

Edmund Ignatius Rice
b. June 1, 1762, Callan, Ireland
d. August 28, 1844, Waterford, Ireland

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I Edmund

Blessed Brother Edmund Ignatius Rice, Founder of the
Presentation Brothers and the Congregation of Christian Brothers

In my sixties 1822 - 1832

1822

“Praise be to you, O Christ.”

June 1, 1822: I have lived 60 years as of today and now I enter my 61st. I’m not the man I once was in Callan, but I’m not yet the person that God is calling me to be. These are desperate times. We live in a broken world, but with each movement of

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the Spirit I sense a glimmer of hope. None more than in the classrooms where my Brothers are making Christ known in and through all that they do.

In fact, as I reflect, I seem to understand more the evolving vocation of “Brother in Ireland.” We are called *TO DO AND TO TEACH. Facere et Docere.* Praise God, that would make a wonderful motto someday to help direct my Brothers to convey the values of the Gospel to others, as they serve the ever-changing, ever-evolving needs of those around us!



Acts of the Apostles 1:1 Jesus began to do and to teach...

This family of Religious is inspired to find Christ in self and in others, in suffering and in joy, in the ordinary as well as the extraordinary events in daily life. I can only pray that all called to serve God in youth and in the as yet unknown needs of the church, will grow in a close and personal relationship with Our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is present not only in the holy sacrifice of the mass, but within us personally, in our communities, and among all those who are associated with us and collaborate in our shared responsibility for the mission.

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We are Irish. Not French! Our kindred spirits in France follow a path similar to our own, but different... You can't be Irish and live a life, even a Religious life designed by those whose experience and history reflects a different story within the Catholic experience. If only my Brothers who seek to define us as a new growth within the mission of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle could see that we are new wine in fresh wine skins. God willing, this papal brief will aid us in our identity, while reflecting our gratitude and respect for our French brethren.

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Frères des Écoles Chrésiennes (De La Salle)

And what can I say of my dear friends who have for so long been with me on this journey, but now at a fork in the road, will go down a different path? What does it matter anyway if we are Christian Brothers or Presentation Brothers? Sure, by any name, are we not called to do the work? And if only the most holy of Bishops, Doctors one and all, would let us alone! But no, they seemingly don't know what to be at... And could it be about power and control? I wouldn't put it past some of them, but I will pray for their humility and my own acts of judgement. And I will forever miss my Brothers being ever grateful for their service to God, goodness to their students, presence to the parents, and the living response to the hungry in faith and in body. They were brothers to the prisoner and a respite for the poor. They were my friends; I sadly bid them well.

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We are now a new family within the church. A family not under man's control but destined by God to hear His will and follow it wherever it may lead. May we evangelize youth within the mission of the church. May we proclaim and witness to all that we are Catholics. May we be one with those who have been marginalized by poverty and injustice. May we foster and invigorate a true community of faith. May we bring healing. May we bring peace. And may we celebrate the value and dignity of each person and help to make them whole.

The Spirit is moving. Pray God that we are mindful enough to allow ourselves to be moved by it and to pursue excellence in all our endeavors! Upon my head a burden of leadership has been cast. So be it. Let us get on with it.

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Let us vow to recommit to who we are and what we are called to be. Let us vow Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience to Him – and Him alone. These evangelical counsels within the bonds of the Gratuitous Instruction of the Poor, and under the guidance of our blessed papal brief, and endowed with the patronage of Our Blessed Mother shall not limit us but make us free to respond to Him hither and yon. Let us be brave in the face of persecution and find strength in the pain of our broken land. Let ours be the hands of those who work at building the Reign of God. Who shall hold us back? What will cause us fear? To God be the glory, and to our Brothers be the work of it!

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We shall now pick helpers to assist in the ministry of leadership. I can't do it all and I need to hear other voices as I discern. Some will disagree with me; others will share a similar vision. But Brotherhood will unite us in our determination to "get it right." As Irish Brothers we know that wherever two or more of us are gathered, you're sure to find differing opinions! May our decisions come from sound minds, clear vision, compassion, and the fire of love. And may our prayer and supplication strengthen our bonds and open our eyes. Let the work of the schools continue, and the work of the Monks bring us more companions on this journey. And to all we say: Thanks be to God.

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We hear God saying to us; "On Ye go!" But how can we do this when we are burdened with "gratuitous instruction?" Holy Mother Church knows that funds are needed to do what needs to be done! Can not those who have - help those who have not? Isn't balance a response to reality? Must we be hungry? And why are my words falling on deaf ears in Rome? God forgive me, but in their palaces their tables have plenty. In too many of our communities, bread and potatoes are substitutes for meat and vegetables. And can we not have some milk for our tea?

I will continue to pray and plead our case. I'm good at knowing that The Lord hears us. Please God, someday Rome will hear us as well. And I must remind myself

of what St. Paul has instructed: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

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As my father would say, *“go raibh maith agat a Thiarna,”* thank you, Lord! Thank you, Lord, for hearing my prayers and calling back to our family of Christian Brotherhood some more of our Presentation confreres. *Céad Mìle Fàilte!* Their decision once challenged us to consider our motives and intent. Their decision to return to us now invites the opportunity for their input and consideration. If we have been blind, may you work through them to open our eyes. If we have been deaf, may you inspire them to open our ears. All of us are being moved by the Spirit. Our prayer life already embraces much of what they hold dear. As for the rest we’ll grow it together to reflect the Monks that we are, the new family of Religious that we have become, and the Brothers that we are being led to be.

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I’m 60 and much is to be done before my body gives up its health and stamina. So, by shanks mare or by whatever means available, I’m off to visit the Brothers in Community. And I pray that this first General Visitation will do much to unite us, and even more to open our eyes and hearts to divine providence. God Bless the Work.

1823

“Praise be to you, O Christ.”

Pray. Reflect. Listen. Act. Dear God, I’m trying, but at the age of 61, it’s still not easy. Not with the likes of some of those you’ve sent me. Did you do it to make me grow in different ways? Are you calling me to be a more patient man? Am I to grow as a leader of the many and not just the likeminded? I wish I could think out loud or talk to my Mary... Instead, I turn to Your Mary and continue to ask her intercession.



I need the wisdom “to know.” My Ma used to say when I vexed her: “You know too much!” And yet I feel as if I know so little. I am worn down. Like Job on the dunghill, I need to get on with it... Pick our local Superiors and by the Grace of God get it right. If only I knew men as well as I do “the books.” Those numbers and figures were easy on the eye and clear to understand and manage. Men are different. I need to know their minds and hearts. And it won’t be by sharing a pint or some of the homebrewed poitin, but by hearing their thoughts, learning their hopes, sharing their fears and loneliness, and by being Brother with them in prayer.

Maybe that’s why the Good Lord has set me on Visitation? If I wasn’t so thick, I should have seen this sooner. I thank the Blessed Mother for calming my heart and opening my eyes. They’ll see yet, her perpetual help shall sustain us all!

§

Dear God, I’m not a “know-it-all,” but I do know a lot! And what I’m seeing in some classrooms is a lot of talk and not a lot of teaching. Not everyone called to teach will find it easy. Some men are natural born teachers. I blissfully envy them. I wasn’t. I needed to develop a system. And once I discovered how boys learn, I could

begin to really teach. And what's more, I could infuse our Catholicity into everything I was called to instruct. That's how you grow a well-rounded Catholic man, and by God, we'll keep at it until Ireland is known to truly be the Land of Saints and Scholars. St. Patrick drove out the snakes; we'll make way for the Saints-in-the-making! And to make this happen, we'll teach the teachers how to teach those whom they consider unteachable! Novitiate will take on the task and responsibility for my Brothers. And as for those in the world who join us in the classroom, we'll teach them what we know. And in spirit and impact, they will be part of what makes our Apostolic Institute a beacon of hope for the boys, and a chance for the church to become what God intends.

And to those from the world who are not up to the task, we will wish them well and find others in their place who will plant the seeds of faith and learning in the children of God. And when my Brothers despair of the work and the difficulty of instructing youth, I will tell them: "Have courage; the good seed that you sow will grow up in the child's heart later on..."

§

It pains me to turn to a Bishop to seek help in what ought to be considered a Religious eviction. But what do you do with your man, that Brother in Carrick-on-Suir who won't embrace the New Order? A boyo who now considers himself a Presentation Brother, but who won't leave our school? By their rule, they are answerable to Himself, the Bishop. And my Brother, the cute one that he is, is quietly engineering things to their own advantage! He must decide to be either fish or fowl. Either you are with us as one of us in our new way, or you're not! Let the Spirit move him to be with us, or let the Spirit move him out! Go with God... And, so he went! Amen.

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1824

"Praise be to you, O Christ."

I cannot believe that I'm 62! How did that happen? I look in the mirror, and I still see the boy in Callen who ran in the fields with my brother John, thatched the roof

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with me Da, and fed the hens for my mother. Back then, I never saw or felt age... I whitewashed the walls of the house and byre, and with each stroke of the paint I only grew stronger. But now, I'm living the words of the old song my gran'da used to sing: "The boy's a man now, his toil - worn and rough."



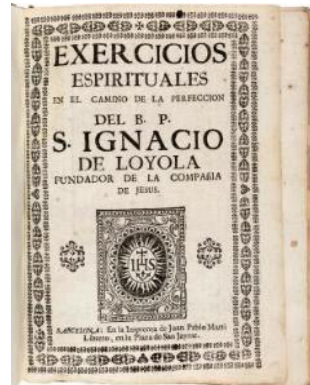
Rice family residence Callen Ireland

Sweet Jesus, I am man now and have been for quite some time, but the toil of work never wore on me then as it does now! Vain though it may be, I loved the challenge of making money, keeping the books, finding and fixing the problems. My uncle saw something in me, and he encouraged the hunt for growth in business, faith and family. And maybe it wasn't always in that order. And Mary, my Mary, seemed like the prize for a life and faith well lived. We had plans. Who knew, Dear Jesus, that you had other plans in mind. What's that saying? "Man plans and God laughs." To God be the glory, but at 62, I wish sometimes it could be a bit easier.

Money has become the bane of my existence. It permeates every decision, every house issue, every school. And in Rome from palaces and splendor, I'm told that my Brothers are to do all for the "gratuitous instruction of the poor." Well, if that's not irony, I don't know what is! Oh, God forgive me, is it irony or hypocrisy? Still, in all things good or evil – and maybe even hypocritical, there is the whisper of the Spirit moving us. But I'll tell you this, Dear Jesus, it's not making me keen on clerics, and I thank providence for being a layman called to such an Institute to bring You to the poor.

I am grateful of course, for the example of my brother, Father John Rice, OSA. Seeing him minister and listening to his counsel, I am reminded of the sacrament within the call of Holy Orders. It was a blessing that he followed in the way of the "Braithrin Liath, the "little gray friar." The men of the Augustinian Order

were a grand example to all in the shadow of their monastery in Callan. And truth be told, were a fierce influence on my own spiritual development. And when the time presented itself and the Lord was inviting me to follow Him, I once again considered the Little Gray Friar and the life he led and the powerful Augustinian example he set. And in pondering this and asking the questions that one would consider, I found myself not drawn to the OSA, but to the Jesuits in Waterford. I even considered journeying to the continent to begin the SJ journey.



I found in St. Ignatius a great example. There was a man of the world who loved the life he was given and lived it fully. And when fate intervened and the life that he loved radically changed, he was brave enough to see God in his lot. And he answered a new call, and discovered a new life which he loved even more dearly! I felt akin to Ignatius after I lost my Mary. I thought my life over, fool that I was! I prayed. I read. I considered. And my eyes were opened to the needs of those around me, and like Ignatius, God gifted me with the bravery to respond. I was a new man, and a new man needs a new name. How could I call myself anything other than Ignatius! As my brother John often said, "Christ makes Himself present in an outward sign as he seeds the man with an inward Grace."

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And, what of Limerick? Like a poor man's Caesar, I came; I saw; I fixed. And the real issue was the Bishop! Thank God it was fixable! It didn't take much really, but I thought of my uncle. He could be as we Irish say, "cute." Ah now, not cute the way others define cute... Looks have nothing to do with it. It's using our "third eye" to

see the truth, and then responding slowly with wisdom, strength and a twinkle-in-the-eye.” It’s taking our time and spinning some tales from the past that are curiously similar to our present. And it’s using that wisdom born from our experience to find the truth that seems to elude so many. Fixable.

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They say, “The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor.” But before hearing their cry, do we not see that material poverty in clothing and food are an obstruction? Hungry, how can you embrace our faith? Naked, how can you learn to read and write? Feed the hungry! Cloth the naked! I hear you Lord: “Brothers, be the Beatitudes and Live the Corporal Works of Mercy!” And in so doing, the heresy that some say we preach will be countered by the good that they see us do!

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Lord, let us travel south to Cork. I can only hope that I am not Peter returning to Rome to be crucified! They are fine Monks, the lot of them! But they do not wish to embrace your Papal Brief. It’s as if they answered only part of your invitation to “come and see.” Some by their inaction are saying: “We’ve seen enough!” It’s such an Irish way of doing things; how do I blame them for being who they are? Still, I will tell them the story of who they are called to be. Not my vision, but Your vision. I know that from prayer and reflection. This is of God, not man. And their hesitancy is not of God, but of yet another Bishop! *Dia A Sha' bha'il Sinn!* That God may save us!



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I left Cork with a heavy heart. I spoke. They listened. But they didn't hear me... I fear that I was too late. It's hard to counter the influence of a Bishop. His is a powerful and impressive voice! After all, he didn't get to the chair of his authority through weakness, faults and failings. There might well have been some cunning in it! His theology can twist the truth through impressive ecclesiastic grinders. Like the meat grinders in Powers' Butcher Shop down the Lane, the Bishop blends his truths, his theology, his alternate facts into a concoction most appropriate to meet his needs. And lest I judge, he then proclaims it to be of God! Who wouldn't be confused! So, I leave Cork with sadness on me, "*tá bron orm.*" But, I am hopeful in prayer. May the words entrusted to my mouth, linger in their hearts and someday, call them home...

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I am on the road once again. And this time to Clare. There are "issues" that I must address and at the heart of it will be changes to authority. No one sets out to fail. No one likes to fail. Yet failure is a reality that leads us to where we ought to be! And in Clare, that was the case. And those involved seemed relieved. We lived our

Brotherhood, spoke our truths, and got through it. We then said our prayers, told some stories, and celebrated the will of God as only we Irish can. We sang a few tunes and toasted the successful opening in Ennistymon. To God be the Glory, to His Mother be the thanks, and to the Irish be the strength to go on...

1825

"Praise be to you, O Christ."

Dear Lord, no one has to tell you that you're old. Your own body does a fine job of telling it for you! I'm 63. I'm too young to be this old! And yet every morning that I wake up, I feel it in my bones. My Gran'da said; "Never complain. The Lord loves the silent sufferer." To that I often add; "It builds character!" So, I suppose that all things considered, *I'm loved by the Lord as a man of great character!* Alas, there are times that I could do with a little less love and a wee bit less character - if only my bones didn't feel their 63 years! God forgive me the indulgence of the body, and I thank the Lord for the smile that it just put to my heart. We Irish are a queer lot. Even in our prayer, our humor can force its way in. Thanks be to God...

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Limerick has been a concern; the inconsistency of location and the message that it might communicate! The need is great for the boys of the city lanes and the country culch. Only a Christ-centered education can save them from their inheritance of poverty. But no good can come of the learning dispensed from the government and the pomposity of the prelates of the Church of England. I fight myself to not be judgmental as some of that cloth do mean well. Others, I am not so sure of... They seem to wish education to be a means of spreading a doctrine of faith that has scorned our Apostolic lineage, yet veiled itself in structures and practices that seem familiar. Their church is a reflection constructed by Henry to serve particular needs of man. That reflection can appear to be akin to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Confused and hungry, ignorant and unschooled in the one true

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faith, they are welcomed. Our poor brethren are led to the altars of protestantism with great hopes and misguided faith. And alas, their lot in life scarcely improves.

They are but Irish in an English Church, and a new second class citizen in the land of their birth. Is it not better to be poor and Catholic, than marginal and misbegotten? The hunger for a better life can only be satisfied from the wellspring of our Catholic faith and the foundation of success born in education and reared in a life of service to Christ and His minions. Limerick's new and permanent site-location of school and monastery will be the answer to a prayer that the faithful, unbeknownst to them, have prayed! The message shall be clear if not unspoken, that our commitment is sincere and our presence a lasting one! And we will do there as we do in all of our schools: "Educate others unto justice, so that they may shine like stars for all eternity."

§

My Uncle Michael was a wise man and nobody's fool. He taught me to recognize success and to build on it. To not rest on one's laurels, but to constantly be looking to the future for the next obstacle to overcome, bill to be paid, unexpected setback to be dealt with. There was never time to fully recognize all that was accomplished, as there was always so much left to do!

As I reflect upon it now, it seems that we were always in process. We were becoming what we needed to be in response to the reality around us. Exhausting, for sure; rewarding, most definitely! I think upon that now as I look to the future with the eyes of a Religious Brother, and the heart of an old Irish businessman. Sustainability is my biggest concern. Christ Himself has told us in Matthew 26:11 and Mark 14:7, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me." I fear that indeed, Christ was correct. Poverty like our Irish hills and some of our old stories, goes on and on and on. But how can we continue to address true material poverty when all signs indicate that unless we dig the ditch now and stop the downward flow of decay into greater poverty, all shall be lost?

To offer a free education to the most materially poor is essential. However, we need recognize as well that because of our efforts and the ministrations of others around us, some of the poor are emerging from the shackles of poverty and are more able to assist us in our Catholic mission. Aye, there are levels of poverty! And when our brethren, our spiritual kith and kin are in a position to assist us with

a nominal amount, much can be accomplished! Asking a hai-penny, a half-penny from those who can now afford to assist in their son's Catholic learning is a recognition of their increasing material success. A half-penny does not sound like a great deal; however, to those who once didn't have it and now do, it is a mark of upward mobility! And in that spirit, it is also engaging them in our Catholic corporate responsibility to help those less fortunate. This builds community; it builds the Body of Christ on earth.

And for my Brothers, it allows food on the table and time to do their ministrations. Begging need not be a part of the Brothers' life! Let the time and effort expended to that charge be put to use in *Teaching and Doing...* So, to Rome I once again plead my case, and to the Blessed Mother, I once again ask her intercession and perpetual help. Thy will be done.

§

Dear Lord, in the quiet of my presence before Your Blessed Sacrament, I turn within to hear Your voice and be moved by the Spirit. I beseech your guidance in knowing Your will. I am wordless in answering false accusations from ill-informed Church leaders. They who say that we, Your Monks, are ill-prepared to teach. That we are illiterate on multiple levels including our knowledge of Catholic doctrine.

As Samuel of old once said: "*Speak Lord, your servant is listening.*" Dear Jesus, I'm listening, but I don't hear you! All I hear is my mother's voice telling the "*leanai*," the "*wee ones*" at home with hurt feelings by those who judged them: "*They're only jealous!*" Perhaps they are, or maybe that's my vanity once again speaking. Wordless, all I can do is bid them to Come and See!

So, to the schools the Leaders came... They watched. Observed. Questioned the children. And like the blind man's eyes that were washed with the river's mud, they saw the truth! Education in action. Catholicity infused into all the curricula. The hungry being fed; the naked being clothed. And pedagogy inspired by how the boys learn. Thank You, God, for my wordlessness!

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I think of the Monks as my own dear brothers. We are a family of faith drawn together in vocation and mission within Holy Mother Church. We are "*Fortis et Hospitalis*," brave and hospitable. Brave to answer God's call To Do and To Teach,

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and hospitable to each other within the community and Institute. This mark of Irish religious common life defines us in a particular way and brands community as a living means to sustain us within our prayer and apostolate.

Acts of the Apostles 1:1 Jesus began to do and to teach...

However, we also have our families from which we hail. And to them we owe a great deal! It was within their constraints of home and love that the seed of vocation was formed and allowed to grow. We are indebted to them, bound to them, and responsible to and for them in ways often unknown until, like Job, circumstance makes need known! And it is for this that I am most grateful to my council for permitting me to assist those of my name and heritage whose need was extended by an open hand for those resources available to me under the guidance of my Brothers. Wealth, like success, can be fleeting and situational. And if you cannot turn to your family in need, to whom can you turn? So, I am thankful to have been there to help those of my blood who were experiencing financial difficulties. I know them and they know me! A loan is a loan, not a gift! The Brothers have empowered them to do what must be done to save the day, reap the reward, and return the loaned funds from whence they came. *St. Matthew would have it no other way!*

1826

“Praise be to you, O Christ.”

Today, I am young! At 64 when all things indicate otherwise, I feel the hope and positivity of a young man. And while my mane, Dear Jesus, indicates silver among the red and gold, and a shine now resides where once flowed my boyish locks, still the energy and hopefulness of what tomorrow can bring thrills me. And it is in no short measure due to return to the fold of Cork’s Brother Superior. A fine man he is who had been appointed by the Bishop, and who had once resisted the Papal Brief.

Like saving the hay, I trust that for some it takes time and the appropriate climate to become who and what they are meant to be. My prayer is of gratitude. I am thankful for the man - called to be my Brother. I am thankful to Our Blessed

Mother for her steadfast intercession. And I am thankful to Almighty God for working on His own terms, hearing our prayers, seeing our work, and living within our hearts! Forever.

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Energized, I am called to the work of the moment. Back to the solicitor and to the courts I will go! I will seek any legal means necessary to ensure that our Institute's land and property not be seized by church leaders. I hold them in no malice or disregard. We are a new growth born of an old tree. We are laymen who are living simple vows within a complex church of Religious tradition and governance. A threat to some we are, an enigma to others we have become! Alas, to the God who called us into being, we are an answer to the cry of His poor. So it is in His name that all must be done to preserve and protect the fragile beginnings of His new covenant with the poor.

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Oh, Lord, in my life for every joy there is a sorrow. And like the sword of sorrow that was predicted by Simeon to one day pierce your mother's heart, no greater pain has afflicted me than that of the Bishop of Cork convincing Br. Austin Riordan to remain under his Diocesan jurisdiction. Our Brother Austin has moved into a new residence, opened a new school, received new postulants, and established the Presentation Brothers. That Community is "our community." That name reflects our humble beginnings and familial link to our dear Nano Nagle and her Sisters of the Presentation. But its work is our work! Its traditions are our own. Its prayers are prayed to the same God who called us all to this new family within the church. Though many were called, few have been chosen.

Yet now, even some of those seem to have turned a deaf ear... But in humility, who am I to judge the will of God? Perhaps this is also part of His plan. I must trust in Him who bequeathed providence as our inheritance. Is it not said: "In my father's house there are many rooms?" Our Brothers of the Presentation will fill but another one of the Lord's rooms. Their future, which began today, will take shape with each new day that follows - another new growth born of an old tree. Or perhaps, it's a new leaf sprung from our new branch? Afterall, I've said it before

and I'll say it again, "When God made our work, he made plenty of it!" And yet I wonder with child-like curiosity, shall our roads one day cross again? Will we be one again in Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience? Will our shared beginnings, traditions, work and responsiveness to the will of God, heard in His gentle whisper before his Most Blessed Sacrament, bring us a new unity that only time can define? Oh, Mother of the Word Incarnate, let it be so.



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I offer my Litany of Mary and my journey to Cappoquin, under her gentle protection, to our Brother Ignatius Mulcahy. A tremendous teacher in his day and a valued community member, his resounding answer of "YES," to the Lord's invitation to "Come follow me," turned many to the faith in love and fidelity. Because of him, many are now Catholic not only in name, but in understanding and devotion.

His life has been sacramental; he is an outward sign of an inward grace. And now he lives his calling as a Brother of the Presentation. I need not question his decision. I know him well enough to be certain that this is of God and his response had to be YES, once again. Now aged, he needs care and comfort. To that, we pledge him to receive a life-annuity of 30 pounds-sterling. This is meant to reflect our gratitude for his service, brotherhood, friendship, and original dowry. *Ad multos annos.*

§

With all the joys and sorrows of 1826 now behind us, I do thank our Heavenly Father. And not the least for the permission to accept grant monies to ensure the solvency of some of our schools. Grants are a gift that when used wisely, give over and over again! And as we still may not ask for financial recompense for the instruction that we offer, these monies, now received in good faith, will reaffirm our commitment to a number of schools which otherwise may have been short-lived.

1827

“Praise be to you, O Christ.”

Dungarvan may not be Emmaus, but it is to there that I am on the road! And I only hope and pray that I like the strangers who met Christ on the road to Emmaus, will know Him in the breaking of the bread. So, it is to the Eucharist that I come and kneel in prostrate adoration before His infinite and adorable majesty. Only in the breaking of that bread will I find the strength to do what must be done. Like the new Pharoah who knew not Joseph, I need attend to the new Bishop who does not know us! And he has denied us the ability to raise money for the school and community. God, who knows his heart, must question his intentions, as do we? We are spiritual men who are Vowed to live in this world in preparation for the next. But this world need not be our Purgatory! We need to eat. We need supplies and materials to teach. We have rents to pay and mortgages to satisfy.

And if the Bishop has denied our only means to support the “Gratuitous Instruction of the Poor,” then like the Apostles, who with heavy hearts kicked the dirt from their sandals and with girded loins moved on to new environs, so too we close the door to this mission and respond to the call of another. This decision was business. “*Estote Firmi*”. Be strong and courageous – that was my intention; that was my prayer. And strong I was and courageous we were, and so we left! And the Bishop got what he wanted, or did he? The replacements that were found to fill the void left by the Monks found themselves like the ill-equipped fisherman who fell into the Shannon, “Over their heads!” These masters did not know of our ways. And while the slate and chalk were the same, the method and pedagogy failed to

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meet the needs of the learners. The result was chaos. No one learned; no one behaved.

Teachers quit and the Bishop came a calling! Thanks be to God, the Reverend Doctor requested that the Brothers return. After prayerful consideration and some ecclesiastical guarantees our Brothers came back to Dungarvan! The Bishop then supplied the Brothers with specific assurances of funds to conduct the school and community. As with Ruth in times of old, the bounty of the harvest was realized through the will of God and the strength to make difficult decisions for the good of the Order and the health of the church in Ireland. *Dominus nobiscum!*

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The Brothers seem keen on saying: “God Bless the work!” I appreciate the sentiment with its inherent prayer. Yet I find that hard work, successful though it may be, breeds more hard work and potential for success. And so it was to be in Dungarvan! As the Monks were scarcely back when the need arose for them to offer weekend parish instruction to adults in matters of faith and religious formation!

In concert with my council and worried though I be that this was overextending the Brothers, permission was granted. And the masses of the needy soon became the enlightened faithful, and the church’s new branch on that old tree, grew yet another leaf. All this because the Brothers were moved by the Spirit! And so it was, and so it shall forever be when responding to the movement of the Spirit and the needs of others with open hearts and a willing way. *Benedicta nobis Dominus.*

1828

“Praise be to you, O Christ.”

Dear Lord, I remember my grandparents and then my parents when they turned 65 years of age. They were old! Now, at 65 myself, I’m not so sure that “old” means what it used to... As a child, I mind stories told by the old folks as I turned the fan

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bellows at the hearth. They talked of the land and how all in nature was sacred and how we were a part of this web of life. It was deep talk from simple people who could not even read. Yet, the wisdom was grand.

§

My gran'da was a fierce man with hands the size of bricks. And his temperament was volcanic when things didn't go his way, yet my Da would say: "Look beyond that for he wasn't born that way. The world has made him so..." Yet, in the glow of the fire as the day's weather misted off his soggy trousers, he spoke of thoughts bigger than himself. How everything in life and nature was connected and at the heart of it all was God. He was Catholic for sure, as who wouldn't be in our house. Yet, his theology was more than what the Priests at the Mass Rock spoke of, or the masters in the Hedge Schools. He saw truth and God in nature and people.



And sure, my grandmother was no different in some ways. Yes, she clung to her beads and whispered her Hail Mary's, and not a drop of the drink would pass her lips - even though she nare took the pledge. Granny believed in family and what we would call "community." In her eyes we were all related. And given enough time, she could tell you who married who, and why this one and that one were all part of the mix. Community then was all family and in her mind's eye, we were all connected. And she'd say of those whose ways were questionable: "Mind that one, for he's one of our own." And she, at the heart of the family, even though we had a great more than others, was happiest with so little. If she had her own around her, if they went to mass and were sure to keep Lent, if they held on to what little land we had and cared for those with less than us, then that's all she needed to

know to have her peace. Some say now it was simple, yet in “simple,” she found the Divine.

And how she wound up with my grandfather, I’ll never know. Two more opposites you could not find! Yet, before the fire when day was done, all was well. And when the music came out, our history was sung. And the world was painted with images that bound them both and made us a family.

§

My parents were the same, but different. They prayed the prayers that they had taught us, but there was more to them than that. They used silence and thought to think the things they never said aloud to us. Today, I’d call it meditation. Back then, we’d say they were walking with God. You’d see them out in the fields, or on the path. They’d often be alone, together. Silent they were, but in contact with something bigger than themselves. What little they’d say to us was all about what you find in nature when you shut the door to noise and worry. They always came back emptyhanded for sure, but they always seemed to have found whatever it was that they were looking for. It’s as if they did find God in their walk. And in their talk to us, didn’t they always end with a, “Thanks be to God?”

§

And didn’t we all love a good party. The craic was always grand when there was something to celebrate. The hay being saved, the cure in the water, a birth, the straw turned into the cross, autumn’s abundance and the end to the purgatory of winter. We’d honor it all with music, stories, and dance! And all would eat, and some would drink. And the women folk would feign disapproval... But for sure, it was all a part of it.

And those stories that were told reminded us of who we are, why we are blessed, and why others were against us. Literate or not, we all heard and understood the messages, and joined in the song and tradition. And in the morning we were all at mass once again. And Granny would give each of us a coin for the collection plate and an extra for the child sitting next to us; just in case that boy or girl had none of their own to drop into the basket. Och, there are just some things you never forget... Praise Be Jesus Christ. Now and Forever.



Detail from Icon by Desmond Kyne

1829

“Praise be to you, O Christ.”

I’m afeard, Oh Lord, of what I see. Sure, to the eyes of the many, all is as it ought to be. Schools are being founded, others are thriving, communities are teaching, visiting the sick in hospitals and homes, and the imprisoned wherever bars keep them. And, at times going door to door, shop to shop, for the sustenance of life and doing. And our numbers grow – thanks be to God. However, we live a trinitized life, the evangelical counsels: Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. All must be balanced. And in none of it, does the Apostolate take precedence!

Yet, our work is paramount, and the need is great. But can our Brothers sustain themselves within, by only concentrating on the work that must be done? For God knows, no matter the level of joy that is found in the work of our hands, if our mind, heart and soul are not focused on growing closer to thee, all shall be a shadow of what it ought to be. It will be pretense rather than real. It will be the world over the Divine. It will breed discord in the house and discontent in the heart. Prayer will grow secondary to workings of the hands. And for the Monk, a new isolation within Community itself will birth a loneliness and despair that invites confusion of the spirit.

I think of the old Superior of the Augustinians, a Master of Novices who intoned: *“Why hast thou come?”* Did we not come because we were moved by the Spirit? Did we not come because we just couldn’t not come? But once there, then what? Knocking on the door and bidding to enter is just the beginning of a long

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road that's meant to bring us closer to You. Together in prayer and study, we come to the beginnings of understanding this; however, in the dip of working and teaching, we can forget what we've learned and lose ourselves, our focus, and You in the process.

Pity the Monk who finds joy in the work, but loneliness in heart and home. His is a conflict born of a Community that has forgotten to guide each other on the path to Almighty God. Then when our Brother has convinced himself that the work that he is doing could be done as "Master" rather than "Brother," the questions are asked. What went wrong? Why did he fail to persevere? Is this of the Spirit, or of the loins? Is this his failure or ours? Why has he thrown his vocation back in the face of God? And what now of his soul?

But in all these questions, are we asking ourselves if we have been Brother to each other? Is it easier to be Brother outside of the house, than within? Are we fraternal, or are we mere men living a bachelor's life under the pretense of God and Community? And in the end, what will come of us? There may well come an anger within the youth of our confreres that'll be defined in all sorts of ways that mask what's really real! For if the teaching Brother who once found fulfillment in the school but who now looks to find joy in new ventures not akin to who and what we are, is Providence at work or discontent? And is that discontent owned by the man or the Community?

Are we, "keeping the rule," and are we inviting the "rule to keep us?" Is it easier to overlook the need, actions, practices and prayer necessary to attend to the health of our Religious life, than to do the hard and time-consuming work of building that special relationship we are called to grow between ourselves and Christ our Savior? I'm afraid because we have not yet begun to ask these questions, and when we do begin – will it be too late?

Is your man Voltaire on to something when he questions: "*Religious who live together without love? Who talk to each other without knowing each other, and dying without tears for each other?*" I think of this now as I witness the joy of the Brothers in returning to Dungarvan and seeing the completion and opening of our new school and house in Limerick. I wonder, are we a monastery connected to a school, or a school connected to a monastery? And if I asked that question of my Brothers, would they think me daft? Would they or could they see my point, and question what is at the heart of their vocation and our Mission? I wonder. And, I pray. *Oh Lord, come to our assistance; make haste to help us!*

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1830

“Praise be to you, O Christ.”

Merciful God Almighty, do they not know what to be at? If my Brothers have questions, issues, thoughts or ideas, you would think they'd use the mouths that God gave them to ask the persons burdened with leadership who'd rightly have the answers? But I'm supposing that they already have a notion of what we'd say. So, they are asking others in the hopes of getting different answers to the same questions! Some of them are cute that way... But if they think that the French are our Congregational parents in faith, they are dearly mistaken. True, we are akin. But we are not blood!

We are Irish and to those of us who know something, that means something! Those in our history who have tried to impose their ways upon us have been met with a malice of response that bespeaks our nature. We know who we are, and for better or worse, that's how we'll remain – sometimes in spite of ourselves! It's why we say, “It's well for you and it's me that knows it.”

§

Some of our number have already forgotten what some of our new'uns are too young to have ever known! The Brothers of the Christian Schools of France, founded by Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, who himself was blessed with a happy death on a Good Friday none the less, are our venerable brothers. But we are not one in fact, but in Faith alone! And what is it that they are after? Or is it that they lack confidence in those that they are preparing to elect and then to lead them? We are simple men who are called to do the ordinary in an extra-ordinary way... No more; no less. And as they say in the Latin: *Incipiamus de integro* - Let us begin anew!

1831

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“Praise be to you, O Christ.”

Merciful God Almighty, we are opening a new door to an uncertain future. Not just our first real General Chapter, but an actual new chapter in our lives as Consecrated Religious Brothers in the Church and in the World. We ask only of Christ: *“Quo Vadis?”* And before He replies, we ourselves have the answer: *“Whithersoever thou goest, I will go, and wheresoever thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God too.”*

§

In thought, and in word, and *in pectore*, I thank my Brothers for entrusting to me the confidence of leadership. And to those who cast their spell to any other, I pray their trust be in the Will of God and the Providence of our Inheritance. And so, it is, and so it was, and so it shall always be...

§

To begin the journey of men who are called to walk in the light of revelation and response, our Novitiate must be attended to. All must know Him, love Him and Serve Him in the light of the Christian Brothers of Ireland. Our restructure is a commitment to a journey, not a final destination. We’ll keep at it until we get it right. And I believe it’s this process of “keeping at it,” that will ensure that the formation of our fellows will always be at the heart of Community.

The Novice Master is but one person in the life of formation. He may be first to pick up the spade; however, it is the responsibility of each Brother to continue to nourish that mustard seed of vocation in one another. Sure, if not, it will wither and die. ‘Tis the only way that the seed once sown becomes the tree that is planted!

1832

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Project of the Edmund Rice Networking Council, Congregation of Christian Brothers North American Province

“Praise be to you, O Christ.”

As I sit here at the table awaiting the sun to fully rise, I am grateful that the brutal rain has stopped and that a whisper of a rainbow can be glimpsed just atop the heather in the upper field. It’s quiet. And, I’m 70 today. I feel the need as my brother often says for a “free gaff,” “some time alone.” But it’s not to be... Alone I am not! Tea in the cup, I notice the hands holding it are my father’s. I can almost see the yellowed knuckles where he once held his pipe, and the tobacco block that he cut religiously for the smokes that came one after another! They were wise hands; are mine? Knackered or exhausted, I oughtn’t be.

For what’s the use in morning, if sleep still calls me? You’d not find the ould fella so! Na, he’d be up and about. But here as I sit 70, I no more want to move than the eejit in the pub! It’s not that I have a puss on my face, but rather much on my mind, 70 years’ worth... Sure, what’s the use in talk’en about it if I can’t just be alone with my thoughts? My Brothers have theirs for sure and their memories as well, yet mine are my own and I dare say some might be shocked to learn of them.

As a child, I did as a child and wasn’t it grand! So many faces are coming back to me today. So many of them now gone, too soon gone... And my little Mary, who’d never be Mary, had her mother lived! What name was it that my Mary had wanted for our wee girl? Some things you do forget. No matter. When all happened that did happen, how could I not have named the wee child Mary? I knew it would always make her mother near, and I knew that I needed that. And I wanted the name to thank the Blessed Lady who answered my prayers and left life in the child. An easy life it is not; indeed, however, the family is good to her, and she wants for nuttin’. She’s happy. And when I’m gone, they’ll all crack-on till a family again we are at home with God. That gives me a peace that I daren’t share with the Monks. Och, there’s enuf on their minds!

§

We’ve become many, but we’re far too few to do all that we are being asked. But, no matter. America is calling us. Never could I have imagined a day when we’d be

called across the Atlantic to do the work of the Lord. And to Baltimore no less! For the sake of those in desperate need, how do I say no? Yet, the need is so great at home, and we are so few, how can I say yes? We'd all like to give it a lash, give it a go. As the tinkers say: "we all have a gra' for it," a wanting to make it so... But it will have to wait as need and numbers dictates. So, not for now. But like the farmer's wife whose cat escaped the kitchen, we'll leave the door open, and we too will return to it.

§

Now Canada and its Bishop had the makings of a right idea! They too, wanted us. And they'd send Novices from there to here for training. Imagine, Canadians coming to Ireland to make Novitiate! That means that the likes of them already know of us and seek to grow their vocation within our numbers. That's a fierce calling!



Basilica of St. John the Baptist, Newfoundland

But this decision is not mine alone. To the Council goes the question and to the Communities for their thoughts. Gobsnacked, what did the Brothers say? "Ah g'way otta that!" The compliment inherent to the request was lost on some, and embarrassed others! We Irish often don't know how to take a compliment. Some say it's because we'd not heard many in our youth, lest parents think they'd blow a head on us! Yet, most of the Professed were inclined to begin a missionary's life,

and it was only the lack of appropriate accommodation that forced our hand and denied the request.

§

70 years is a long time. I've outlived many and sometimes I wonder why I'm still here. Maybe God doesn't know where to put me! Or maybe He just isn't finished with me yet? There's always more work to do, and the work is the mineral of the moment. And didn't we know it from the start?

Those lads only chance to know God and their learnings, isn't found in the arseways methods of those hoping to turn them from their Catholic inclinations! Like Christ Himself, we say to the young'uns: "C'mere to me." And the invitation is sincere, and the learning is swift, and the joy of discovering that you are loved by Almighty God and His only begotten son is a yoke to be cherished.

§

One day, I will lift off the mantle of leadership and God willing, hand it over to those better equipped than I to do as St. Paul might have said: "Run the race and keep fighting the good fight." For me, I trust that I have already run the race, fought the good fight as best I could, and finished the course. Naturally, change will come with growth and new direction. Good luck to them all!

I look to return to the classroom in which I have spent so little of my own time. I will teach. I will do. And I'm after praying for this so that I can earn my just reward. Sweet Jesus, live in my heart and let it be so!



Mound Sion Waterford, site of original school, bakery and tailor shop, and the resting place of Brother Edmund Ignatius Rice.



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Notes on the author:

John B. Murphy is the author of I EDMUND 1822-1832. The text is a reflection on the sixth decade of the life of Brother Edmund Ignatius Rice, founder of the Congregation of Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers.

A lifelong educator recently retired from the New York State Public Schools, John has served as a teacher and administrator with a special call to the most challenged students in economically marginalized areas.

He brings to the reflection his own experiences of the brothers at Blessed Sacrament High School and Iona University, his years in formation among the brothers of the then Eastern American Province in New Rochelle, his time on the mission at Bishop Kearney HS, and his continuing involvement as an Edmundian and committed Associate of Edmund Rice.

He taps into the wisdom, stories, expressions, and witticisms of his Irish relatives both in The Bronx, NY, and in South Armagh, Ireland. His is a personal reflection on events reported in the growing literature of the life of Edmund Rice. (A bibliography is found in the previously published section of I EDMUND, The Concluding Years -- see: https://ercbna.org/Atimo_s/news/I-edmund-2024.pdf.)

John and Barbara, his wife of 37 years, are the proud parents of Mary Kate, Matthew, John Patrick, Benjamin and Patricia. When permitted they take turns spoiling their cherished grandson, Desmond.

