schools in Ireland. Br Thomas Grosvenor, one of Edmund Rice's first two companions at Mount Sion, Waterford, was the founding Superior. This school, in a converted warehouse serving the sailing ships at nearby Sir John Rogerson Quay, was succeeded by a purpose-built school at Westland Row in the same parish in 1864. Thomas Grosvenor left the Brothers to become a diocesan priest in Dublin in 1822. He died of cholera heroically contracted during an epidemic while hearing the Confessions of his poor parishioners in Irishtown in 1827. A plaque honours his sacrifice in the porch of Donnybrook Church. Other early foundations in Dublin were at Mill Street in 1818 and James's Street in 1820. These led the way for the Brothers' first purpose-built Generalate and Novitiate at North Richmond Street (1828), beside the soon-to-be famous O'Connell Schools named after the great Daniel O'Connell MP, the hero of Catholic Emancipation, and a personal friend of Edmund Rice.

(2) 150th Anniversary of the Death of Br Michael Paul Riordan in 1862

Br Michael Paul Riordan, a member of the Cork Community, was Edmund Rice's successor as Superior General of the Christian Brothers in 1838. In God's Providence, he was to provide much suffering and misunderstanding for Blessed Edmund in his old age. He had the unenviable task of following in the footsteps of Blessed Edmund as Congregation Leader, a difficult act to follow. A compromise appointee at the General Chapter of 1838, he suspected that not all the Brothers reacted cordially to his appointment, and, initially, he ruled by edict rather than by consultation. With his Francophile tendencies, he even had notions of grafting Edmund Rice's Brothers onto the French De La Salle Order! He caused many a heartache for Blessed Edmund in his retirement. He eventually turned out to be an excellent administrator of schools, mellowed with age, and his promotion of the publication of their own schoolbooks by the Brothers led to the fame and efficiency of the Brothers' schools being recognised even beyond the shores of Ireland. He died at North Richmond Street, Dublin on 17 February 1862, aged 73, having been Superior General for 24 years. He should not be confused with Br Michael Augustine Riordan, also a member of the Cork Community and no relation of M.P. Riordan, who seceded from the North Monastery in 1826 to become founding Superior of the South Monastery, Cork, the first foundation of the distinct Presentation Brothers who wished to remain under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Cork rather than under Edmund Rice.

(3) Centenary of the Death of Br Patrick Ambrose Treacy (1834-1912),

Hero of the Australian Christian Brothers

Australia became one of the most fruitful and prolific arenas for the educational and religious activities of the Christian Brothers worldwide. The vast Oceania Province today includes not only Australia but New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, The Cook Islands, East Timor (Timor Leste) and the Philippines. Brothers from this vast Province have also gone as missionaries to India, China and Africa. Much of the credit for this must go to the heroic exploits of Co. Tipperary-born Ambrose Treacy. After an abortive attempt in Sydney in 1842-1847, stymied by the 'Benedictinising' attempts of Archbishop Polding OSB, the Brothers simply left and returned to Ireland. They were later to return to Australia, this time to Melbourne, in 1868, under the entrepreneurial leadership of Brother Ambrose Treacy. Despite being so far distant from the Generalate in Dublin, Br Treacy, with very little resources and always appealing for more Brothers, founded a huge network of Catholic day schools and boarding schools right across the vast continent of Australia. He even visited many of the mining camps and sheep-farms on horseback to collect funds for the new schools, and was not disappointed. He began to recruit novices locally, since the outflow from Ireland could not keep pace with the demands of the new foundations. A man of action and great lateral thinking, as well as a loyal, devoted follower of Edmund Rice, he must have been devastated to be recalled to Dublin, admittedly on promotion, to become a member of the Brothers' General Council after the General Chapter of 1900. During his ten years back in Ireland, he, with his vast experience of school building in Australia, became unofficial clerk-of-works for the construction of the new Generalate and Novitiate, St Mary's, Marino, and one of the main fundraisers. During his ten-year period as Assistant to the Superior General, he was a good 'friend in court' for the expanding Australian and New Zealand network of CB schools. In an age of daunting and time-consuming travel, he undertook their onerous Visitation on behalf of the Superior General, even including a visit to the Brothers at Gibraltar on his way out, and returned to Dublin exhausted after an absence of ten months. At the end of his ten-year spell in Dublin, although in poor health, he was happy to return to his beloved Australia in 1910. There he died two years later, aged 78, and is buried at Nudgee

College, Queensland. Knowing the flair of Australians, I am sure that the centenary will be marked appropriately. I do know that Br Regis Hickey, former Edmund Rice Postulator, has been engaged in exhaustive research into Br Treacy's correspondence in a follow-up to the excellent biography by the late Br Kenneth K. O'Donoghue published in 1983.

Personal: My Time as Postulator Comes To an End

Those of you who know me personally will be aware that my health has been causing problems in recent years. In August 2008, shortly after returning to Ireland from residing in Rome, I attended a Chapter of the European Province at the University of Limerick where I suffered what is colloquially called a blood clot on the brain. I have no memory of that week, but I was moved, first to Limerick Regional Hospital where I had a CAT-Scan and, later, to Cork University Hospital, where I underwent brain surgery. I made a good recovery, but I still suffer from high blood pressure, eye problems and pernicious anaemia. Medication helps, but I occasionally suffer from vertigo. Driving is no longer an option.

I made a commitment after the brain operation to continue as Postulator for a further three years. That time is now completed, and, after consultation with the Christian Brothers' Leadership Team in Rome, it was felt that, for my own sake and for the Edmund Rice Cause, now might be a good time to step down. In the meantime the leadership teams of the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers will discern to choose my successor. I retain my other hat as Congregation Historian and may now, with a little more leisure time, be able to devote my diminished energies to a few favourite research projects that I could never previously find time for. God is good, but, humanly, I'm a little sad.

I would have liked, I suppose, that Blessed Edmund would have been canonised on my watch, but God views time differently! I take comfort from the fact that I did my best while I could. I worked full-time at our Generalate Archives in Rome in the period 1981-1986 completing the historical research required for the advancement of Edmund's Cause to Beatification level, under the instruction of the late Br Columba Normoyle, Promoter of the Cause, and of the late Fr Dermot Cox OFM, the then Postulator of the Cause. I returned to Ireland in 1986 and was involved as a member of the teacher education staffs at Marino Institute of Education (MIE), Dublin and Newman University College, Birmingham, UK, and in the setting up of the St Helen's Province Education Office in Clonkeen Road, Blackrock. I never lost my interest in Edmund and his Cause, and in 1994 I produced the first of three editions of a short biography of Edmund and chaired the committee that prepared the special International Mass broadcast on Irish television that honoured the 150th anniversary of Edmund's death in 1844.

I had the privilege of attending Edmund's Beatification ceremony in Rome in October 1996. In September 2003, I returned full-time to the Cause, being appointed Roman Postulator. Since then, from a base in Rome and, later, in Dublin, I have organised Novenas, given lectures, written articles, distributed memorabilia, prepared celebration of Edmund Rice Masses, sent out an international Newsletter, answered queries of a historical and theological nature from hundreds of Brothers and other clients of Edmund worldwide. I have been elated at the enthusiasm for Edmund that exists among young and not so young. I have been disappointed, too, at times, by the failure of some to communicate timely information about Edmund-related events in different parts of the globe.

In late 2007, I suffered the inconvenience of moving my office from Rome to Dublin (due to the downsizing of our Roman property). This involved the transport and reinstallation of several containers of books and documents. Then, as mentioned above, I suffered a debilitating but life-saving brain operation in August 2008. In March 2011, I suffered the indignity of some person unknown hacking into my email and sending out a false begging letter in my name, destroying my password in the process. I never managed to get back my email address book, losing the details of hundreds, if not thousands, of clients of Blessed Edmund. The email addresses of the Brothers I was able to find elsewhere, but there are hundreds of laypeople out there whose details I have lost. I have had to get a new email address to continue. Maybe Edmund was telling me that it was time to let go! Like St Paul, I find myself “boasting” of my infirmities!

I would like to say a sincere ‘Thank You’ to all who co-operated with me. Thanks in particular to Br Philip Pinto CFC who recommended my appointment to the CCS at the Vatican in 2003, and to Brothers Martin Kenneally, Donatus Brazil and Bede Minehane FPM who acted as Vice-Postulators in turn since 2003. A special word of thanks is due to the Rome and North Richmond Street communities who have housed, fed and tolerated me and my moods in my time as Postulator. I intend, of course, to continue spreading the message of Edmund, but in a less pressurised way. I wish my successor God’s blessing, Mary’s protection and Edmund’s guidance

God bless you all and may Blessed Edmund lead you all into the future –

Donal Blake CFC

Christian Brothers

*Edmund Rice House

North Richmond Street

Dublin 1, Ireland

*Blessed Edmund Rice lived in this House, 1831-1838. It will shortly be refurbished to house a larger community. In the 1960s it housed as many as 45 Brothers.

- Feast of St Francis of Assisi,
- Brotherhood Day
- Anniversary of Death of Colm Keating CFC, 1999
- 4 October 2011

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