

Volume 1 Issue 1

December 2015

# NorAm

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The Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America Mission Frère Advocacy Newsletter



## A CALL TO ACTION

Photo: "El Cristo de los Pecadores" or "Christ of the Fishermen," on South Padre Island, Texas. Photo taken on Brownsville Immersion 2015.



# NorAm

The Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America Mission Frère Advocacy Newsletter

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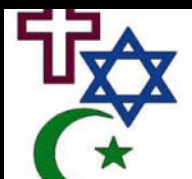
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Across the North American Province and beyond, the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers Network continues to serve those marginalized in our communities. Through the creation of Mission Frère, the North American Province seeks to build a more just and compassionate society by being more present to those most in need and by giving a voice to the voiceless.

If we are truly called by Jesus to tend to the needs of our brothers and sisters, then we must not only serve them, but advocate for their wellbeing. In our schools, missions and communities, the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers and their associates, students and community members in North America continue to live out the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice each day.

#### What does this look like?

It is a group of students from Palma School being at Soledad Prison and creating relationships with prisoners to help them realize their self worth. It is Brother Ed Bergeron partnering with different faiths in Charleston, South Carolina to advocate for justice in their city. It is Iona College students educating others about the realities of hunger and homelessness and working for change in their city. It is Brother Michael Maher in Canada

working with restorative justice to break the cycle of violence and poverty caused by broken prison systems. **It is** the thousands of students, families, teachers and religious of the Edmund Rice Network in North America serving and advocating for the marginalized in our midst and beyond.

**NorAm** aims to tell the stories and create awareness of the amazing work that goes on across the North American Province that advocates for those who need it most. **NorAm** also aims to better connect the North American Province to the worldwide Edmund Rice Network and its partners and resources that focus on advocating for others. Finally, **NorAm** hopes to inspire. It hopes to inspire schools and communities across the North American Province to create programs that balance serving those who are most in need with creating awareness and advocating for them so that they might escape such a cycle.

As Blessed Edmund Rice told us, we "must give to the poor in handfuls." But so too must we work diligently to create awareness of their plight in our society and work to change this reality. We pray that just like Blessed Edmund Rice, we might be inspired to serve and advocate for the voiceless.



# BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS

In November, faculty and students from Bishop Hendricken, Brother Rice Michigan, Catholic Memorial and Iona Prep traveled together to Brownsville, Texas to live in community and serve those living along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Here, students listened to the stories of recent immigrants and their struggles and triumphs and served on the front lines of a reality often mistold in America.

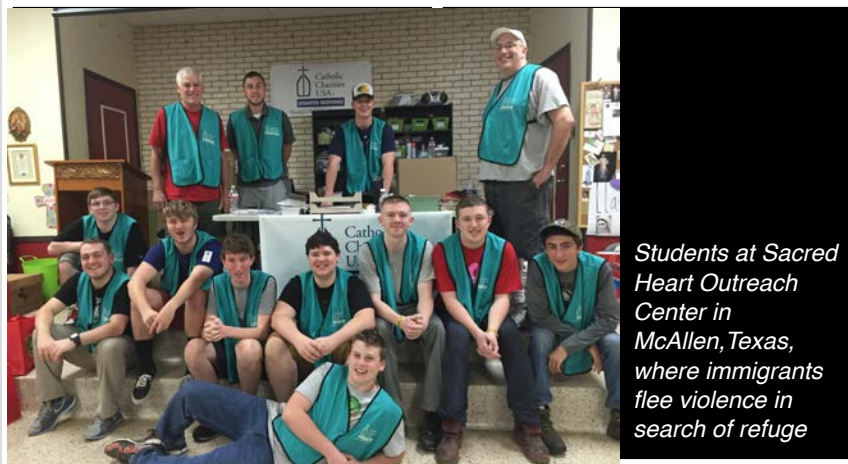


Brownsville, Texas has one of the highest poverty rates in the U.S.

## ON THE FRONT LINES



Students and chaperones from four Edmund Rice Schools traveled to the U.S.-Mexico border for an immersion experience



Students at Sacred Heart Outreach Center in McAllen, Texas, where immigrants flee violence in search of refuge

It's surprising to me to think that our country is made up of immigrants, just like those who are coming to our country now." On the first night of reflection on the 2015 Brownsville immersion trip, students began to think about the realities of immigration in the United States today. "My grandparents probably faced the same kind of obstacles and backlash when they came here from Ireland." Too often in the United States, we forget our past and the way our country was founded. We fail to see how cyclical our current immigration debate is and how the landscape of it in our country is merely another chapter in our country's legacy of new citizens.

As our students from these four schools waited for new arrivals from the McAllen Immigration and Customs Processing Center at the Sacred Heart Outreach Center, a sense of anxiety seemed to fill the room. "It's a lot to take in," Brendan from Catholic Memorial said. "I feel like there's a lot of pressure to not mess up." These students would serve as guides to those migrants who had just

been processed after a daunting journey across the Rio Grande, sometimes lasting weeks or even months. Carlos, from El Salvador, told us that he and his son had spent 18 days on the journey through Central America and Mexico, after fleeing death threats from gangs aimed at his son. Sadly, Carlos' story was one of many similar tales, of those fleeing violence at home, but only to find similar horrors on their route North.

But for those who have faced the horrors on the road, their first stop in Texas is a sanctuary. At Sacred Heart Church and Outreach Center, they find hope. Here, Catholic Charities has been providing hot food, showers, supplies and toiletries for recent immigrants who have just arrived to the U.S. Here, for the first time in weeks or months, they and their families can find comfort, safety and a place to rest until they begin the last leg of their journey to a new home in places all across America.

Students on this trip not only served, but also learned about the realities of this hot topic through morning classes on immigration, guest speakers and their visit to Guadalupe Regional Middle School, an Edmund Rice School that provides tuition

free education to students in the Rio Grande Valley.

Students also worked to repair various projects and gardens through different outreach programs around the Brownsville community. They heard from David, who told students, "sadly, you're too often a product of your environment. I went down the wrong path, but thanks to this program, I was able to turn my life around and become a productive citizen."

On the last night of the immersion, students from these four schools talked about what they learned about the realities of immigration and how they would take them back to their schools to advocate for those whom they met. Lorenzo, from Brother Rice Michigan concluded, "I now have a deep passion for those voiceless and hurting people, who have worked so hard to save and better their lives."

**To learn more about what students are doing to advocate for those in Brownsville and across North America, click the link below:**

[https://twitter.com/ERCBNA\\_ADVOCACY](https://twitter.com/ERCBNA_ADVOCACY)



*Students from NinelsMine address the U.N. during the 70th U.N. General Assembly in New York*



*Students from NinelsMine visit Iona Prep and discuss their battle to advocate for the rights of children at the U.N.*

## NINE IS MINE

In September, students from India traveled to New York to demand inclusive policies and rights for children during the 70th Session of the U.N. General Assembly. These fifteen students from all across India journeyed to the U.N. to tell their stories and to garner support for their program and for the millions of underrepresented children across the world. While in New York, they were hosted by Bro. Kevin Cawley at Iona College and stopped at Iona Preparatory to share their stories with students in New Rochelle.



In response to Nelson Mandela's call to keep governments accountable to their promise of halving poverty by the year 2015 and ending it by 2025, children in India have rallied themselves into a movement called NINEISMINE. The Indian government had promised in its Common Minimum Program to allocate 6% of the GDP for education and 3% for health. These promises best reflect the aim of realizing goals 2(education for all), 3 (gender equality) and 4 (safe childhood) of the MDG's (United Nations Millennium Developmental Goals).

While visiting Iona Prep,

members of the NinelsMine contingent told students of the injustices that exist within their country. Each of the fifteen students from the group represents a different area of change needed in India's society, including more equitable technology for all students, inclusive education for all, child labor rights, environmental protection and more.



**NinelsMine students on their visit in September to the U.N. in New York.**

One student, Rohit, who suffers from Sclerosis, spoke about equal wages for all, including those with

disabilities. He told students about the need to end child labor in India and beyond, and how he hoped his advocating at the U.N. would help end discrimination and unfair labor practices. Rohit's was just one of the many incredible stories that the NinelsMine students brought to the U.N. and Iona Prep to inspire change on a global and local level.

Under the guidance of Bro. Steve Rocha, these students made a lasting impact on the U.N., Iona Prep's student body, and various other human rights groups, such as UNICEF.

*To read more about the group and their work:*

<http://www.nineismine.in/home>





*Students and Staff from Palma at Soledad Prison*



*The book co-written by Palma students and staff and prisoners of Soledad Prison*

## DOERS OF THE WORD

-Jim Micheletti, Palma School

At The Palma School, in Salinas, California, students are breaking down barriers and changing attitudes about those serving time in prison. Through a unique program where students and inmates spend time reading, discussing and reflecting about their relationships, Palma and Soledad Prison are working to help inmates realize their God given talents and to help them and others stay out of prison.

### HARD NUMBERS

The recidivism rate in our California prison system hovers around 67%. This means most who are incarcerated are released only to commit more crimes and end up back behind bars. It costs approximately \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year to keep a human being in prison. At the Soledad Prison complex alone, there are some 10,000 inmates. The math here is harsh for all of us paying this bill. Harsher still, is the loss of human talents and gifts from felons, created in the image and likeness of God, who have the ability to contribute to society and create a more just and peaceful world as humane human beings. This is where Palma steps in...to work with inmates to stay out of prison and to realize their worth in the world.

### LIFE CYCLE TEAM AT SOLEDAD

The Life Cycle team, dedicated to reducing recidivism, consists of inmates serving life sentences who gather with younger and lesser offenders to arm them with direction and hope on their release. The program works and has witnessed many inmates return to society to contribute. Palma is blessed to play a part and learn life lessons

from men whose stories are intensely motivating to merit a good life and never to get caught up in crime.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, Palma students spent hours inside the prison meeting with as many as 100 inmates at a time to share stories about father-son relationships.

The result of these meetings was a co-written publication titled *Brokenness and Blessings* about the importance of caring father-son relationships in the development of every boy's life. Palma student writings and inmate writings were positioned side-by-side in the text anonymously, with the intention of showing student solidarity with the inmates, our common humanity, and hope for a better way. Many of the students claimed this was the most powerful and meaningful experience of their social and moral development at Palma.

### ACTION LEADERS WIN BIG

On September 24th-27th Action Leadership represented Palma School at the annual Essential Elements Fair of student leaders in Florida. This conference gathers student

leaders from 19 Blessed Edmund Rice Christian Brother schools in five countries and challenges them to develop an advocacy project aimed at creating a more just and peaceful world. Palma's work with inmates serving life sentences at the Soledad Prison earned high praise from all the Christian Brothers and Christian Brother Schools present. Action's goal this year is to read and analyze Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* along with the inmates and meet for discussion of this classic. The novel's themes speak directly to the language of the Essential Elements: to "stand in solidarity with those marginalized" and to "value the dignity of each person."



*Action Leadership Seniors:  
Matthew Gastello, Jacob Haas,  
Bryce Robinson, Robert Batson*

**To learn more about this program  
at Palma, click [here](#)**

**ERI**



Edmund Rice International (ERI) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) committed to advocating for the right to education, children's rights and environmental responsibility. ERI is also fighting towards the eradication of poverty and works on behalf of many marginalized communities in twenty-five countries worldwide.

Based in Geneva, Switzerland and with offices in New York, ERI is also involved in promoting respect and sustainable care for the environment directly with the U.N. They do this through partnering with faith-based groups and engage with change-makers at the international level.

To see video about ERI and what it does to advocate for children and the environment, click on the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6glxTifnuc&feature=youtu.be>



Another program in which ERI promotes advocacy is through their annual Human Rights and Advocacy Training. Each year, ERI invites Edmund Rice Network educators from around the world to spend time in Geneva, Switzerland, where these individuals are educated on human rights directly from the U.N. Participants are trained on how to promote advocacy and spread awareness of these issues in order to share them with their schools and communities to where they return.



Participants from the ERI Course "Human Rights in Advocacy" in Geneva

To learn more about ERI and their programs click here:

<http://www.edmundriceinternational.org>

# SOUTHERN JUSTICE



In Charleston, South Carolina, a new kind of collaborative effort is reshaping the hearts and minds of a city sadly known recently for violence and racial tensions. In Charleston, different faiths are not dividing, but uniting a city that has recently been in the news for the wrong reasons. This collaborative effort has already had great success in raising awareness in the city for more just systems and policies and has successfully advocated for many of those most marginalized in the area.

The Charleston Area Justice Ministry (CAJM) was founded in 2012 as a faith based community organizing group. The CAJM is comprised of 12 local faith communities- 2 Catholic, 1 Jewish and 9 Protestant groups. Saint John's Catholic Church in North Charleston, S.C., is one of the two Catholic groups connected to CAJM. Brother Ed Bergeron serves as Parish Administrator at Saint John's and brings his experience as an Edmund Rice Christian Brother to his work with CAJM. Through the facilitation of D.A.R.T (Direct Action through Research & Training) since 2012, the CAJM has successfully researched and helped advocate for and implement a number of important programs designed to combat injustices in Charleston's school, prison and labor systems.

Each member congregation selects a number of its congregants to identify and research issues of injustice facing their community. Then, congregations join to continue research and discussion, outlining the course of action for identifying the CAJM's plan of action. In 2014, the gathering included more than 1,900 members of the network.

The group's successes have been great. In 2013, the group identified child incarceration as one of the most pressing injustices in the local community. CAJM found that despite the fact Charleston

County had the lowest rate of violent crime in the state of South Carolina, more juveniles were arrested and incarcerated than in any other county in the state.

After enlisting commitments from the the Mount Pleasant, Charleston and North Charleston Police Departments to reduce juvenile incarceration by 65%, the group created a Risk Assessment Instrument to identify the cause of the issue.



October 2015: Local faith community members at a "Team Assembly Night."

The group found that 62% of all juvenile arrests came directly from schools, primarily from students performing below grade level. 25% of students in Charleston County Schools were unable to read at grade level by the time they were reaching the third grade. The CAJM worked with the Charleston County School District to open 280 additional K-4 grade spots for the lowest performing students. Because of this, in two years, more than 500 students have attended K-4 that otherwise would not have.

This is just one of the many topics in which CAJM continues to be successful by both creating connections across faiths and advocating for more just systems and laws in and around the Charleston area.

For more information on their work, click below:

<http://charlestonareajusticeministry.org>



# ADVOCACY @ IONA COLLEGE

-Alexa Filipi



This Fall, Iona College hosted two annual events promoting advocacy, awareness and service in the community. Through Iona College's "Make a Difference Week," and it's "Week of the Peacemaker," students, faculty and staff engaged in activities promoting advocacy and service to those marginalized populations in the local community.

In October, Iona's "Make a Difference Week" brought more than 750 students, faculty and staff together to advocate for and serve those in the community. This week was highlighted by Homelessness Awareness Night, an event where students from various organizations came together to create awareness on various issues surrounding homelessness. Students discussed topics such as hidden homelessness, gentrification, affordable housing and the need to debunk stereotypes.

Students heard from Midnight Run's Executive Director Dale Williams, who discussed his experience of being homeless and how students can serve those experiencing it. Lauren Pirrone '14 also discussed her organization P.A.S.S (People Advocating for Sanitary Support), which advocates for sanitary products for girls and women living in shelters or experiencing homelessness.

The "Week of the Peacemaker" has been hosted at Iona for more than 30 years, and honors those who have provided service for the sanctity of peace, freedom and justice. In previous years, this week has highlighted themes such as human rights, poverty and environmental justice. This year, the theme was "Building Bridges of Understanding and Respect Across Race, Religion and Gender." Throughout the week, students were able to participate in many on-campus dialogues, lectures and events highlighting the need for advocacy and justice.

The week kicked off with a keynote address from journalist Haider Hamza, who spoke of his experiences as a citizen in war-torn Iraq. Hamza discussed the need to look at situations from both sides, and how we as humans often neglect to do this. "There was an opportunity for this war to end well, but the cultural bridges needed weren't built in time," Hamza described.

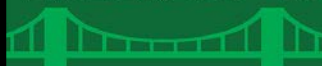
In addition to Hamza's address, the week also included a lecture from Dr. Josh Klein and Dr. Marcus Aldredge who discussed the need to create awareness about the issues of race, poverty and incarceration in America. In attendance were Iona's Student Campus Ministers and Mission Ireland team. Through this lecture, students were able to humanize this issue and draw inspiration from Edmund Rice's ministry to men on "Death Row" in 19th Century Ireland.

## Make A Difference Week



*Iona College students participate in the 2015 "Make a Difference Week," promoting service and advocacy in the community*

## WEEK OF THE PEACEMAKER



Building Bridges of Understanding and Respect Across Race, Religion and Gender  
**NOVEMBER 1-14, 2015**



*2015 Keynote Speaker Haider Hamza discusses the need to create cultural bridges to promote peace*

*(Photo-IonaianNews.com)*



Rohina Malik's "Unveiled" was performed during Iona College's 2015 "Week of the Peacemaker." This play highlights the topics of racism, hate crimes, Islam and multi-culturalism. Malik's eye-opening work has been performed at more than 25 theatres around the country. (Photo- Lasplash.com)

To learn more about Iona College's Office of Mission and Ministry, click below:

<http://www.iona.edu/Student-Life/Student-Experience-Activities/Mission-Ministries.aspx>

## "FROM COMPASSION TO LIBERATION"

### OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES



In early-November, leaders from 15 Edmund Rice Christian Brothers' Schools from North America gathered for the annual School Leaders Retreat in Georgia. Brother Brian Bond, CFC, the Executive Director of Edmund Rice International spoke to these leaders about advocacy in our schools.

By examining the U.N.'s "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," Brother Bond invited school leaders to examine their own school's "Human Rights Temperature." This introduction would go to shape the theme of the week, which asked school leaders to discuss and reflect on how our schools can better advocate for those whom we serve.



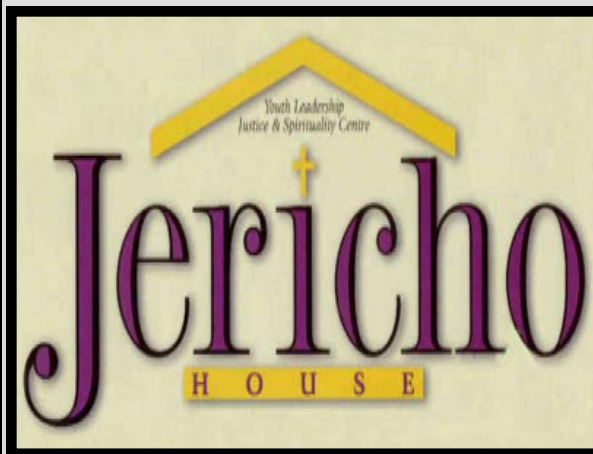
Brother Brian Bond, CFC, centered this year's retreat on advocacy

Schools were asked to remember the calls from the General Chapter of the Congregation, and how these calls might relate to their schools.

The retreat culminated in the planning of steps to engage students in advocacy and the creation of an advocacy group in each of the network schools.

To learn more about the Edmund Rice School's Network in North America click below:  
<http://www.edmundriceschools.org>

# JERICHO HOUSE



*Jericho House in Wainfleet, Ontario, Canada, is an interfaith and ecumenical centre that provides youth with opportunities that promote leadership, social and ecological justice and spirituality.*

In the Niagara Region of Ontario Canada, Jericho House is providing students (and adults) with incredible opportunities and programs to grow as leaders, while learning about advocacy, spirituality and social justice. Through Jericho House's Torch Leadership and Social Justice Programs, students serve those marginalized in the community.



Students with the Torch Social Justice Program

After their service immersion, students own their experience by participating in a workshop, learning about social justice and advocacy. Through this program, Brother Bill Carrothers and Sister Jacquie Keefe at Jericho House allow students to serve the marginalized, learn how to advocate for them, and provide them with the leadership and spiritual skills needed to go out and create change.

The Torch Leadership and Social Justice Programs are just two of the many in which Jericho House

promotes advocacy. Another program facilitated by Jericho House is the English Language Learners Retreat. This retreat invites local Catholic school students learning English to Jericho House to enhance their integration into schools and to educate them on the Church's teachings on immigration and human dignity.



English Language Learning students on a Jericho House retreat

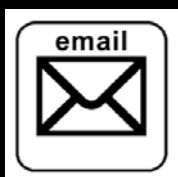
Additionally, Jericho House hosts an annual Leadership Symposium, bringing high school students together to address a justice themed area of concern. Jericho House also hosts a yearly Christian Brothers Ecology Retreat, bringing educators from Canada and the U.S. to learn more about responsible environmental stewardship.

To learn more about Jericho House click below:  
<http://www.jerichohouse.org>



# CONTACT US

*We are always looking for submissions and links from across the network and beyond!*



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[www.ercbna.org](http://www.ercbna.org)

## ADVOCACY LINKS



### Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM): Justice and Peace Alerts

An association of the leadership of men in religious and apostolic institutes in the U.S. The link below is to the CMSM publication "Justice Alert," which highlights areas where justice is needed and proposes direct action through advocacy:

<http://www.cmsm.org/justice-alerts.shtml>



### Edmund Rice International (ERI): Click

below to access the most recent issue of Edmund Rice International's newsletter. This newsletter highlights the various areas of advocacy that ERI is involved in at the U.N. and beyond.

<http://us1.campaign-archive1.com/?u=e4d66fd6201da4a3aeb2f5b00&id=30178e815b>



**Carbon Rangers:** An e-newsletter published by Bro. Kevin Cawley, CFC, ERI Team and Executive Director of the Thomas Berry Forum for Ecological Dialogue at Iona College. Carbon Rangers creates awareness for climate change and advocates for responsible environmental stewardship.

[http://edmundriceinternational.org/jpic/?page\\_id=79](http://edmundriceinternational.org/jpic/?page_id=79)



### Edmund Rice Latin America (LATAM):

The link below is to LATAM, the Edmund Rice Christian Brother's Newsletter in Latin America. Click below to see the great work being done in Latin America:

<http://edmundricelatinamerica.org/latam-newsletter/>



### Smart Justice Network of Canada:

Brother Michael Maher works with this organization to bring awareness to the criminal justice system. Brother Maher and his colleagues advocate for both offenders and victims through Restorative Justice, which advocates for the criminal justice system to address the harm(s) done through mechanisms of support, accountability and healing. Click below to learn more:

<http://smartjustice.ca>



### Edmund Rice Network South Africa:

Click below to access the latest edition of the Social Justice and Advocacy Desk, which highlights social and eco-justice programs, volunteer projects, and advocates for rights for local and international groups.

[http://media.wix.com/ugd/5dddc4\\_8a0605b4b4984001bc4f0c87ad98be48.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/5dddc4_8a0605b4b4984001bc4f0c87ad98be48.pdf)