



# PROFILES

Of Edmund Rice Christian Brothers

Epiphany 2019

## *Encuentro Americano*

Yankee Stadium was the forum the Holy Father and future Saint, Paul VI, chose to address the American church and, particularly, the religious of the United States. It was the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, October 4, 1965. He urged those in attendance to be mindful of our sisters and brothers in South America. He contrasted the wealth of our country with the poverty in Latin America. He later gave momentum to his plea by requesting that each religious community donate ten percent of its holdings and membership to missions in the poorer sectors of South America.

The response of the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers was the preparation and missioning of brothers from our schools across North America to new ministries in Peru. Six decades later the Brothers and our partners in mission now serve in Peru, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Argentina, ever seeking to be engaged with the poor in building a better today and tomorrow. This edition of PROFILES touches into the multiple blessings coming to our Brotherhood from our presence in the Latino communities in both South and North America.

### **Brother Joseph Albert Cussen, CFC**

Brother Cussen came to Iona College in the autumn of 1965. Having lived and ministered in East Harlem and then taught Spanish at Bergen Catholic HS in New Jersey and Rice HS in Central Harlem, he was well aware of the challenge the Brothers faced in responding to the Holy Father's appeal for South America. Education in Spanish language and Latin American culture would need to be significantly upgraded for the Brothers and for our students.



With characteristic insight and boundless energy and in harmony with the Papal request for promoting communication, Brother brought to the Iona Campus annual Language Days. The events stimulated yearlong collaboration between high school teachers with each other and with their students. The goal was to promote fluency in Spanish throughout the New York metropolitan area.

In succeeding decades, increasing numbers of high school students chose Spanish to fill their modern language requirement. Once enticed by the dynamic audio-visual techniques developed by Br. Cussen and his fellow instructors at Iona, the number of students majoring or minoring in Spanish increased significantly. Many chose to become Spanish Language teachers and to pursue a Masters in Spanish at Iona College.

Today Iona alums are well represented among the teachers and Spanish department chairs in and beyond the New York area.

Not satisfied with enabling others to learn what would soon become a major international language throughout the American continents and being ever a student of what he teaches, Brother Cussen commits to spending at least fifty days a year in countries where Spanish is the dominant language. Here he gathers the experience and materials that have made his books on the teaching of Spanish a favorite of professors and students for several decades. His intermediate Spanish text **Casos y Cosas**, published by McGraw Hill, now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, is well known to many students.



And today Brother Cussen continues to teach and travel, facilitating the exchange of gifts Pope Saint Paul VI had envisioned for the peoples of the Americas.

## Brother Kevin Griffith, CFC

Br. Kevin Griffith is the Province Leader for the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers of North America, with pastoral responsibility for the Latin American Region. His first teaching assignment was at All Hallows Institute in the Bronx. He delighted in being near the home stadium of his Yankees, and savoring the Latino culture of the surrounding neighborhood. He moved on to successive missions at Archbishop Curley - Notre Dame High School in the Little Haiti section of Miami, Notre Dame-Bishop Gibbons HS in up-state Schenectady, NY, and Rice High School in Harlem, NY. He taught English and remedial reading, coached baseball and basketball, and directed student Encounter retreats, before being tapped by the Brothers for service in Province roles of Vocation and Formation ministries.

His skills and vision recognized, Brother Kevin has been selected again and again to roles of leadership. His pastoral letters are a source of inspiration and challenge to the Brothers, his wisdom is sought in moments of challenge, and his personal interventions have guided the Brothers' communities in finding new ways of being Brother today.

He serves on the Praesidium Board for the protection of minors and vulnerable adults and ministers in this area on behalf of the Brothers.

To keep in touch with the core of his vocation Brother Kevin seeks ways of translating his prayer into ministry. He steps himself in Advocacy and Mission Immersion opportunities. He has joined students in building houses for poor families in Peru and in the rehabilitation of damaged schools in Haiti.



In a recent pastoral letter he writes: *“Let us challenge one another to live joyfully...to live gently...to live compassionately...to live intimately...and to live lovingly. If we embrace this way of living, of being - we will be the better for it, and maybe, just maybe, we will begin to attract others to our Brotherhood. **New life and new hope are upon us.**”*

## Brother Hugo Cáceres Guinet, CFC

Brother Hugo was one of the first Peruvians to join the Congregation of Christian Brothers. Today he is Regional Leader for the Latin American Region of the Congregation of Christian Brothers.

A noted theologian, catechist, and specialist in pastoral ministries, Brother studied in Peru and Italy and has earned degrees from the Gregorian University in theology and from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome in Scriptures. He has taught in the schools and seminaries of Peru, worked on pastoral and catechetical commissions, promoted vocation discernment activities and directed formation programs.



Br. Hugo likes to visit first graders in Fe y Alegría - Hermanos Cristianos School

His responsibilities as Region Leader bring him to Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Peru. He is sensitive to the cherished distinctions and cultural uniqueness of the peoples served by the Brothers and their collaborators. He complements his leadership role with preaching retreats for religious groups and exploring new insights in contemporary spirituality. His particular area of research is masculine spirituality with a biblical perspective. His book *Jesús el varón* was published in 2012.

Because thousands of people from Venezuela are leaving their country he is involved, in collaboration with other religious congregations, in implementing new ministries to help the refugees. Peru has received in three years over 500,000 refugees.



Br. Hugo Carceres, CFC, looks on as Brother Ever Cieza, CFC signs the vow sheet at his Perpetual Profession as a Christian Brother.

He writes in his recent Christmas letter to the Brothers and Edmund Rice Network in South America: *“While a maddening shopping fever takes hold of our Latin American cities, a fever that usually goes up in the Christmas season, let us ask God that the Christian Brothers and the Edmund Rice Network will be able to maintain a clear vision of what Christmas stands for. We mean a Christmas celebration that recognizes and welcomes the poverty of Jesus, who “became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.” (2Cor. 8, 9) Let us hope that the story of Mary and Joseph looking for a place to bear their Child, will encourage us to take some solidarity action that will help the thousands of Venezuelan refugees who will be near our homes and in our communities around Christmas”.*

### **Br. Alberto Llanos, CFC**

Brother Alberto Llanos is the Community Leader in Casa de los Hermanos, Cochabamba, Bolivia. The primary ministry of the Community is Centro Hermano Manolo (CeHM), a multifaceted service to the shoeshine boys and other child laborers in the sprawling open markets in the center of the barrio of this immense city. <https://vimeo.com/111617188>

The Brothers, their faithful collaborators, and volunteers seek to offer boys, girls, and adolescents, a warm reception in a place where they can safely experience an invitation to be themselves, to share with each other and to open themselves to the possibility of an education other than that of the streets. In Bolivia a child can legally begin to work at 8 years of age. National statistics indicate that 17 percent of minors, 7 -17 years of age, are laborers.



Br. Alberto and his colleagues reach out to the children on the streets inviting them to come to the center during a work break to enjoy some snacks, perhaps a meal, and an opportunity to play games. Those who sample and appreciate the opportunities the centers offers are encouraged to bring their co-worker friends. In the steady stream of new youngsters, some become regulars, assist in coordinating the activities, and even agree to re-enter school.

Staff meetings bring together a growing community of street counselors, social workers, and alum volunteers to explore ways of raising awareness among the children and their families of rights too often denied the youth of the city: rights to life, a name, comprehension, medical attention, a free education, protection, family, food, citizenship, and love.



When it is Brother Alberto's moment to lead the prayers of the community he is ever mindful of the blessings needed and received in accompanying the child laborers the Lord leads to Centro Educativo Hermano Manolo.

**Br. Robert Gabriel Dunbar, CFC**

Brother Robert Gabriel Dunbar first met the Brothers at Essex Catholic in Newark, New Jersey. He went on to Temple University in Philadelphia to earn a Bachelor's degree and then Iona College for a Masters in English Education. He joined the Brothers after college. His first teaching assignment was St. Lucy's School in East Harlem. There, and in subsequent missions at St. Augustine's in the rural migrant worker area of Highland, New York, St. Francis DeSales in East Harlem, and Sacred Heart in Hell's Kitchen, NYC, he became increasingly aware of the growing Latino presence throughout the New York area.



Appointed the principal at Sacred Heart he found ways of bringing the joy of his classroom to the larger school community for the next six years.

On completion of his administrative turn, Br. Dunbar opted to return to teaching, this time at All Hallows High School, in the Bronx, NYC, the Brothers' first High School in the United States. He finds himself at home in the very warm and engaging atmosphere of the predominantly Latino community in the school and the surrounding neighborhood. With a rich history and accolades for academic standards, strong sport programs and excellent college placement, All Hallows stands out as a uniquely successful institution in the midst of what has long been a challenged section of the city.



Observing that some of his students needed added opportunities to develop their artistic skills, Brother has initiated an art club whose dedicated members gather Fridays at the end of the school day. He is impressed by their capacity to capture the beauty, the weirdness, the frenzy of their experiences in this inner city oasis. They delight in the encouraging presence of a brother willing to be with them as they explore their gifts.

## Br. Edward Séan DiFiglia, CFC

Originally, from Essex Catholic in Newark New Jersey, Br. Sean DiFiglia began his teaching career at St. Cecilia's Grammar school in East Harlem, NY. Here Mrs. Anne Curley, a long-time collaborator of the Brothers, guided the novice teacher in meeting the needs of nine and ten year old, first generation, Puerto Rican, boys and girls. Their fourth grade classrooms became centers of innovation addressing cultural and language diversity while encouraging discovery and collaborative learning.

Once grounded as a teacher, Br. Sean was reassigned to Peru. He began at Casa Santa Rosa De Lima Community and High School in Lima and then moved on to Colegio Sra. Pilar High School in Arequipa. Here he taught English language classes and religion. Outside of the classroom, he trained pastoral agents in a poor area on the outskirts of the city and accompanied a parish group of young people in the creation of a local radio station - Voice and Message

For the next twelve years, he was involved in roles of university instructor in a teacher training college, was part of the formation staff for young people exploring the vocation of a Christian Brother, and served as community leader in Moyobamba in the highlands of northeastern Peru on the edge of the Amazon jungle.



*Brother Sean working with the teachers from the school – on a Needs Analysis – Nuevo Horizonte, outside Nuevo Chimbote, Peru*

On the pastoral front, he took part in the training of local farmers as pastoral agents, visiting them for on-site reinforcement and accompaniment of the families and communities in the small villages. As head of the Diocesan Religious Education Office, he mentored teachers in their role as religious educators in the schools, especially those teachers working the surrounding jungle villages.

After a turn at Vocation Director for the Province and a renewal program in Chicago, Brother Di Figlia spent ten years as director of a high school in Chimbote, called “Mundo Mejor” (Better World). During his tenure as director and with the collaboration of other talented people, he created a program so that students who come from low-income households could take advantage of a quality education with reduced tuition.

After a year of sabbatical and renovation, Br. Sean moved to Nuevo Chimbote. Here he and others have taken on the ministry of accompanying families who have literally invaded previously uninhabited

desert territories. Here families seek to eke out a new life building primitive houses. There is now access to water and electricity but little else.

Adjoining shacks and mobile classroom rescued from other parts of the country have been assembled and designated as a school. Br. Sean and Brother Charles Fitzsimmons, CFC, have embraced the families of the students, gathering parents for workshops on sanitation, hygiene, mental health, and community action, consulting with teachers, tutoring, offering classes in art and dance, and inviting all to pray in the Chapel of the Virgen de las Mercedes.



*Brother DiFiglia consults with mothers in the program “Sembrando Infancia” – a program to teach mothers how to improve the nutritional value of their meals, using common foods at a low cost at Nuevo Horizonte.*

Their efforts have attracted the financial support of A CHANCE IN LIFE, formerly Boys’ and Girls’ Towns of Italy, promoting educational projects that emphasize self-governance and community engagement. Br. Sean Di Figlia, once again delights in the magic and miracles he first encountered as a novice Brother at St. Cecilia’s in East Harlem.

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As the Americas, North and South, come to understand and embrace interdependency, our brothers and co-workers, become ever more aware of what it means to be Companions of Edmund in South and North America. Untold blessings have accompanied the journey initiated by Saint Paul VI. Brothers and sisters, *hermanos y hermanas*, have come to know the power of the Spirit enkindling among the People of God throughout the Americas a ministry of **presence, compassion and liberation**,.

## Companions of Edmund

Throughout the Americas and around the globe, men and women of all walks of life find ways of bringing the spirit of Edmund Rice and the Christian Brothers to their neighbors. Some are in areas the Brothers left long ago



*Brother Edward Sean DiFiglia, CFC working with a group of associates of Edmund Rice in their annual assembly in a little village in the sierra north of Lima, Peru.*

Like a rising phoenix these Companions of Edmund include co-workers in the Edmund Rice Network Schools, students, alums and alum Parents, college students who attended Action workshops or participated in mission trips and immersion experiences. Having been touched by the Charism of Edmund Rice, they seek to give new expression to the gospels of Jesus Christ in prayer, service and community. To learn more about being connected mail, e-mail or call



Phoenix Rising  
By Brother Kenneth Chapman, CFC  
Inspired by his years on a mission to Native Americans in Arizona  
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*We introduce the Religious Brother within the Church-Communion, as part of the one Chosen People, in which each one is called to radiate the richness of his particular vocation. .... the heart of the identity of the Religious Brother, namely fraternity, is a gift that is received (mystery), a gift that is shared (communion) and a gift that is given away (mission)*

**Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church**

Vatican Document approved by HH Pope Francis, Oct. 4, 2015

The logo of the Congregation of Christian Brothers: The Celtic cross (wood) attests to the spirit of faith of our founder, Blessed Edmund Rice. A widower, father and businessman, he responded to the call of Jesus, "... sell what you have, give to the poor, and follow me." He and his fellow brothers, grounded in a heart-centered, Eucharistic spirituality (monstrance), came together in community, prayer and service. The promptings of the Holy Spirit continue to bring our message of Presence, Compassion, and Liberation to youth, especially the poor, throughout the world (green sprouts). Visit our website to fill in the rest of the story:

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