

A Message from the Congregation Leader, Br Philip Pinto

Dear Brothers and Friends

The charism of Blessed Edmund is at a crossroads. We can allow the flame to flicker out through preserving the status quo, or we can choose to move in trust to the Spirit's invitation. The Spirit has been summoning us to march to a new rhythm for at least the last thirty years since we had the first Spirituality Conference in 1982.

Aware of the Father's providential presence in his life, Edmund Rice was moved by the Holy Spirit to open his whole heart to Christ, present and appealing to him in poor people.

Charism Statement, 1982

"The time is now! The place is here! You are the people!"

With these words the 2008 Chapter called the Congregation to embrace a new way of living in our world that is emerging. This new way of living finds expression in a sense of self that refuses to be limited to the way things have traditionally been. There is a challenge and an invitation to "follow me to the edge", to "enter into the core of your being". The Mystery we call God walks with us "in places of the heart beyond our wildest imaginings" and asks us to "fly free as Edmund did". We are dared to become hope for the world and to risk being different. And above all, we are summoned to trust.

We on the Congregation Leadership Team see this as a cry from our times to become a viable and vibrant example of Religious life that is responding to the urgent needs of our world. Our contact and interaction with our communities and mission sites have also shown us the reality on the ground. Our reflection on this reality confronts us with the truth that the status quo is not an option. We have become aware of the need to undertake a bold journey towards a new place, a new place to which we are led by the Spirit of Jesus rather than by our conventional reflexes and choices.

Where would we move from here?

And we know when Moses was told, in the way he was told

Take off your shoes.

*He grew pale from that simple reminder of fire in the dusty earth.
He never recovered his complicated way of loving again
And was free to love in the same way he felt the flames
licking at his heels loved him.
As if the lion earth could roar and take in, in one movement.
Every step he took from there was carefully placed,
Every thing he said mattered
As if he knew the constant witness of the ground
And remembered his own face in the dust
The moment before revelation.
Like the moment you too saw for the first time your own house turned to ashes
Everything consumed so the road could open again
Your entire presence in your eyes
And the world turning slowly to a single branch of flame.
*Falling, David Whyte**

Like Moses, we too realised that we were standing on holy ground, that we had always been standing on holy ground, and in the midst of the rubble around us, “our house turned to ashes”, we knew we were being summoned anew by the Mystery we call God. Just as everything in Moses’ life changed as a result of his encounter with this Mystery, we know that everything in our Congregation life is being recast. Truly,

The Beloved sometimes wants to do us a great favour:

Hold us upside down and shake all the nonsense out.

Tired of Speaking Softly, Hafiz

TOWARDS A NEW WAY OF LIVING

What we are proposing as A Way Into The Future is not primarily a series of action steps. This is first and foremost a way of living life. It is the Jesus way, a way of kenosis, of self-emptying, that is not about the preservation of the Congregation, but about making real the “Kingdom of God” that Jesus was so passionate about. It requires a new mindset, a new consciousness that will change drastically the way we live and work.

A Way Into The Future is not simply attempting to adjust what we have been doing. It is presenting something totally different.

Behold I am doing something new

Isaiah 43:1

This is a whole new way of living life arising out of our recent experiences, and a fresh understanding of our Universe and the Jesus story within it. Everything in our history has brought us to this point and the Congregation is being asked to look at the quality of its relationships, not from a sense of power or privilege but from its new-found discovery of humility, compassion and self-emptying.

A NEW WAY OF BEING BROTHER

At the heart of all of this is what we are calling “The Spiritual Search”, the reason we joined this way of life in the first place. It is the search for meaning, the search for the Mystery inherent in all of life. It is Augustine’s cry: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts can never be at rest until they rest in you”.

It is the promise made by Jesus to show us the Father. “Each of us has in our life at least one moment of insight, one Mount Sinai – an uncanny, otherworldly, time-stopping experience that somehow succeeds in breaking through the grimy, boisterous present, the insight that, if we let it, will carry us through our life” (The Gift of the Jews, Thomas Cahill).

We have been involved in this search in a very special way over the recent past, and our Congregation’s spirituality has been shaped by it.

Out of this spirituality has grown a far greater desire to be with those at the margins of society. This desire comes from an ancient wisdom that tells us it is here we will find our wholeness, that among poor people we will be shown the self-emptying that will make us fully and truly human. The option for poor people has always been a hallmark of Religious life down the ages. What we are now stressing is that we do this as Brothers, out of a sense of real solidarity, knowing that we have more to learn than to share.

“It is only by fundamentally changing our relationship with poor people that true change and that genuine, future Christian Brother mission is made possible”.

*A Mission Action Plan
in Search of a Theology, Martin Byrne cfc*

A NEW WAY OF BEING WITH POOR PEOPLE

The model of Church out of which we aspire to operate is that of the Church of poor people. The spirituality of the Church of poor people bewails the seeming absence of God in the violations of human dignity, the affronts to life, and in the abuse and destruction of human and earth eco-systems. It affirms the paradoxical presence of the Mystery we call

God in these situations. It strives to bear testimony to this saving presence among the people through solidarity with them in their struggles. It is a Church where poor people, equal to all others in dignity, are not only evangelised but become evangelisers themselves. It is a Church where no one is so poor as to have nothing to give, and no one is so rich as to have nothing to receive.

As Religious Brothers we dare to keep alive the dangerous memory of Jesus, Jesus who exemplified an alternative way of living life, who challenged the conventions of the dominant society and of religion that supported and validated it in the name of God.

We offer to you, our Brothers, this Proposition for your reflection and action. It is not the final word. It is a work in progress.

We need your wisdom and your courage to give these words life. Saying yes to a different future is not to deny the past or the great contribution of the brave and wonderful men gone before us. But to stay in the past is to do wrong to their memory and their efforts. Everything that has happened so far prepares us for what is to be. Let us not be found wanting.

*I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.*

The Bright Field, R. S. Thomas