

Edmund Rice Christian Brother North America

**PLT Report to the Province Chapter
July 2008**

**A Guided Meditation
to Accompany Power Point Presentation**

Slide 1 (Introduction)

(Hugh) Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America came into being on July 1, 2005. Since that time, Province Leadership - following the lead of Congregation Leadership - has emphasized the need to reflect on the role of Eucharist, Scripture, and discipleship in our lives as consecrated religious Brothers.

Recognizing that spiritual reflection requires a stance of silence and stillness, there is a growing desire among the Brothers of the Province for prayer experiences that provide opportunities for both quiet reflection and faith sharing, while at the same time, using fewer words.

As such, "Be still and know that I am God" has served as a Scriptural reference for prayer and leadership in North America during our term of office. Thus, our PLT Report to the Province Chapter is presented today as a guided meditation which we believe speaks to the spirituality and culture of Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America.

Slide 2

Silent

Slide 3

(Brian) The 2002 Congregation Chapter discovered “restructuring is an urgent call to transform minds and hearts,” and it challenged all Provinces and Regions “to embrace with our hearts....a coordinated reshaping of our present Congregational structures.”

We Christian Brothers in North America, with our usual zeal for getting things done, took this call to heart, and moved to take immediate action.

(Mark) In July 2002, our three North American Provinces held separate, but concurrent Province Chapters here at the Nav-Canada Centre in Cornwall, Ontario. Following these three Chapters, a historic assembly of the Christian Brothers in North America – now referred to as Cornwall I - took place. The purpose of this assembly was to begin to explore the possibility of a common future.

(Dave) Cornwall I established a six man steering committee whose primary task was to engage the Brothers and others in the wider Edmund Rice Network in conversation around the topic of restructuring. The labors of these men, over a two year period, led to regional gatherings throughout North America and laid the groundwork for a second Cornwall Assembly in July 2004. As Brothers in North America, we did indeed want to embrace a common future and “cast our cares on the Lord” with the belief that God would sustain us.

(Dan) Cornwall II produced the Christian Brothers North America: Declaration for a Common Future – which read in part:

“We now embrace with renewed hearts the wisdom of a common future and call on our respective Province Leadership Teams to convey the following request to our Congregation Leadership Team: To dissolve no later than July 1, 2005, our current provinces in North America and to take the necessary steps to create one new province to unite us for mission in Edmund’s charism in service to the Church and to the world.”

With faith and trust in Jesus, Edmund, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help, it would be as a new Province that we would work out the many details of becoming one, knowing that our God would walk with us.

Slide 4

(Kevin) The newly appointed leadership team – three Brothers from each of the former Provinces – viewed the Congregation Chapter document, *The Heart of Being Brother*, as the road map for “choosing life” for the new Province.

Having chosen life, we Brothers in North America began our Emmaus journey with the confidence that “Providence is our inheritance.”

The Province Leadership Team felt it imperative that the seven insights from *The Heart of Being Brother* serve as a guide for our ministry, so as to keep them in the forefront of Province life. Thus, a portfolio system for leadership ministry was established which focused squarely on the seven insights.

(Hugh) At this time, we acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of Nick Morris who served as Deputy Province Leader for the new Province until the time of his stroke in March 2006. We give thanks for Nick’s wisdom and insight and we continue to offer him our prayers and fraternal support.

We acknowledge as well with gratitude the contributions of Kieran Murphy who served as a Province Councilor until July 2007 when he resigned this position for personal reasons. We offer Kieran prayers and support as his life moves in a new direction.

Pause

Slide 5

(Derm) The *Deepening the Spirituality of Being Brother* portfolio took responsibility for prayer, spirituality, community life and renewal.

(Dave) Drawing heavily on the three most recent documents published by the CLT – *Reflection on Eucharist, The Word of God, and Dare to Be Disciple* – Brothers have been encouraged to allow their “hearts to burn within them” as they break open God’s Word and share the stories of their lives with one another.

Additionally, Brothers have been encouraged to participate in the renewal initiatives of the Congregation, to seek personal spiritual direction and to take time each year for personal retreat experiences.

(Kevin) In collaboration with all Community Leaders and Contact Persons, at the November 2005 Community Leadership Gathering in Tucson, AZ, two Models for Community Leadership in North America – the Designated Community Leader Model and the Shared Responsibility Model – were acknowledged and affirmed. These two models have served the PLT and local communities for the past three years.

(Hugh) Although we are challenged by aging and diminishing numbers, the Brothers in our forty-seven communities throughout Canada, the West Indies, and the United States celebrate Brotherhood in community as “our principal means of evangelization” and recognize that our communities have been formed to advance our various ministries and the mission of the Congregation.

Slide 6

(Derm) The *Healing and Reconciliation – A Need and A Call* portfolio took responsibility for issues and concerns related to elder care, growth through our fragility, the protection of children, and Brothers on exclauration.

(Dave) Care for our senior Brothers, with more than 100 Brothers over the age of 70, continues to be a major concern for Province leadership. Escalating medical costs, with little or no government assistance, places a heavy burden on Province finances. Yet, we are committed to providing quality care for our senior Brothers as they continue to be wisdom figures in our Province. The development of a Province-wide Healthcare and Wellness Policy gives witness to this commitment.

Province finances are further exasperated by the on-going lawsuits brought about by the child sexual abuse crisis that remains a reality in North America. As such, legal costs, attorney fees, and settlements with victims of abuse have had and continue to have a tremendous negative impact on Province finances.

(Derm) In response to this crisis, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, teamed up with Praesidium Religious Services to develop the *Instruments of Hope and Healing Program*. Our Brothers have been intricately involved with the development of this program, and recognizing the continual need for “growth through our fragility,” we have committed ourselves to on-going training and to updating our established Province guidelines and policies for ethics in ministry with minors, vulnerable adults, and adults. In this regard, we now have a Province Policy Statement for Ethics in Ministry and Positive Relationships between Members and Minors & Vulnerable Adults, as well as a Province Policy Statement for Maintaining Ethical Ministry with Adults.

Our participation in the *Instruments of Hope and Healing Program* underscores our commitment to provide for the protection of minors in all of our ministries.

(Dave) Those Brothers presently on exclaustation and those recently dispensed from their vows – many between the ages of forty and fifty-five - have made us realize that we must assist our Brothers in taking steps which provide for their spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs on a regular basis, and not just when a crisis occurs.

Yahweh asks us “to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with God.” We do this with an ever-growing awareness of the need for healing and reconciliation in our lives, and with the realization that we are called to transform our hearts and minds.

Slide 7

(Kevin) The *Seeking New Brothers* portfolio took responsibility for vocation promotion and initial formation.

Our efforts at promoting vocations never cease. We have participated in numerous North American and international programs aimed at seeking new Brothers. The latest of these – *Called to a Deeper Journey: From Vision to Action* – took place last April in Auckland, NZ, and was sponsored jointly by our own Congregation and the Presentation Brothers.

Without doubt, we are challenged by the very real lack of new vocations in the developed world. Still, we celebrate the four men – two residential candidates (one soon to become a novice) and two annually professed brothers – currently in our initial formation program.

Our commitment to vocation promotion allows us to “cast our nets” with the confidence that God still calls men in the developed world to Christian Brotherhood. As such, this past year we have reconstituted our vocation efforts by establishing a new model for vocation promotion in North America – a model that calls on each brother and each community to actively participate in identifying, inviting and mentoring young men who have the qualities to be future Christian Brothers.

Additionally, the appointment of Community Vocation Animators and Regional Vocation Chairs throughout North America underscores our commitment to continually seek new Brothers.

Our pre-novitiate residency in Mt. Vernon, NY and our novitiate community in Chicago, IL are a testimony to our commitment to providing the highest quality of initial formation for the men who join us.

Slide 8

(Dan) The *Educating the Minds and Hearts of the Young* portfolio took responsibility for the educational initiatives of the Province.

(Mark) Our association with Catholic school education in North America dates back to 1876 in Canada, 1906 in the United States and 1956 in Dominica.

In North America, the “evangelization of youth” is a major focus of our ministerial outreach. At present, we minister in eleven incorporated schools, sixteen staffed, administered or affiliated schools and two sponsored schools.

The guidelines for these schools have been developed in collaboration with our partners in ministry and are articulated and presented as *The Essential Elements of an Edmund Rice Christian Brother Education*. During the past several years, there has been a renewed focus on the Essential Element that proclaims: “We Stand in Solidarity with Those Marginalized by Poverty and Injustice.” This has given birth to an increase in the number of immersion and service programs in our schools – to which our students, Brothers and lay colleagues have responded generously.

(Brian) Additionally we serve in a tapestry of ministries that attempt to meet the needs of the large immigrant population that is prevalent in North America, but that is often ignored.

Our schools and ministries are a reflection of the multicultural society in which we live, and they serve a variety of peoples; including, African-American, Caribbean, Asian, Latino, Chaldean and European.

We have responded continuously to the call of the Congregation “to move to the margins” and to “attend to the poor at our doorstep.”

Our engagement with these various immigrant communities gives witness to our commitment to the evangelization of youth, still so desperately needed in our cities, towns, and villages.

Our involvement in all of our ministries, but particularly with the black and Latino youth of our inner cities and the Latino and Asian immigrants at our borders, allows us to make a significant difference in the lives of the most vulnerable of God's children and gives them an opportunity to claim their human dignity with a profound sense that they are indeed God's children.

(Dan) Our Office of Educational Services offers support to the *Consortium of Edmund Rice Schools* in assisting them to keep *The Essential Elements of an Edmund Rice Christian Brother Education* at the center of their ministry. This office provides on-going support for the promotion of youth leadership, lay leadership and lay empowerment. Programs such as - the ACTION Workshop for student leaders, the Called and Gifted Program for lay colleagues and school board members, the Pilgrims in Peru immersion experience in Latin America, and numerous other similar programs give witness to our commitment to educating the minds and hearts of today's youth.

(Mark) In North America, we celebrate the diversity of the people we serve, and we continually strive to respond to the emerging needs of our changing world. Our hearts are transformed a thousand times over as we stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalized in our midst.

Yes, we celebrate, but we also struggle to keep our ministries vibrant, as most of them receive no government aid to assist us in serving the needs of the poor. Our Advancement and Development offices, both locally and Province-wide, are continually seeking funds from outside sources to support our good works. It is indeed a struggle – a struggle to which we are deeply committed.

Slide 9

(Kevin) The *Edmund Rice Network – The Unfolding Story* portfolio took responsibility for the Christian Brother Lay Volunteer Program, the Associates of Edmund Rice, and the Edmundian Society.

(Derm) The lay volunteer program provides young people with an opportunity to live and minister with the Brothers at the margins of society. To date, lay volunteers have served in Peru, South America; Bonita Springs, FL; New York City; and Brownsville, TX. Plans are afoot for future volunteers to serve in both New Orleans, LA and the West Indies.

(Kevin) The Associates of Edmund Rice are primarily lay people who are committed to deepening their faith lives by giving witness to gospel values and the charism of the Founder. They are spread across the North American Province and participate in a variety of activities with each other and with the Brothers. Our hearts are transformed as our lives are touched by our mutual association.

(Derm) The Edmundian Society consists of former Christian Brothers still committed to the works of the Province in a variety of ways. Their partnership with us gives witness to the enduring legacy of Edmund's influence on their lives, even as their lives have taken them in new directions.

(Kevin) The wider Edmund Rice Network in North America is made up of many parts that support one another in the quest for union with Jesus and Edmund. We Christian Brothers celebrate our partnership with the men and women who touch our lives and transform our hearts.

Slide 10

(Hugh) The *A Prophetic Call to a Quest for Justice* portfolio took responsibility for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation efforts, Congregational advocacy efforts, and school related campus ministry and outreach initiatives.

(Brian) One of the very first acts of the new North American PLT in July 2005 was to appoint a Brother to serve fulltime as the Province Director of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

This year, each of our communities in setting their yearly goals was asked to take a look at their carbon footprint - and to pay special attention to matters such as, global warming, recycling, and the conservation of water and energy.

On the international level, the JPIC Office has worked closely with the Congregation's offices for both the Advocacy of Children's Rights and for Eco-Justice, and has been integral in aiding with the establishment of *Edmund Rice International*.

On the Province level, efforts at promoting Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation are a major part of our school curriculums. Campus Ministry and other programs provide opportunities for North American and international immersion experiences, Christian service projects, retreat experiences for students in our schools, and participation in Edmund Rice Camps. Participation in these initiatives gives our students opportunities to walk with those on the margins of society, to "Be still and know God" in their own lives, and to see the world through the eyes of others.

(Hugh) Mission awareness in our schools provides students with an educational perspective of the poor and marginalized in Latin America, Dominica, and on our own borders. Mission collections provide students with an opportunity to make financial contributions that directly benefit the missionary work of our Brothers and our partners in ministry.

Province efforts to promote justice are also prevalent in our outreach ministries that directly serve migrant populations in numerous settings.

Additionally, work in diocesan offices for both Black and Hispanic ministry gives witness to our quest for justice for those who are indeed “rich in faith...and heirs to the Kingdom.”

(Brian) Perhaps the most poignant examples of our commitment to justice are our movement to New Orleans, LA where we have established a community to serve the needs of the people in the aftermath of the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina – and our movement to Edinburg, TX where in 2010 we will begin a new school serving the Mexican-American community of that area. The quest for justice is never-ending.

Slide 11

(Hugh) The *New Wineskins for New Wine* portfolio took responsibility for Province finances, legal matters, North America's pastoral care for the Latin American Region, and a variety of issues related to restructuring.

(Brian) The finances of the North American Province are always a concern for leadership, as the lack of government aid, rising legal and medical costs, and the aging of our Brothers place a tremendous burden on our ability to provide for our ministries.

Our Development and Advancement offices do their best to offset these realities and to raise funds for our ministries, as well as for the retirement and healthcare needs of our Brothers.

Still, we are resolved to honoring our past, living in the present, and providing for the future, knowing that new wine can be put only into new wineskins. The new wine of our ministry in New Orleans is a prime example of our commitment to respond to the needs of our changing times.

(Hugh) Our faithfulness to walking with our Brothers and those they serve in Latin America and Dominica is a testimony to our commitment to the missionary work of the Congregation.

Additionally, Province Publications; such as, *Christian Brothers Today*, the *Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America Province Newsletter*, and timely *PLT Bulletins* all serve to advance the mission of the Congregation in North America.

Slide 12

(Dan) The *Communications* portfolio took responsibility for Province communication.

There are three major means of Province communication.

The Province web site can be found at www.ERCBNA.org. Maintained and updated regularly, the site contains news and information about ministry opportunities, retreat experiences, vocations, and much more. And like any good web site, it offers valuable links to many Congregational and other sites.

The Province Newsletter is published several times a year and is posted on the Province web site. The newsletter reports on Province and Congregational events, shared articles and other resources, announces awards and other good news, and generally covers stories and news in which the Brothers and others from the wider Edmund Rice Network have an interest. News about ministry sites, communities, jubilees, Province events, etc. is published in the Province Newsletter, and it reports Congregation developments and events. The newsletter depends on more thorough coverage, broader development, and more narration than the Bulletin.

The Bulletin is published one to five times a month and is distributed by e-mail. The Bulletin makes essential announcements regarding assignments, policies, and other items from the PLT and from other Province entities: advancement, education office, missions, etc. The success of the Bulletin depends on generally limiting content to timely, necessary, and brief entries. Some items – such as letters from leadership, directory changes, and longer items that require more timely distribution than the Province Newsletter can provide – are distributed as attachments to or links from the Bulletin.

The Province directory, necrologies, and the ministry clearinghouse are among the other activities that fall under the Communications portfolio.

Slide 13

(Brian) The *Legal and Corporate* portfolio took responsibility for issues pertaining to legal and corporate matters.

(Mark) It has already been mentioned that our legal costs continue to escalate, and that they are a major cause of concern to the PLT. We continue to receive lawsuits at an alarming rate in connection with child sexual abuse. Our responsibility to take seriously and to investigate thoroughly each new claim of sexual misconduct by a Brother or former Brother is time consuming and costly. When such a claim is made, we provide pastoral outreach to both the alleged victim and the Brother/former Brother being accused. We remain committed to the highest standard of integrity in carrying out our responsibilities in this area.

Slide 14

(Kevin) Last July, a pre-Chapter assembly of the Brothers in North America took place – again here in Cornwall – so that we could continue to chart our future together.

At Cornwall III, the PLT presented a new model for the structure and governance of the next North American leadership team.

This new structure called for the establishment of five Province Offices that have come to be called the Province Offices for:

1. Province Life and Renewal
2. The Edmund Rice Network
3. Evangelization
4. Stewardship
5. Healthcare and Reconciliation.

(Dan) These five offices will take responsibility for much of the management of the Province - thus, freeing the members of the PLT to heed the call of the Brothers to be more collaborative and pastoral in their approach to leadership. This was clearly articulated in the Cornwall II Declaration, as such:

“Realizing that all of us are called to be a prophetic witness of the Gospels, the Brothers’ mission in North America demands leadership that inspires and challenges us to new realities.”

More will be said regarding the new structure and model for Province Leadership as this Chapter unfolds.

Slide 15

(Mark) At present, we are in the midst of preparing an Apostolic Plan to guide our future ministry in North America. The establishment of this plan - which will be further developed during our time here in Cornwall - gives further witness to our commitment and belief that:

“Restructuring facilitates new life in mission and ministry, promotes prophetic religious living and ensures a redistribution of resources in a spirit of fraternity.”

(Hugh) In an act of faith, in July 2005, we Christian Brothers in North America dissolved our three Provinces not knowing what the future held – and, in the process, birthed into being Edmund Rice Christian Brothers North America.

We “Dared to Be Disciple” then, as we do now, trusting that our Emmaus journey is being guided by the light of Christ, the heart of Edmund, and the love of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

In this reflection, we have shared with you some of the ways that we have responded to the call of both the 2002 Congregation Chapter and our 2004 Declaration for a Common Future. We conclude in stillness by asking ourselves the question, “Can we dare to be disciple?”

Slide 16

Silent