

From the Postulator's Desk, Advent 2009

Diary of Events in 2009

Christmas Greetings from Donal Blake

January:

I visited **Rome** for ten days and stayed at our Generalate in Via Marcantonio Colonna. A visit to Rome, a place I love, always gives me a boost of energy. I gave a brief account of my stewardship and visited **Monsignor Robert Sarno** at the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of Saints. I availed of my visit to reconnect with other Postulators who are fellow-members of the **College of Postulators** and tried to dip into their wisdom to advance the Cause of Blessed Edmund.

I also communicated in person that I was appointing **Brother Patrick Bede Minehane FPM** Vice-Postulator of the Cause in succession to **Br John Donatus Brazil FPM** who, because of mounting work as Archivist and Procurator for the Presentation Brothers, felt that he could no longer do justice to the role. We thank Donatus for his work over the past three years and welcome Bede to his new role. Bede comes well qualified for all exigencies, having been a former Provincial of the Anglo-Irish Province and later a member of the Presentation Brothers' General Council. It was pleasant to visit St Peter's Basilica and other Roman churches where the elaborate Christmas Cribs were still in place.

February:

I travelled down to **Cork**, a journey I was to repeat several times in the course of the year, to meet with Br Bede Minehane FPM, the new Vice-Postulator, who is stationed at **Mount St Joseph**, the Generalate of the Presentation Brothers, and to continue my research into the early history of the **North Monastery**, the bicentenary of whose foundation is being celebrated in 2011. The results of my study will probably appear in book form and/or form the basis of a series of historical articles. I generally avail of the generous hospitality of the North Monastery Community at Fairhill during my Cork visits and, in pursuit of my research, I dip into the House Annals of the North Monastery, the Minutes and Account Books of the Cork Charitable Society, the St Leger Papers, the local history holdings of the Cork City Library, Grand Parade, the Cork Diocesan Archives, and the files of the Cork Examiner. I also avail of my visits to Cork to say hello to my family members, especially my brother-in-law Jim in Doneraile who has been coping bravely with serious illness for the past few years.

March:

This month I resumed my association with **Br Leo Canny CFC**, Drimnagh Castle, Dublin, who is editing and translating into English the detailed research of his late brother, **Dr Phil Canny CFC (Liam Ó Caithnia)**, into the Gaelic-speaking domestic church milieu of Edmund Rice's childhood in Callan, Co. Kilkenny, in the mid-eighteenth century. Remember that most of our resources for the Edmund Rice story to date have been in the English language, whereas Gaelic was the language of the home. Phil, whose brilliant history of the sport of hurling was a literary sensation in the early 1980s, had his final research into Blessed Edmund Rice's childhood brought to an untimely conclusion through the onset of Alzheimer's Disease. May he rest in peace. I assist Leo who is over 80 years of age by proof-reading, by offering friendly criticism, by researching for him in the Allen Library, North Richmond Street, and by supervising the project towards the final stages of publication. On average I devote a day per week to this work which, hopefully, will shed new light on the influences at work on the youthful Blessed Edmund Rice. Hopefully, the work should be ready for publication by Easter 2010.

During March I also co-operated with **Chris Reidy**, an Australian who was making a documentary on Edmund Rice and his legacy. He had previously worked with Channel 9 of the Australian TV Network. I accompanied Chris on a tour of Edmund Rice's Dublin, completed an hour's interview on camera, and made further contacts for him at Callan and Waterford.

April:

This month was taken up by pressing Edmund Rice matters. First of all, the annual **International Edmund Rice Novena** had to be got ready. Normally, we focus on two seriously ill people, one from the Christian Brother circle of influence, the other from that of the Presentation Brothers. This year, seeing that we were centring on the bicentenary of Edmund and the early Brothers making their perpetual vows as Religious of the Presentation, we decided to change the format and focus on a prayer campaign that the Christian and Presentation Brothers rediscover in their own lives Blessed Edmund's founding charism of 'raising boys to the dignity of men', and to pray for new vocations worldwide, especially in Africa where the Brothers are involved in about a dozen countries. Various regions of the world were encouraged to add their own particular intentions for the Novena. I directed people from various places around the world to where Edmund Rice material was available in print and more especially on various websites. I produced a new edition of '**From the Postulator's Desk**' and communicated it to various Promoters and to regional websites.

The new international ER website, www.edmundrice.net, recently initiated by **Br Michael Godfrey** and now managed by **Br Michael Burke, South Africa**, is well worth a look by all who wish to keep up to date on the activities of the Edmund Rice Network, including the two congregations. Bit by bit I am transferring to this website the various ER prayers and paraliturgies that I had collected from around the various Provinces and Regions. On 25 April I made an input at a Conference held in **Emmaus Retreat Centre**, Swords, for the European Province sector of the Edmund Rice Network. About 200 attended. **Br Pat Madigan CFC**, the new CEO of the Mount Sion Centre, Waterford, collected and codified the various suggestions and sharings for future use.

May:

During May I caught up on some of my on-going research. On 5 May we concluded our Novena and celebrated the **Feast of Blessed Edmund**. Early in the month I attended the AGM of the **Irish Church Archivists Association** at Mater Dei Institute. This group represents most of the religious orders in the country, in addition to some dioceses. It is a very fruitful way of networking with sources of useful information for historical research and it supplies an update on the most modern methods of preserving documents in archives. It organises an annual training course for the initial training of new archivists and researchers.

In the middle of the month I was a guest speaker at a book launch in **Mitchelstown CBS, Co. Cork**. The book was on Dean Morgan O'Brien, the parish priest who introduced the Christian Brothers to Mitchelstown in the mid-19th century. The author was **Tom O'Donnell**, a history teacher at the school. Later in the month, I delivered a lecture at the North Monastery, Cork, to staff and past-pupils on a former Superior and headmaster of the school, the famous Limerick-born **Brother Dominic Burke** (1834-1904), the 'father' of technical education in Ireland. A pleasing feature of the evening was that a group of ten relatives from Limerick of the late Br Burke that I had helped to track down attended the function. I felt rather pleased. Unfortunately, as I walked across a darkened corner of the car park I tripped over a step and suffered a heavy fall. Was it a case of 'pride comes before a fall'?

June:

1 June marks the birthday of Blessed Edmund, but unfortunately there was little to celebrate this year. The devastating **Ryan Report** into abuse in Ireland's Industrial Schools, closed in the late 1960s, was just published, and all 18 religious congregations involved in their management were castigated for their failures, cruelty and even abuse. The Christian Brothers catered for more of these deprived children than most and so bore the brunt of the media reaction. We were all smeared by association. One journalist went so far as to state that nobody should feel safe in the same room as a Christian Brother! It didn't seem the proper time to point out that the majority of Christian Brothers in Ireland were never stationed in the Industrial Schools and that the majority on the staffs of the Industrial Schools, an inadequate system inherited from the 19th century, were not guilty of sexual abuse, whatever else. Even one instance of this was, of course, one too many, but one cannot turn back the clock! I grieve and pray for all those abused. It wasn't an easy time to promote Blessed Edmund's path towards sainthood, and I received a number of nasty anonymous telephone calls. Where is Edmund Rice in this very sorry saga? We need you now more than ever, Edmund!

Still, life goes on. I acted, as in former years, as a member of a panel of interviewers for the selection of prospective candidates for a course for the training of addiction counsellors connected with Sister Consilio's admirable centre at **Cuan Mhuire** near Athy, Co. Kildare. I also made myself available to advise **Barry Lenihan**, a senior pupil at Clonkeen College, who is presenting a study of Mount Sion, Waterford as a module for his Leaving Certificate history examination in June 2010. I then sat down and wrote a number of **Jubilee letters** to

Brothers who are celebrating 50, 60 and even 70 years of brotherhood this year. I felt better afterwards and prayed, 'Edmund, we didn't all fail you!'

July:

July is vacation time in Ireland for soul and body. In early July I joined 45 members of ARBI (Association of Religious Brothers of Ireland), composed of members of various congregations of Brothers, for a week's retreat in Emmaus Retreat Centre, Swords, Co. Dublin. The retreat master was Brother Philip Pinto, Congregation Leader of the Christian Brothers, and the topic was **St Mark's Gospel**. Philip has his own impressive way of presenting Scripture and linking it to the problems of today, and I never realised before now how challenging Mark's Gospel could be!

My companion on a fortnight's holidays this year was, as usual, Br Jim Logue. Over the past twelve or so years, we have gradually worked our way around the coasts of Ireland and Britain and some of their offshore islands, using public transport. This year's choice was **Bournemouth**, Dorset, UK. Bournemouth boasts of a seven mile sandy beach and is a purpose-built holiday resort – and the sun shone most days! We were booked into a very pleasant B&B, and a generous cooked breakfast set us up for most of the day. We attended Mass at the Sacred Heart Church, a former Jesuit foundation, and listened to the music of the bands in Bournemouth's beautiful Lower Garden.. We visited much of the surrounding counties of Dorset and Hampshire, taking in Poole with its "millionaires' row" at Sandlands, the New Forest with its wild horses, Christchurch with its Priory, and Dorchester, onetime home of the novelist, Thomas Hardy. One day we ventured as far as Salisbury to see its soaring cathedral. On another occasion we visited Brownsea Island in Poole Bay by ferry, where Baden Powell founded the Boy Scout movement. We travelled to Lymington one day and looked across at the Isle of Wight where we had holidayed a few years ago. On a memorable very sunny day we travelled by open-top bus to Swanage and then by boat along the famous Jurassic Coast. On 22 July we returned to Ireland refreshed and with our knowledge of the south coast of England much enhanced.

On 31 July, **feast of St Ignatius of Loyola**, Edmund Rice's patronal saint, I attended a poignant funeral. Mrs Mary Leader, mother of our Br Donal Leader, was buried at Templemore, Co. Tipperary. Donal, who is stationed in our community near the UN in Geneva, Switzerland, was delivering a series of lectures on Human Rights at a conference in Bangkok for members of the Edmund Rice Network in Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, East Timor, the Cook Islands, India and the Philippines. He was struck down by a massive heart attack, was hospitalised far from home, and so couldn't travel home to Ireland for his mother's funeral. What a sad predicament! He has since made a good recovery and returned to Ireland.

August:

August is a slack time in Ireland. Most people take their annual holidays at this time, and many offices remain shut. During this month I prepared another edition of '**From the Postulator's Desk**', forwarded it to regional local Promoters and posted it on various websites. **Sister Teresa Ryan**, a Brigidine Sister, visited from Australia. She had attended a sabbatical with me back in 1997 at Hawkstone Hall near Shrewsbury, UK, and I was glad to renew her acquaintance and catch up on her news. Knowing I would be away on a course during September, I contacted **Br Bede Minehane FPM**, the Vice-Postulator, to be available during my absence. Then I called down to Cork to spend a few days with my closest relatives, my sister Mary and my brother William and their families. Keeping in touch with family is so very important. Jim Dennehy, my brother-in-law, continues to battle cheerfully with an array of serious illnesses, and I am in awe at the commitment of my sister who looks after him so well and so generously. God bless them all.

September :

I am at an age (67) when I should consider slowing down, put my affairs in order, and prepare for the final phase of senior religious life. A number of years ago, the Brothers and Sisters that compose the **Nagle-Rice Family**, namely the Presentation Sisters, the Presentation Brothers and the Christian Brothers, came up with a programme that tries to achieve just that. And so this year I was invited to participate. The venue was **Ballyvaloo Retreat and Conference Centre**, Blackwater, Co. Wexford, managed by the St John of God Sisters, and located on the famous sandy Curracloe Beach. On 6 September a group of 24 Religious, male and female, assembled, to be greeted by Br Peadar Gleeson CFC and Sister Kathleen Quinlan PBVM, the course directors. Over the next month we were encouraged to relax, play and pray.

We had many excellent inputs by visiting lecturers, but the one that made the greatest impact on me was **Br Mark McDonnell's** wonderful three-day Powerpoint presentation of Cosmology/Ecology. His images were outstanding. We were exposed to many different types of prayer, and **Fr Columba McCann OSB**, Glenstal Abbey, made a great impression with his approach to Lectio Divina. Our visits to Glendalough, Callan, Mount Sion, Ballygriffin, South Pres Convent and Mardyke House – some of our holy places - were both enjoyable and inspiring, each in its own way, and the hospitality we experienced along the way certainly enhanced the Nagle-Rice spirit of the group. We felt very proud of our Founders, the Venerable Nano Nagle and Blessed Edmund Rice. During our last Mass together I presented each participant with a little locket containing a third-class relic of Blessed Edmund. All in all, the course presented me with a renewed love of God and his Creation and hope for the future.

October:

October was for me a month of **medical visits**. Because of my major operation last year arising out of the presence of a clot on the brain, this month consisted of a series of check-ups that all was well. I had blood tests, an ECG and heart-monitoring, an EEG for the brain and a

long appointment with a neurosurgeon. I was delighted with the positive results. Then, just to remind me forcibly of my mortality, I was involved in a traffic accident – my own fault! My intention was to attend a funeral Mass on a Tuesday morning for one of our Brothers who had died in the Nursing Home in Baldoyle. I travelled by train to Sutton and began to walk the final mile towards Baldoyle. I needed to cross the road to reach the Home, but the traffic was very heavy. Finally there was a small break and, with a quick look over my right shoulder I stepped out into the roadway. I hadn't noticed a truck coming out from a T-junction and next moment I was sent sailing through the air. I thought my back was broken. I was lying face down on the footpath, and both my hands and one knee were bleeding. The poor driver was white-faced and did all he could to make me comfortable. I was removed to the A&E at Beaumont Hospital. No bones were broken, although my right arm and right shoulder were quite bruised. The doctor was amazed I was so unscathed after a collision with a truck. I showed him the Edmund Rice relic I had in my pocket and he agreed that somebody up there was looking after me!

November:

November was the wettest month in living memory, and thousands of people in the west and the south and along the Shannon Basin had to leave their flooded homes. Climate change? I travelled down to **Callan** to do an inventory of the various documents that had accumulated since the Brothers moved out from the town to the Westcourt site in the late 1960s. Some documents I sent to the Provincial Archives in Marino for safe keeping; others I sorted for the use of whoever will be showing visitors around Edmund's old home in Westcourt. Finally, several documents had five or six copies. I shredded most of these copies, leaving just the originals and one copy. **Br Michael Godfrey** who had spent the past few months overseeing the renovations at the Brothers' Residence in preparation for the new community arriving after Christmas, left for Melbourne at the beginning of the month, before his new posting to Zambia in the New Year. Before leaving Ireland, he enthused his relatives in Australia and Co. Tipperary to sponsor the erection of a new outdoor statue of Blessed Edmund in front of the Visitor Centre at Westcourt. It was blessed by Bishop Freeman of the Ossory Diocese. It looks very well and is lit up at night.

December:

Where has the year gone? The arrival of December reminds me that I need to tend to my Christmas mail - snail and electronic. This month a sculptor in metal from Brisbane, Australia, called to my office in Dublin asking for my assistance. Her name is **Susan Kaden** and a son of hers is a student at St Laurence's College in Brisbane. She has been employed to sculpt for the new car park at St Laurence's bronze images of the Venerable Catherine McAuley and of Blessed Edmund Rice. I helped her as I best I could, sharing my knowledge of images of Blessed Edmund with her, directing her to the McAuley Mercy Centre, Baggot Street, here in Dublin and down to Callan and Waterford where she might get even greater help.

Finally, as I was going to press, word has begun to filter in of a young man injured some time ago in a horrific sports accident in **Buenos Aires**, Argentina. The doctors apparently thought

he might never walk again. A first-class relic of Blessed Edmund was applied to him and a Novena was made in honour of Blessed Edmund. Remarkably, the young man is now able to walk again, much to the astonishment of the medical people involved with his treatment. Is this another cure through the intercession of Blessed Edmund? Let us hope so.

With that final piece of good news, let me wish you all the blessing of the Peace Child at Christmas, the protection of Mary Immaculate and the continued guidance and intercession of Blessed Edmund. A Very Happy Christmas to you all!

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6 December 2009