

## **LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: AUGUST, 2016**

Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2016, is the 172<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the death of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice, Founder of the aboriginal and undivided Society of the Presentation, from which arose both the Congregation of Christian Brothers and of the Institution of Presentation Brothers, and, consequently, the *fons et origo* of all initiatives, educational and other, deriving from either or both of those bodies, *Lux Edmundi* included.

As is now customary, virtually all recognised schools in the Republic of Ireland, primary and post-primary, will have commenced the 2016-2017 school year by late August. Amongst these will be a range of new schools under a variety of patrons. These will include a new school under the patronage of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. This we may deem a shoot new-sprung from the root of Edmund (cf. *Is* 11:1), clear proof that his charism is as vital now and as fertile as it ever was, well capable of putting forth new growth in new times and in new places.

Its particular founding charism is of fundamental importance to each religious congregation, including those engaged in the apostolate of education. It is, therefore, also of importance to all those who serve in schools established by these teaching congregations and, given their influence, should be at least of interest to all involved in Catholic education in Ireland.

The English word “charism” derives from the Greek word *charisma* (plural, *charismata*). In the New Testament, *charisma* is used to indicate a gift, a grace, given by God through the Holy Spirit. Some such gifts are given for one’s own spiritual benefit. Others are given for the benefit of the neighbour. The founding charism of a religious congregation comprises the special graces given to the Founder of that particular congregation to serve the People of God in the matter, and in the manner, the Lord requires. It gives a congregation a character peculiar to itself. A founding charism is not something preserved in some kind of historical amber. Like the mustard seed (cf. *Mt* 13:31-32), it grows and develops through the lives and works of the successive generations of religious. It is amongst “all these things” the religious – and, it bears emphasis, now their lay co-workers as well - must, like Mary, ponder in their hearts (cf. *Lk* 2:19), not least in times of change when, individually and institutionally, they may have need to re-discern what God is asking of them in the circumstances.

For teaching religious in Ireland, these are times of unparalleled change. In a few short years, they have passed the trusteeship of their schools to legal entities of various kinds, and, more significantly, perhaps, have passed the governance and management of those schools to lay men and women.

These new legal entities, especially those which arose from the collaboration of more than one religious congregation, emphasise that collaboration does not mean conflation. They urge schools to make their own the founding charism of the particular congregation from which they take their origins. It is absolutely crucial to the successful negotiation of these changes that all who succeed the religious accept that the founding charism of this school or that did not depart the scene with Br. A, or Fr. B or Sister C. With the keys of the school, as it were, their lay successors received charge of the founding charism; accepted that, what Br. A and Fr. B and Sr. C did yesterday in fidelity to that founding charism, Ms. D and Mr. E and Mrs. F must do today; must know it, digest it, appropriate it, live it, grow it, develop it, and, in their turn, hand it on in good nick to those who come after them.