

LUX EDMUNDI: AUGUST, 2015

Saturday, 29th August, 2015, is the 171st anniversary of the death of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice, founder of the aboriginal and undivided Society of the Presentation and, thus, of both the Congregation of Christian Brothers and the Institute of Presentation Brothers and, indeed, of all initiatives, educational and other, that derive from either or both of those bodies.

Come that day, virtually all recognised primary and post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland will have already commenced the school year. Virtually all of them will also have engaged in preparation for that commencement. Roy Keane parted company with Mick McCarthy in Saipan in 2002, denigrating the manager's approach to the World Cup and insisting: "By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail". Almost no Irish school fails to prepare for the new term. Individually and collectively, school personnel work hard to ensure that they are ready to hit the ground running, to provide for those committed to their care the very best service right from the start.

In faith-based schools, such preparation must itself be faith-based. What is said and done must be said and done in the light of, and with express reference to, the faith in which the school was founded, the religious ethos in which it is to be conducted. As they are obliged to do, Catholic school authorities will ensure that all school personnel understand the nature and purpose of a Catholic school, not just *qua* school, but also *qua* Catholic.

In these days of preparation, there simply must, therefore, be place for prayer and reflection on what we are, and on what we are about, precisely as staff in a school under Catholic patronage. Everyone working in a Catholic school is entitled to be made aware from the very first day of service that, in its ends and in its means, the *raison d'être* of the Catholic school as Catholic is to serve the young for the sake of the Gospel, to form them in Christ.

There are materials to hand to help us discharge our duties in this respect. These include the school mission statement, the Schedule to the Deed of Variation for Catholic Primary Schools, the Charter of the trustee body (where pertinent), the publications of Catholic Schools' Partnership and *Vision08* and associated statements – including those for Catholic Schools' Week - issued by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. In their respective capacities, Board and Principal must ensure that these documents are constants of school planning; that, at staff sessions of any kind, especially those at the beginning of the school year, there is express and specific provision for shared consideration of one part or another, one aspect or another, of these and similar materials.

Likewise, "Religion" must always be treated as a necessary constituent of the curriculum, a definitive aspect of the student's experience of Catholic education. We must provide for *both* the religious education *and* the religious formation of all students, not just of those preparing for the Sacraments or for state examinations. We must not, by our negligence, invite direct state intervention in the teaching of Religion in faith-based schools (A. Hyland and B. Bocking (2015), "Religion, Education and Religious Education in Irish Schools", *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 18.3: 252- 261).

In all of this, the Catholic school must, of course, respect the constitutional and other rights of others, but others must also respect the rights of the Catholic school, especially its fundamental right to protect and promote its ethos, its characteristic spirit, as a faith-based, Catholic, school.

Go gcuire Dia rath ar ár saothar uile: Faoi bhrat Mhuire agus choimirce Éamainn go rabhaimid.