

# *Love and Speak the Truth*



Presentation Day Letter  
2005

Dear Brothers

*1. Introduction*

Recently, one of us attended the final Profession Ceremony of a Loreto Sister in Ireland. Orla Treacy took final vows in a beautiful ceremony in Holy Redeemer Church, Bray on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2005. Loreto Sisters have the tradition of invoking the blessing of patron saints on such a day. For her patrons Orla chose Thérèse of Lisieux and Oscar Romero, thus emphasising that both contemplation and the work of justice are intimately linked in the call of active apostolic religious life today. On her profession ring, Orla had inscribed the motto “Love and speak the truth”. It was edifying to see a vibrant and dynamic young woman commit her life to God in such a ceremony. Since final professions are rare in Ireland these days, it was equally gratifying to see the love and support for Orla’s vocation from such a large attendance of family and friends. We wish Orla every happiness and blessing as she and three other sisters from the Irish Province of Loreto begin a new mission in southern Sudan in February ’06.

*2. Love and Speak the Truth*

This is our first Presentation Day letter to you as a new Congregation Leadership Team. We would like to share some reflections with you on our Chapter Vision Statement – “Sing to the Lord a New Song”. As we do so the phrase “love and speak the truth” resonates with us. It captures for us the essence of leadership of a community of disciples of Jesus Christ in the Spirit of Blessed Edmund Rice. As we have begun to move around the Congregation we have held a number of ceremonies to launch our Chapter Vision Statement and to inaugurate the ministry of our new Province Leadership Teams. At the heart of these occasions has been a re-enactment of the “washing of the feet” which we read about in John 13. It is a reminder that the heart of our lives as Brothers is the vocation to love. We are called to wash our brothers’ feet and our sisters’ feet. But we are also called to be receivers of love – to allow our feet to be washed. We are called to allow our brothers and sisters into our lives in an intimate way. This is quite a challenge to our life in community. It is so easy to allow fear, anxiety, hurts, routine, to dominate our lives to such an extent that we retreat into our own private worlds cut off from all real relationship. How can we be men of God, if we

are not also men who love and men who allow ourselves to be loved? In a truly loving community, neither fear, anxiety nor ego are dominant. In this atmosphere it is possible to love and speak the truth. And the truth will set us free.

### 3. *“Sing to the Lord a New Song”*

Brothers, it is our belief that we can only “sing to the Lord a *new* song”, if we have discovered God in a new and deeper way in our lives. Otherwise, our Chapter theme will remain a nice slogan but will not relate to our real experience of life. Yet God is always inviting us into a deeper, more intimate relationship. God is always revealing a *new* face to us. So the key questions are: Who is God for me *now*? Who is God for us as Presentation Brothers *now* at this stage in our Congregation’s journey? So much depends on our answers to these questions. They cannot be answered at the head level alone. Yet without a new and deeper experience of God, we will not have the energy to sing a new song and we will not rise to the challenges we face and to the call of our time. Many of our Brothers have had such a God experience through experiences of prayer, renewal, retreat, relationship, dislocation, diversity and fragility. Others, for whatever reason, have drawn back from such intimacy and may need help again to come in touch with their truest and best selves. We invite them to kindle again their enthusiasm for God and for God’s dream of the world. Our brother, Philip Pinto, Congregation Leader of the Christian Brothers, has challenged us many times to open our minds and hearts to a bigger and wider notion of God.

### 4. *Who is God for me now? Who is God for us as Presentation Brothers now?*

The ‘God experience’ we have referred to above cannot be manufactured. However, it can be prayed for and it can be received. Each of us needs to pray for a new and deeper experience of God. Each of us needs to make the following prayer our own: “Open my eyes Lord, that I may see you in all people, events and experiences. Open my ears that I may hear you. Open my heart that I may love you and allow myself to be loved by you.”

In such radical openness we will encounter a God of infinite love, acceptance, forgiveness and healing. The negative, fearful, legalistic images of God which damaged so many of us in the past will recede and we will see our lives in a new way. Then we will sing a new song.

In our Chapter Vision Statement we say the following:

We are gifted with a deep awareness of the presence of God in all of life – in our own hearts, in our relationship with our brothers and sisters, and particularly in young people who are poor or disadvantaged. We receive this gift through living in gospel communities that are passionate for God’s vision for the world. We respond to this gift through our mission of Christian formation.

Having reflected on who God is for us *now* and how we name God, we now move on to share with you some reflections on God’s vision for the world and the implications this may have for our mission of Christian formation.

### *5. God’s Vision for the World*

On a recent visit to Rome for a meeting with the Congregation Leadership Team of the Christian Brothers, three of us visited the Sant’Egidio Community in Trastevere. Sant’Egidio is a lay community founded in 1968 by Andrea Riccardi, an eighteen-year-old student. It now has forty thousand members throughout the world. The community comprises women and men, single and married, young and old, who live in their families and work in their jobs and professions. Each day they come together for prayer and mutual support. Prayer, communicating the gospel, solidarity with the poor and ecumenism are at the heart of the life of Sant’Egidio. Members contribute voluntarily of their gifts and talents to the Community. In Rome alone, they run a food centre which feeds 1500 hungry people every day.

One of the members, Giancarlo, said to us: “I encountered Jesus Christ first in the poor and then I encountered him in prayer”. What a wonderful integration of life and prayer. Life provides the raw material for prayer and true prayer energises us for mission. Was this not so true in the life of our founder, Blessed Edmund Rice? For so many of us, life is divorced from prayer. The real issues and struggles of our lives play no part in our prayer. What a pity! We end up saying prayers, but are we truly praying? Some of us have privatised prayer to such an extent that we cannot share our faith – the deepest part of ourselves. “Singing a new song” demands of us a deeper and radical conversion.

*During the Chapter we shared our faith around the Word of God. We came to know in a deeper way the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and in our breaking open of the bread of our lives for one another. We experienced this as a grace. We call the Brothers to a deeper understanding of Eucharist.*

*We encourage communities to use a variety of prayer forms and we invite the Brothers towards a continual renewal of their lives through experiences of Eucharist, personal prayer, retreats, workshops, seminars and spiritual direction.*

(Chapter Vision Statement)

#### *6. Hunger and Thirst for Justice*

God's vision for us and for our world now is for a restoration of right relationships. Each of us needs to ask ourselves some questions: Am I in right relationship with myself, with my brothers and sisters, with the earth, with my God? At the heart of God's vision for the world is the thirst for justice of which we speak in Constitution 6. Again, our Chapter Vision Statement challenges us to engage seriously with the work of justice.

*Faithful to the inspiration of our Founder, we hunger and thirst for justice so that all peoples, especially youth, can achieve the fullness of human and spiritual growth and development (Con 6).*

*Many of our Brothers have made us aware of the poverty caused by systemic injustice in various parts of the world. We will engage in advocacy work with policy makers on behalf of people who are made poor. (Chapter Vision Statement)*

We can assure you of one thing Brothers – that if we engage seriously with God's vision of a world of justice and right relationship, then we will be upset. God's vision for the world will shock and disturb us. It will demand change. We say in our Chapter Statement that we live in "gospel communities that are passionate for God's vision for the world". If this is true then our prayer is real. If this is not true, then are we authentically praying? If we are still far off the mark, then can we pray for the grace of this passion for God's vision?

#### *7. From Vision to Mission : Christian Formation of poor youth today.*

We say:

*In a world where 120 million children have no access to even basic education we affirm that the Christian formation of poor youth will continue to be our mission.*

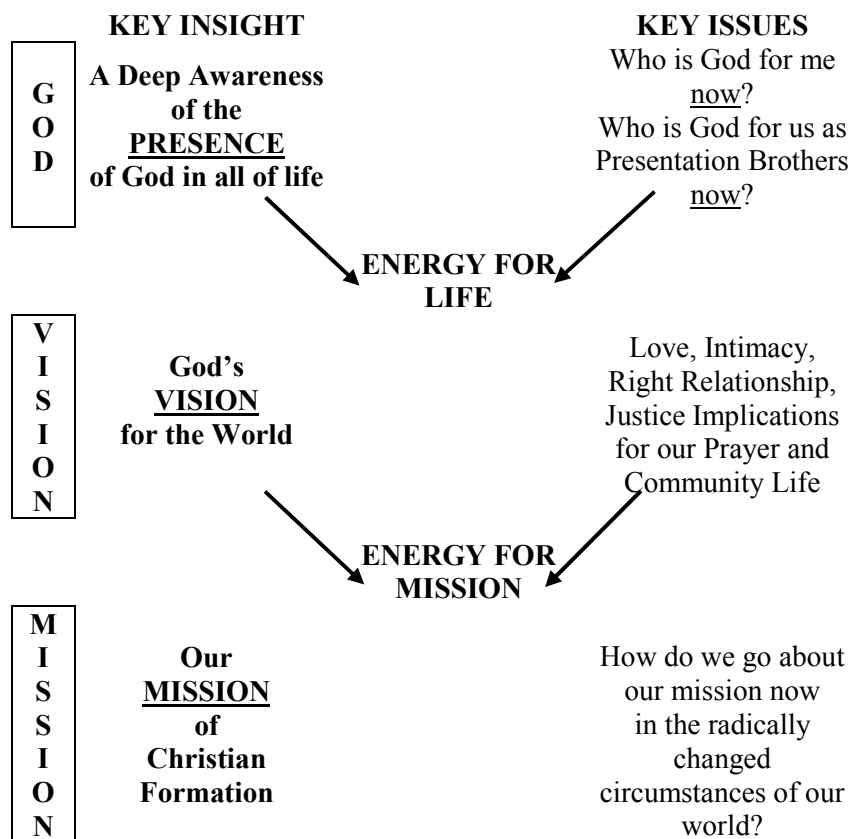
This shocking statistic alone makes clear the urgent relevance of our mission and ministry to today's world. Yet two very critical questions suggest themselves:

How do we form Christ in young people today, in the context of the cultures of today's world? and

How, specifically, do we form Christ in poor young people?

Let us remember, Brothers, that Christ is already present before we arrive. Education is about the drawing out of what is there. Edmund Rice saw Christ in the poor but far more importantly, he saw the tragedy of the poor not seeing Christ in themselves. This had huge implications for the methodology and shape of his vision in nineteenth-century Ireland. Our point is that though our mission is clear, relevant and urgent, how we go about that mission in today's world will require radical change. We will explore how God's vision for our world is implemented in our mission of Christian formation in more detail in a later letter.

What we have shared with you so far could be illustrated in the following way:



## 8. *Our Identity*

Brothers, if we are truly to 'sing to the Lord a new song', we have to be clear about our identity. Do we as Presentation Brothers know who we are? Exploring this question and arriving at a common answer is an important part of our journey today. We need to know who we are and what we stand for. This rediscovery of self, of our charism, of our identity as Presentation Brothers is crucial. And it is not only we ourselves who need to be clear about our identity but other people too. More than ever we need to communicate who we are, if we are to be a leaven, a witness in society. Br. Seán Sammon, Superior General of the Marist Brothers, says the following:

*We would also benefit from examining the relationship that exists between the original ministry of our Congregation and the ever-increasing population of the world's poor. If we plan on a future for our Congregation, we must be crystal clear about our group's identity and specific about its ministry.*

*A Religious Congregation establishes its corporate identity when its members decide on a focus for the life of the group. So that any one who looks at the group can quickly answer, "what is this Congregation known for?" A sense of being sent by our Congregations began to erode over time among many of us.*

*Leaders have found themselves less capable of making corporate commitments to ministries that addressed compelling and unmet human needs, needs quite similar to those that had captured our founding person's hearts and moved them to action.*

*The vitality and viability of our groups depend upon our ability to demonstrate a consistent reason for existing and to engage in a credible corporate mission.*

*What was the original dream of the founder? How is that being lived out today? What changes need to occur in the overall structure of your group, the daily life of its members and in your life personally, so that the founder's dream is vital and vibrant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

Each of us is challenged to address these important questions. As a CLT, we deeply believe that our Chapter insights on the presence of God, on God's vision for the world and the urgency of the mission of Christian formation of poor youth, present us with a radical programme to re-appropriate our core identity. We are Brothers of Jesus in the tradition of Edmund Rice, in community and in our mission to poor youth in a radically changing world.

## 9. *“Starting Afresh from Christ”*

Five years after issuing *Vita Consecrata*, the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, approved the document “Starting Afresh from Christ” published on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2002 by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. We find inspiration for all that we are trying to do in this Instruction where we have found a strong emphasis on spirituality. If there were clear paths into the future we would undoubtedly follow them. But, of course, there are not. How often do we say that we are making the paths by walking them? However the spiritual guidelines are clear:

We read in par.13 that:

*“Religious life finds its identity in the call of the Lord, in following Christ, in unconditional service, which is capable of filling a life to the brim, giving it fullness of meaning.”*

And to quote from Par. 21:

*“Consecrated persons can and must start afresh from Christ because he himself first came to them and accompanied them on the path ... Starting Afresh from Christ means once again finding one’s first love, the inspiring spark which first gave rise to the following (of Christ)... If ‘we love’ it is ‘because he first loved us’... Consecrated persons cannot be creative, capable of renewing the Institute and opening new pastoral paths if they do not feel loved with this love. It is this love which makes them strong and courageous which instils fire and enables them to dare all.”*

In such words we are challenged to rediscover the spirituality at the core of our lives, giving them meaning. To quote again from Seán Sammon’s book:

*“In the hard work of identity formation today, congregations need at the outset, to ensure that Jesus is at the centre of the life of the group and its members. They need also to reclaim the essentials of their foundress’ our founder’s dream, and draw on the renewal experience of both individuals and the group over the past four decades...*

*Today, as men and women religious, we face a twofold and formidable challenge. First, we need to respond creatively to the call to live out our passion for Jesus and for the reign of God in the midst of diverse theologies and expressions of consecrated life. Second, we have an equally strong need to identify those elements that we, as God’s people, believe must be commonly held by the groups who stake claim to this way of living.”*

10. *Mary – Truly our Sister*

*“During the Chapter we prayed often to Mary, the patron of the Congregation. We were very conscious of her presence drawing us closer into the heart of Christ. May Mary always be present with us on our spiritual journey as we seek to be true disciples of her son, Jesus.” (Chapter Vision Statement)*

For us as Presentation Brothers, Mary has a special place in our lives. On November 21, we celebrate the Feast of Mary’s Presentation. Mary invites us too to present our lives to God and to present Jesus to the world of our time. Pope Paul VI suggested that in the contemporary world we need to relate to Mary in a new way, as a real woman who is “truly our sister” on our faith journey. We end this letter to you with the words of Paul VI and by listening to the words of the women from many parts of the world who speak to us of Mary:

*Mary is “truly our sister, who as a poor and humble woman fully shared our lot”.* – Pope Paul VI

*“For poor women Mary is not a heavenly creature but shares their lives as a comrade and sister in struggle.”*  
– Maria Pilar Aquino, Mexico

*Mary is our “sister; a woman in solidarity with other women and the oppressed”.* – Chung Hyan Kyung, Korea

*“It is the Mary of the Gospels, on whose lips is placed the Magnificat, who is seen as a colleague by women around the world who are rediscovering that they have a mission in society and church. ... [Her] face is no longer only that of Our Lady, glorious Queen of Heaven, but also and primarily an elder sister and travelling companion.”*  
– Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, Brazil

*“Perhaps for our time her best title is not ‘mother’, but ‘sister in faith’, not one who directs or defines our way, but one who reminds us of the resources we carry with us as we go.”*

*– Patricia Noone, United States.*

Brothers, we wish you all a happy and joy-filled Presentation Day. May Mary of the Presentation truly be your sister.

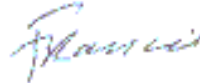
Your brothers in Jesus and Edmund



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**Br. Martin  
Kenneally**

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**Br. Francis  
Agoah**

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**Br. Andrew  
Hickey**

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**Br. Patrick  
Fitzgibbon**

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**Br Richard  
English**

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**FOR YOU TO DO:**

**PRACTICAL “FOLLOW-THROUGH” TO THIS LETTER**

1. In the **Novena** of prayer leading up to Presentation Day, please use segments from this letter and from the Chapter Vision Statement as resources/readings for both personal and community prayer.
2. Individual Brothers and Communities are invited to begin **dialogue** with the CLT on the content of this letter. Written responses can be forwarded to Mount St. Joseph, Cork or e-mailed to [presgen@eircom.net](mailto:presgen@eircom.net).
3. You are invited to hold a **community meeting** to pray about and discuss this letter.
4. *Each community is invited to **fast** in preparation for our titular feast, in solidarity with those who are hungry. Please forward money saved by this fast to the Generalate at Mount St. Joseph. We will donate it to two worthy causes in our Nagle-Rice Family.*
  - a) *To the Presentation Sisters in Pakistan, for the relief of victims of the recent earthquake there.*
  - b) *To a community of Christian Brothers in Mississippi, USA, who are working with the poor people devastated by Hurricane Katrina.*

*Questions / Suggestions  
for  
Reflection, Prayer and Sharing  
on each Section of this Letter*

**1. Introduction**

- a) When last did you attend a final profession ceremony? What are your memories of the occasion?
- b) How do contemplation and mission link in your own life?
- c) What would motivate a young religious to begin a new mission in war-torn southern Sudan?
- d) How does this challenge us as Presentation Brothers?
- e) Pray for vocations.

**2. Love and Speak the Truth**

- a) Read the “washing of the Feet” in John 13. What does this evoke in you?
- b) How am I called to love?
- c) How am I called to receive love?
- d) What fear and anxiety do I need to let go of, to hand over to God?
- e) Pray for the grace of facing the truth in my own life?

**3. Sing to the Lord a New Song**

- a) What new face of God are we discovering today?
- b) Who is God for me **now**?
- c) Who is God for us now as Presentation Brothers?
- d) When last did you experience really good retreat?
- e) Pray for the grace of openness to God.

**4. Who is God for me NOW? Who is God for us as Presentation Brothers NOW?**

- a) What negative images of God still affect us?
- b) Where do I encounter a God of love and forgiveness in my life?
- c) Do I live in a gospel community?
- d) Decide in community to make one change that will make us more a gospel community.

**5. *God's Vision for the World***

- a) How do I speak to God in prayer about the real struggles of my life?
- b) Can I be more open with my Brothers?
- c) How can I deepen my understanding of Eucharist?
- d) Organise a period of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.
- e) Determine to see Christ present in the Brothers beside me.

**6. *Hunger and Thirst for Justice***

- a) Am I in right relationship?
- b) How can we practically express our hunger and thirst for justice?
- c) How will God's vision for the world disturb me?

**7. *From Vision to Mission***

- d) How do we form Christ in young people today?
- e) How do we form Christ in poor people today?
- f) Pray for the grace of zeal in mission.
- g) What radical changes are required today in how we undertake our mission?

**8. *Our Identity***

- a) Who do we say that we are?
- b) What touches you in the section on identity?
- c) How do we communicate our identity to others?

**9. *Starting Afresh from Christ***

- a) Reflect deeply on Par. 21
- b) How do you react to Seán Sammon's comment?
- c) In what way is Jesus the centre of my life?

**10. *Mary – Truly our Sister***

- a) Reflect on Mary as "Truly our Sister".
- b) How are we challenged to grow in our understanding of Mary today?
- c) How can we communicate a contemporary theology of Mary to our brothers and sisters?
- d) How can we gain a deep understanding of Presentation Spirituality?