

## **LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: AUGUST, 2017**

Tuesday, 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2017, is the 173<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the death in Waterford of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice, Founder of the aboriginal and undivided Society of the Presentation, from which derive the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers and all institutes and initiatives, educational or other, that spring from either or both of those bodies, including *Lux Edmundi*.

By that date, virtually all recognised schools in the Republic of Ireland, primary and post-primary, will have commenced the 2017-2018 school year. Schools under Catholic patronage will be aware that, throughout that year, the Church in Ireland will be preparing to host the World Meeting of Families in Dublin, from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> August, 2018. This is a truly global event, interest in which will be hugely increased by the prospect of Pope Francis himself participating there-in.

Irish Church authorities have indicated that WMOF 2018 will include “an engaging and exciting programme for young people as well as fun activities for children” and Catholic Schools Week, 28 January to 3 February, 2018, will focus on “Catholic Schools: Called to be a Family of Families”.

*Amoris Laetitia*, The Joy of Love, the Post-Synodal Exhortation of Pope Francis on Love in the Family, supplies the frame of reference for WMOF2018. It would be well for all involved in Catholic education in Ireland to re-familiarise themselves with the contents of this pastoral reflection on Church teaching on Marriage and the Family. To do so will assist us towards a more complete appreciation of what WMOF2018 is about. It will also help us make our own contribution towards this great occasion by undertaking an evaluation of whether, and to what extent, what is actually taught in our schools - in, say, RE or SPHE/RSE – on pertinent topics accords with Catholic teaching.

Beyond that, for each Catholic school community in Ireland, WMOF2018 constitutes an implicit invitation to look again at the teaching of the Church on the role of parents in the education of their children and, even more pertinently, to examine its own exemplification of this body of doctrine. The social doctrine of the Catholic Church insists that, under God, the parent is *the primary educator* of the child and, by way of corollary, indicates that all the rest of us who work in, with or for schools, Catholic schools especially, do so at the service of the family, and, specifically, of those parents who entrust the school-based education of their children to our professional care.

Throughout 2017-2018, the Catholic teacher in Ireland will take from her store “new things and old” (cf. *Mt* 13:52). Amongst the “old things” will be those policies, procedures and structures already in place to help parents discharge their various functions in respect of the school. Amongst the “new things”, we may include the General Scheme of an Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill, 2016. This – like, indeed, its companion piece, the Education (Admissions) Bill, 2016 – contains provisions to which we may very well object. However, as we are the successors of Nano, Edmund, Catherine, Mary and Margaret, we may - we must - make our own the social purposes of these items of proposed legislation, to the end that, as far as the social doctrine of the Church on the rights of parents is concerned, we “walk the walk” as well as “talk the talk”. If WMOF2018 is to mean anything, if each of our schools is to be a “Family of Families”, then we must ensure no homeless parent, no homeless child, will get on our doorsteps just another kick in the teeth.