



EDMUND RICE EDUCATION
AUSTRALIA

Celebrating Blessed Edmund Rice's Feast Day 2019

A Message from the EREA Council

An English journalist, Suzanne Moore, in speaking of the response of New Zealand's Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern to the Christchurch horror wrote: "We have seen the qualities that define leadership in such a way that it is clear she is a lioness and that to call so many of our current leaders donkeys is a disservice to hardworking donkeys the world over."

Unfortunately, there are so many situations and occurrences recently in the world where leaders have shown such poor responses that we might well find ourselves agreeing with Suzanne Moore. The qualities that impressed this journalist so much were the speed of Jacinda Ardern's response, the information that she shared with her people and the language that she gave them 'to speak about the unspeakable, to vocalise the shock and sadness.' In supporting the victims Jacinda Ardern said "We cannot know your grief, but we can walk with you at every stage. We can and we will surround you with *aroha, manaakitanga*, and all that makes us."

Evident was the compassion and empathy and the stress on the unity of the people. There was not the bellicose fury of those who seek to revenge, to name or to punish. This leader through her strength, her words and her actions sought to assuage the grief of a nation and all of its peoples.

It is only last week that we celebrated Anzac Day and, in reflecting on leadership, the leadership of one of the heroes of the Second World War came to mind. Sir (Ernest) Edward "Weary" Dunlop has been acclaimed as a great inspiring Australian leader. Fr Bob Maguire of Melbourne fame recalls that "Weary was asked what he learned during his time working with the sick, wounded and dying in Changi, he answered, 'I learned to put others first'."

The story of Weary Dunlop's service of others during his time in captivity is legendary, putting his own life at risk to protect others, to provide medical services with little equipment and to lift the spirits of his fellow prisoners. He turned despair into hope. His healing continued after the War in medicine but more broadly. In the face of a nation that felt the wounds of the war he rose above the natural inclination to feel hate and anger and instead promoted Australian-Asian relations.



We are still in the Church's season of Easter. At this time, Christians reflect on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospels show that throughout his life Jesus challenged the status quo and put people first. He touched the lepers, he spoke to those on the edge of society and ate with "publicans and sinners". His leadership was one of compassion for the weak and challenge for the self-righteous. It was directed to his claim "I have come to give you life – life in its fullness." And then in his death he forgave his tormentors.

The story did not end there. Christ, the anointed one, is still with us through the Spirit. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul prayed "that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Jacinda Ardern spoke of surrounding those suffering with *aroha* (love) and Weary Dunlop took many a beating for his fellow captives. Jesus in his teaching, in his life and in his death proclaimed with every element of his being the love that God has for us. A love that he asks us to share, "Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

Hopefully none of us will be called to exercise leadership in the extreme situations described above but we each have a role to play for the people and circumstances that we meet in our lives. On the fifth of May we celebrate the Feast Day of Blessed Edmund Rice, the Founder of the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers. Edmund was someone who saw a need in his own time and decided to do something about it. He invited others to join him in providing education and used his business skills to advance the establishment of schools. His obituary detailed the need.

His avocation brought him into immediate contact with the working classes. He perceived that, in many instances, irreligion proceeded from their ignorance – and that to its prevalence much of the crime that abounded could also be traced. He lived in a part of the city where vice and ignorance prevailed to a greater extent than elsewhere. ... Mr Rice having once embarked in the cause he undertook was resolved to persevere...

The work of Edmund and his brothers, according to some historians, had brought major changes to the "rough masses" by promoting "the pursuit of useful knowledge and in the habits of virtuous and honourable industry." They played a vital part with the teaching Sisters in effecting "a radical transformation of Catholic culture."

We can each show the compassion and concern of leaders and work for the betterment of those with whom we come in contact in our day to day existence. Edmund gives us an example as recalled by one of the students.

He was very affectionate and kind to the children. Rich and poor were equally dear to him. When leaving school the boys shook hands with him. Next morning if they had been beaten by their parents they would show him the place to make it well.

May we each and our leaders, both those in the Church and those in civil society, surround all in the love and compassion that will help us grow to our full humanity

Live Jesus in our hearts, forever.



Paul D Oakley cfc

President, Edmund Rice Education Australia
On behalf of the Council



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