



*The Heart of Being Brother*

CONGREGATION CHAPTER *ROME 2002*

## What we do with our hearts affects the whole universe

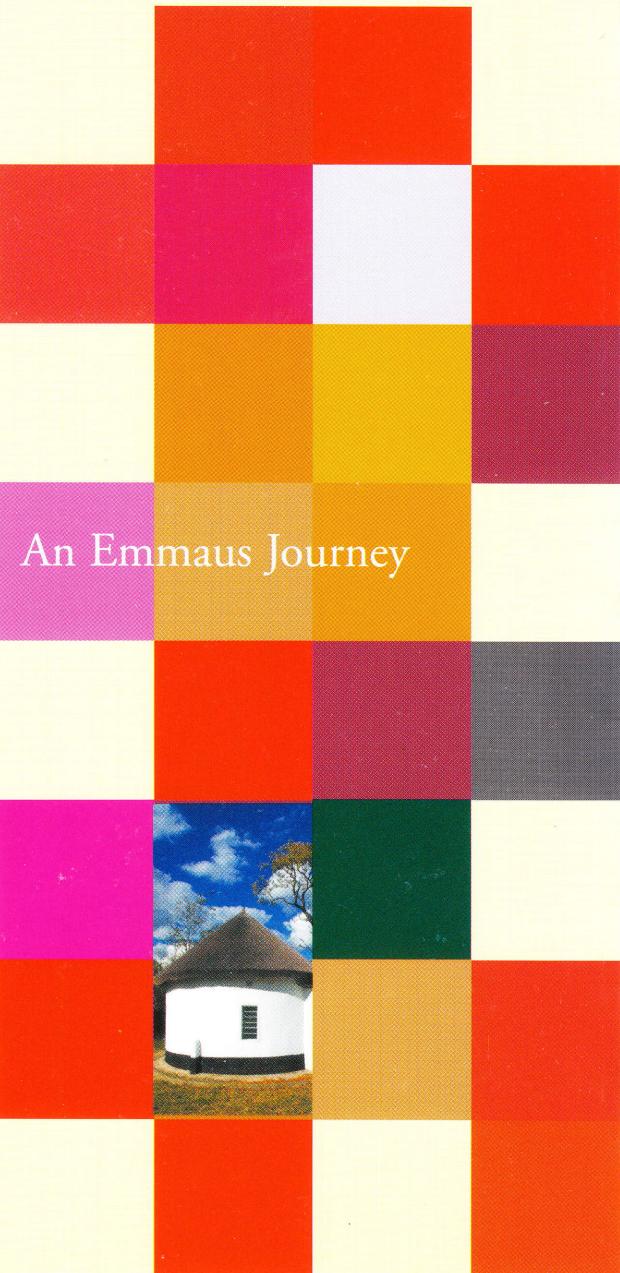
IT WAS two hundred years after our story had begun. It was a time to pause in gratitude for the life of Edmund and the life of the Congregation, a time to be proud of the chain of fidelity that had survived the vicissitudes of time. It was a time to rejoice in new releases of energy, new possibilities, and the gift of a new injection of youthfulness in some parts. But it was a time when, in the broader Church and in the world at large, new wine was bursting out of old wineskins; the comfortable securities and stabilities of an earlier time had passed. And, for the Congregation, the truth was that it was a time when many were feeling disheartened. Membership was ageing and shrinking, structures and strength were straining, and influence was dwindling. In some places, the exposure of sins committed by some of our members had left us shocked and shamed. Even in those places where new life was budding, there was anxiety about the future.

Such was the time when we gathered for the Chapter of 2002. Over land and over sea we came, Christian Brothers from all around the globe and, for a time, our friends from the Presentation Brothers and the Edmund Rice network, men and women alike. We gathered in Rome, where Edmund had hoped to pray at the tombs of the martyrs. And as we gathered, we started to talk with each other about all that had been

happening among us, our joys and our pain. Candles of good news emerged, and we found joy in each other and in our companions who assured us that we were not alone in the dark. But the more honestly we spoke, the more our cherished hopes seemed to recede into the distance.

But gradually, imperceptibly, another word started to be present in our midst – a word of new hope, of confidence, of life overtaking death. It was not that the floodlights of our accustomed certainties were switched back on, but the flickering candles seemed to glow brighter as our appreciation of the darkness deepened. We were discovering life and healing even in crucifying experiences. It was as if we were seeing everything anew, seeing with new eyes. It started to dawn on us how slow we had been to see what was really happening. We started to perceive the meaning implicit in our suffering – how fitting it was to have become marginalized ourselves since we desired to develop compassion for those at the margins. Though we welcomed the presence of this insight and felt excited by its truth, we did not immediately recognise its true source.

There were moments when this sense of hope and light started to elude us, but we clung to it even though it seemed late in the day. And as we became more at home with the presence of hope in our midst, we found the courage to enter



our deepest truth in all its starkness, to trust each other with the secrets of our hearts. What we came to see was that the breaking open of our stories, of our simple humanity, was profound prayer. As we got in touch with our fractured humanity, we found ourselves touching divinity. Suddenly we recognised who it was that had been in our midst all along, that burned at the heart of our stories and our experience. All these years we Christian Brothers had prayed the words 'Live Jesus in our hearts' – how obvious it now seemed....

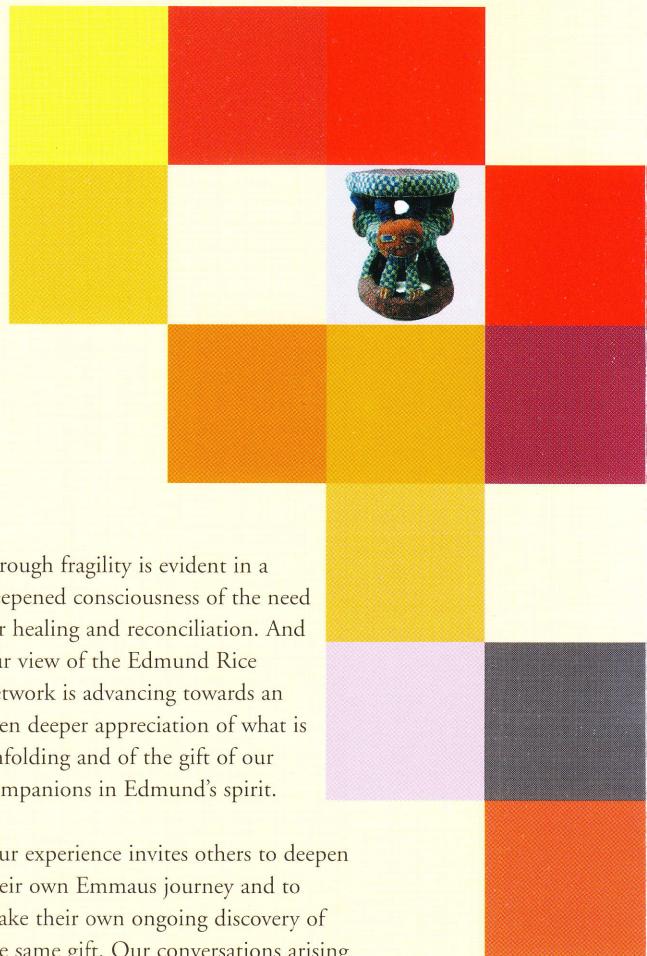
The breakthrough moments were, as always, fleeting, but they were moments to live by. The key had been lying before us all along, in the very word by which we are named. 'brother'. In the intimacy of sharing as brothers our search for meaning in the crumbs and fragments of our stories, together we found God present in our midst. In our listening for God, we had discovered a shared route as Christian Brothers, to replace our tendency to travel on individual paths. We had discovered anew that our way to God as Christian Brothers, our distinctive way of living and loving, was to take literally the meaning of relating as brothers. We had started our discovery of what it could mean – and what it would cost – to truly live Eucharist.

What had we discovered? Nothing that was not already written in our Constitutions, and nothing that we had not already glimpsed individually in

our best moments as Christian Brothers. Quite simply, our hearts had been re-orientated by the experience of being opened to each other. And, being opened, we found ourselves turning instinctively to identify with the pains and burdens felt in our whole earth community. Our hearts burning with this new energy, we felt a renewed fire for mission.

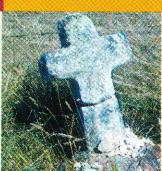
The time came for us to return home. Having taken courage from each other and from our companions in Edmund's spirit, we went home with new hearts. We returned with a new joy and confidence that we had a treasure to share with our church and our world. We went home with renewed energy for seeking new brothers. We returned with a new will to live.

Like the disciples of that first Emmaus walk, we had known what it was to have our hearts burn within us, and we had found an energy that enabled us to turn around. Not away from the Four Directions of the 1996 Chapter, but away from our lack of confidence in the God who was leading us that way. We saw the need to deepen the spirituality out of which we live those four directions. And so our move to the margins has become reaffirmed with a strong prophetic call to engage in the quest for justice and to constantly critique our education ministries. Our internationality is expressed in a prophetic letting-go of old wineskins and moving towards a radical restructuring. Our growth



through fragility is evident in a deepened consciousness of the need for healing and reconciliation. And our view of the Edmund Rice network is advancing towards an even deeper appreciation of what is unfolding and of the gift of our companions in Edmund's spirit.

Our experience invites others to deepen their own Emmaus journey and to make their own ongoing discovery of the same gift. Our conversations arising from this experience signal something new that is beginning among us, but those conversations need to carry on and involve all of us. What happened at the Chapter can also happen in any gathering where we are prepared to enter the same eucharistic rhythm by trusting each other with our stories, starting just with the fragments of any ordinary day in our lives....



## Deepening the Spirituality of Being Brother

### **What have we discovered?**

To be a Christian Brother is to receive a precious gift which invites us daily to walk the Emmaus way into the unfolding mystery of our quest for God.

### **What are our Heart Decisions?**

To facilitate gatherings of Brothers to explore our lived spirituality, brotherhood and Eucharist in the context of the Emmaus story.

To continue our journey into the heart of Edmund's charism with our Presentation Brothers.

To continue to avail of and evaluate present structures, processes and programmes of Congregational and inter-Congregational renewal including Trasna and Passover.

To provide training and support for leaders who aspire to lead others in their journey to the heart.

## Healing and Reconciliation -A Need and A Call

### **What have we discovered?**

As Brothers we are called to accept as gift the growth that comes through facing our pain and loss in a troubled world and suffering planet. As we learn to offer and receive healing and reconciliation, we find our wounded hearts bear within them the hope of new life and a renewed sense of joy.

### **What are our Heart Decisions?**

To promote the highest standards of integrity and accountability in our lives and ministries.

To apply the learning from failures in the proper care of the young and to continue to respond in justice to people who have been affected by our past failures.

To formulate strategies for healing and reconciliation in community living and ministry.

To give particular attention in initial and on-going formation to programmes of healthy psycho-sexual development and ways to deal with trauma.

## Seeking New Brothers

### **What have we discovered?**

Rekindling our efforts to seek new members will in turn transform the heart of the Congregation and rediscover the precious gift of Brotherhood.

### **What are our Heart Decisions?**

To appoint Brothers to full-time vocation ministry for provinces and regions.

To establish a Christian Brother vocation promotion network across provinces and regions.

To establish trans-province formation centres world-wide in readiness to accept new members and to identify suitable personnel who will undergo professional training for formation.

To recognise and respect the culture from which the candidates for formation are drawn and acknowledge the international aspect of the Congregation.

To create communities of welcome where new members feel at home.

## *Educating the Minds and Hearts of the Young*

### *What have we discovered?*

We acknowledge the immense contribution over the last two hundred years that Brothers and their colleagues have made to the liberating education of the young. There is joy and gratitude in the development of greater shared responsibility among our partners in the school ministry.

### **What are our Heart Decisions?**

To ensure that Christian Brother schools are communities of learning and of faith and justice, where students, parents and staffs are educated to a practical awareness of social inequity.

To continue a process of identifying the distinctive values of Edmund Rice education.

To develop across the Congregation a network of those involved in the transmission and development of the Edmund Rice charism in the school network.

To address the issue of future ownership and responsibility for Christian Brother schools.

## *The Edmund Rice Network – The Unfolding Story*

### *What have we discovered?*

The development of the many expressions of the Edmund Rice charism fills us with joy and brings new life and energy to the Congregation.

### **What are our Heart Decisions?**

To support and resource formation programmes enabling all expressions of the Edmund Rice network to explore the heart of the charism.

To develop more effective channels of communication among the various sectors of the Edmund Rice network.

To encourage further expressions of and deeper commitment to the Edmund Rice charism.





# A Prophetic Call to a Quest for Justice

# New Wineskins for New Wine

## *What have we discovered?*

Through the dislocation that comes from regular contact with poor and marginalised people, our hearts are transformed as we deepen our shared reflection of this experience in the light of the Gospel.

## **What are our Heart Decisions?**

To engage with the poor and marginalised at our doorsteps and assist communities to develop a way of theological reflection and faith sharing.

To encourage Brothers to engage in radical relationships of equality with all God's creation and to support the Earth Charter.

To promote networking across the Congregation on issues of justice and right relationships.

To expand our educational outreach in areas of great poverty, responding with a heart like Edmund's.

## *What have we discovered?*

Restructuring is an urgent call to transform minds and hearts. It facilitates new life in mission and ministry, promotes prophetic religious living and ensures a redistribution of resources in a spirit of fraternity.

## **What are our Heart Decisions?**

To embrace with our hearts over the next six years a co-ordinated reshaping of our present Congregational structures.

To conduct a professional analysis of our personnel and resources in order to assess adequacy for current and future mission.

To ensure accountability in the process of the redistribution and stewardship of resources.

*Live Jesus in our hearts forever*