

May 2008

May 5<sup>th</sup> marks the feast day of Blessed Edmund Rice, the founder of the Congregation of Christian Brothers. Edmund was born in Waterford, Ireland in 1762 and passed away at the age of 82 in 1844. He amassed a large fortune at a young age and married Mary Elliott. Tragedy struck when his wife passed away after giving birth to a daughter. Their daughter was probably born prematurely and was an invalid her entire life.

As a widower and father, Edmund prayed through his grief and sought to find God's will for him in his life. He gradually became aware of the number of young boys hanging around the docks and streets of Waterford and decided to use his fortune and his talents to provide them with a Catholic education. This was revolutionary in the Ireland and Europe of his day. The prevailing attitude of the day was that education was unnecessary and dangerous for the poor and all of the laws in Ireland were aimed at depriving all Catholics of any opportunity for education.

It was in this atmosphere of discrimination and oppression that Edmund decided to open his first school. His mission began in a converted stable where over one hundred young boys arrived to be educated by two professional teachers that Edmund hired. Both of these teachers resigned in short order because of the undisciplined behavior of the young men. Edmund persevered alone in his mission and in short order a number of volunteers joined him. This was the beginning of the Congregation of Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers.

Bergen Catholic High School was founded as part of the mission of Blessed Edmund Rice and is directed and inspired by his vision. Edmund saw on the docks of Waterford poor young men and women who had no future. They were marginalized by a justice system that did everything possible to oppress them and an economic system that left them no option for hope or improvement. They faced lives where they were confronted by alcohol dependency, debtors' prison, deportation, jail or execution. Edmund recognized the presence of Christ in their lives and did everything in his power to enable them to experience God's love for them and educate them with the skills and knowledge to improve their future.

The challenge for all of us at Bergen Catholic High School is to educate leaders who will perpetuate the vision and mission of Edmund. The measure of success for a Bergen Catholic alumnus is not about how much money he can make, or how famous he can become. Success for a member of our Bergen Catholic Community is measured by his ability and willingness to recognize Christ in the marginalized and the poor and the difference he makes in their lives. This vision was confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI, in his recent visit to New York when he told the congregation in his Mass at Saint Patrick's Cathedral, "*Dear brothers and sisters, in the finest traditions of the Church in this country, may you also be the first friend of the poor, the homeless, the stranger, the sick and all who suffer. Act as beacons of hope, casting the light of Christ upon the world.*"

This is also echoed in the word of Archbishop Oscar Romero who said, "*We should not feel superior when we help anyone. Those who give materially, receive spiritually. There is an exchange of property that is understood only in a true spirit of poverty, which makes the poor feel that they are equal givers, and not inferior to the truth.*"

It is for this reason that we support activities like Crusaders for Christian Action, Operation Smile, Habitat for Humanity and Midnight Run. It is also why we expect all of our students to perform at least one hundred hours of community service while they are here at Bergen Catholic.

As we begin the last full month of the academic year and prepare to graduate the Class of 2008, it is very appropriate that we celebrate the feast of Blessed Edmund Rice, not because of his accomplishments but rather as a measure of how we, as members of the Blessed Edmund Rice community, continue his vision and mission in our world today.

Sincerely yours,



Brother Lawrence T. Murphy, C.F.C.  
President

I generally include a story on the reverse of my letters and I thought that I would include a few entertaining anecdotes from the life of Blessed Edmund Rice. I hope that you enjoy them.

### Carlo Bianconi

The first one is the story of Carlo Bianconi. Carlo Bianconi was born in Lombardy, Italy in 1786. He came to Ireland, poor, penniless and unable to speak English. One day Edmund Rice met Bianconi and seeing his miserable state, brought him home and fed him. After teaching Carlo English, Edmund set him up in business. Bianconi became a very successful businessman by identifying the need in Ireland at the time for an efficient, regular, nation-wide coach network. His first coach traveled from Clonmel to Cahir in 1815.

When the system spread to all parts of the country, Carlo became very wealthy. Not forgetting the lessons he learned from Edmund Rice, Carlo became involved in many charities. He supplied clothes for the poor boys in Mount Sion, Edmund's first school, every year and also donated 50 pounds a year for this purpose.

### Johnny

The second anecdote is about a young man named Johnny. Even at an early stage in his life, while still a layman, Edmund took to heart the words of the Gospel: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones." (Matt. 18:10). Edmund was always willing to come to the help of any boy that he saw in trouble.

One day, he saw a poor lonely African boy being ill treated by the crew-member of a merchant ship which was alongside the Quay wall in Waterford. His penetrating eyes met the eyes of the poor youth and his heart was filled with compassion for the young slave. Edmund sought out the captain and endeavored to get him to give the boy his freedom. Although the captain was reluctant to part with a young healthy slave, Edmund persisted and at last bought the boy from the captain. This was a happy day for Johnny as he was affectionately known. Edmund taught Johnny to read and sent him for instruction to the Presentation Sisters. He later asked to be baptized. Having finished his schooling in Mount Sion, Edmund set Johnny up in a little shop. He was quite successful in business and lived an exemplary life.

### Poll McCarthy

My final anecdote is about Poll McCarthy. Poll was a notorious prostitute and drunkard in Waterford. As a poor woman of the street, she was an outcast and avoided by all. Poll often went to Edmund for help. He tried to persuade Poll to mend her ways and give up drink. "I would love to give it up but I'd die without it." She said.

At that time a Father Matthew was running a very successful temperance campaign in Cork. Indeed it was said that within six years he had persuaded half of the adult population of Cork to take a pledge to not drink alcohol. Edmund bought Poll some clothes and persuaded her to go to Father Matthew in Cork and take the pledge.

In the little house of Father Matthew, Poll eventually took the pledge and made her peace with God. As an act of penance, she walked from Cork which is a distance of about 78 miles, in her bare feet. She never again touched intoxicating drink. After that she lived a holy life, faithful to her prayers and Mass. She died with a reputation of being a saintly woman.