

The Edmund Story

A role play.

In this story – the names marked # are real, historical characters. Those marked @ are fictitious though based on probably characters in Edmund’s life.

This roll play or ‘sacred walk’ is best done when a group can walk around the grounds of a venue to several spots that are pre-arranged. Each spot where the group stops is to represent an ‘era’ in Edmund’s life. Each participant is given the number of a character that they will ‘play’ [read]. For a bit of fun the facilitator may invite participants to attempt their best Irish accent. The facilitator or a leader reads out the linking verses of the roll play. Perhaps to carry a small I-Pod with some Irish music playing between each stop may assist in creating atmosphere.

Goal:

The goal / purpose of this role play is to help participants gain a more complete picture of the person Edmund Rice. There are many ‘gaps’ in our historical knowledge of Edmund. But we do know that he grew up in Callan, worked in Waterford, married, had a daughter and more. But we don’t know the name of his ‘best man’, we are unsure of his wife’s name, we don’t know where she is buried and more. This narrative bounces between real historical character and characters that would have historically existed but we do not know the facts about them.

Venue 1 – The beginnings of Edmund’s work in Waterford.

- a. “It is 1804, Waterford, Ireland – Mt. Sion and Edmund Rice stands at the gate of the school and greets each student by name.”
Personal – knows their story.
1. Padrick O’Hagan @
2. Seamus Murphy @
3. Sean O’Connor @
4. Mihall O’Rourke @
5. Kieran Burke @
6. Tomas Collins @

Padrick O’Hagan @

“Padrick, good morning to ya, how would your mother Catherine be? Mrs. O’Reilly told me that she has been of poor health? Give her my best wishes and tell her that I and the Brothers will be praying for her.”

Seamus Murphy @

“Seamus, you’re looking a little scruffy young man. Go on down and see Brother O’Driscoll in the clothing store and get tidied up – he would have a fine suit for ya there and come and see me later in the day lad.”

Sean O’Connor @

“Sean, the top of the morning to you lad. You’re looking much better today. Did Brother Harty give you that extra bread for the family I told him to? Tell your father I have not see your little brother for a couple of days – he has been doing so well in his navigation. Has he been ill?”

Mihall O’Rourke @

“Mihall, I saw you at Holy Mass this morning. Please pray for me lad that I may, like yourself, be open to God’s holy will for us. Will you be serving Mass tomorrow? The rain is threatening – ah for a couple of days of sunshine eh – how is your good mother Polly and your father Kieran?”

Kieran Burke @

“Kieran, Brother Murphy tells me your writing his improved out of sight – well done lad – don’t forget that Hurley game this Saturday.”

Tomas Collins @

“Tomas, you’re not your usual cheerful self lad. What would be the matter with you? You have done so well these last couple of months – better to be here learning your Gaelic and English, your writing and book-keeping then hanging around the quay looking for the odd job and getting yourself into trouble with Constable O’Flaharety @.”

Each participant is given an envelope – the pieces of an Edmund Rice Icon + the master copy + some glue sticks to be shared between the group. Group moves to Venue 2.

Venue 2 – hopefully some sort of garden or lawn.

- b. **The Garden area:** “Edmund grew up in the country – born in Callan in 1762 – the son of Margaret and Robert with seven brothers and we are not sure of the number of sisters. Their farm was called ‘Westcourt’ – 200 Acres – quite big for that time which meant that the Rice’s were well to do.

7. Edmund's mother – **Margaret Rice** – taught Edmund a great and practical love for the poor – anyone welcome in for a meal etc.

Margaret Rice: #

“Edmund, don't you forget now son that anyone who comes to our door to be welcomed as if it was the Good Lord himself. Lord heaven knows what kind of difficulties life has brought their way – and ours is not to judge – but to make welcome and warm.”

8. Edmund's father – **Robert Rice** – they had seven sons – Edmund was the 4th.

Robert Rice: #

“Edmund, you're not to go out to play until all your chores are done. Did you bring in the cows from the Mill stream paddock for milking? Have you checked on that the new calf down by the bridge? If you keep up your lessons from Brother Patrick # you will do your uncle Michael # and the family proud.”

9. Hedge-school Master – **Br. Patrick Grace osa** – then school in Callan [6 metres by 5 metres] – then

Brother Patrick: #

“Ah Edmund, I think I've taught you all I can – sadly lad, the English won't let you be taught the most important lesson of all – that we are totally and unconditionally loved by our God – to love God and to love all your fellows – both rich and poor alike. Aye, you'll be off to Callan for school soon and perhaps if you're lucky to Kilkenny to that fine Mr. White # – he'll remind you too of the importance and love of your faith.”

10. His cousin **Maurice Rice** # - [at age 13 Ed moves to Kilkenny – to a kind of TAFE College – a commercial and business school] lived with cousin Maurice # – for years Edmund spoke lovingly in his letters of his Kilkenny teacher – Mr. White # – his kindness and compassion.

Maurice Rice #

“Edmund you're doing your father and mother proud. You ought to go into business with Uncle Michael # – you are a natural with the book-keeping and the ways of buying and selling. I'm pleased to see you are keeping up

your daily Mass and prayer – just be careful of that scally-wag Conor Phelan @ and his mate Padrick O’Connell @ – they are always up to no good – Mrs. O’Brien @ said she saw them sniffing ‘snuff’ down by the flourmill the other day. No good will come of them I say.”

11. His ‘mate’ – **Conor Phelan** @ [talks about his love of ‘nice things’ etc]

Conor Phelan @

“Edmund, that was a great time at the fair in Carrick en Suir – I would say and Padrick agrees, that Lucy Tiernan @ might have eyes for ya lad!!! Did you see how she blushed when we was chatting to her and Moira Finn @?

12. His uncle – **Michael Rice** # – at 17 Ed sent to Waterford and is apprenticed to Michael – supplying ships.

Michael Rice

“It is great to have you here with me in Waterford Edmund. Your parents and your cousins in Kilkenny – they all say you are reliable and good with figures. I need someone I can trust to help me with the business. The White Dove will dock from Liverpool tomorrow en-route to Newfoundland – we have to provision her – it will be a busy couple of days. If you can handle that well – I’ll get you to visit some of the country markets to look out for fine cattle we might purchase – we need reliable suppliers we can trust – trust is essential in good business Edmund!”

13. Ticked off by **James Phelan** # of Coolagh for “his misconduct during Mass”.

James Phelan

“Young Rice, come here lad. I never thought I’d see the day you’d be sitting here in Holy Mass all done up to the nines and chatting idly to that rascal Eamonn Tiernan @ – and I’m told you were misbehaving at ‘The Red Dragon’ last Friday night – aye – many a good man has been ruined by the evils of drink. You’d be well to pay more attention to the Holy Mass lad – your good parents would be ashamed.”

14. Eamonn Tiernan @ – he would go to daily mass and if we went on a business trip with him – in a stage coach – he would invite us to pray the rosary with him. If you went to an Inn down by the Quay

– they [the poor urchins] were ‘all over him’!! They truly loved him.

Eamonn Tiernan @

“Conor @ and Padrick @, what are we going to do with Edmund. I was on the coach with him on the way to the markets in Ballycarlow last Thursday and we had to pray the rosary before I could talk to him about how Lucy @ is keen on him. And I could hardly get him into the ‘Yellow House Inn’ for a pint on Friday for him wanting to play with the street urchins and listen to them and their stories – he sure gave away enough pennies that we could have brought several more pints. Even Tadhg O’Sullivan’s # poetry and the promise of another pint could not keep him from assisting those street urchins.”

As each ‘story’ is told – the group may slowly keep on walking or stay still – and make our way through the garden area – a symbol of journey – then the group makes its way to the 3rd venue.

The 3rd Venue – Edmund moves to Kilkenny and then on to Waterford – the port city.

- c. **3rd Venue:** As Edmund moved into adulthood he had the world at his feet. In 1795 he inherited the business from his uncle Michael – an interesting fact given that he had many brothers and also numerous cousins. He was highly respected around Waterford and in County Waterford and County Kilkenny – especially at markets. He was known far and wide as a fair man, an honest man with an eye for a good business deal. Unlike some – he chose to work with the English in terms of commerce – supplying English ships – but also on several occasions assisted men wanted by the English to escape on ships to the New World. He was known for his deep and practical faith – his love of the Mass but also his deep concern for the poor. His years from age 18 to age 30 were a real journey of great highs and the most despairing of lows.

15. John Rice

John Rice #

“Ireland will never truly be free till we are rid of those accursed English. But I can thank my dear cousin Edmund for me being alive today; I’m married to

his half sister Jane – she was Jane Murphy # – I was on the wrong side of the English law – for making life miserable for some English land owners and those who sympathised with them – I only just escaped with my life – in 1798 Yeomen surrounded my old farm house at midnight and set fire to the house – luckily I knew they were a coming and had escaped to Waterford – aided by Edmund – there he hid me in his house in Ballybricken – they would never have searched there as he was respected by them. After some weeks Edmund smuggled me aboard one of his ships bound for Newfoundland – he could have been hung for that – brave man that Edmund Rice and I for one – owe my life to him.”

16. Padrick O’Connell [best man]

Padrick O’Connell @

“It was an honour to be best man at Edmund’s wedding – aye – that Mary Elliott was a fine lass she was. He might me about helping the poor but Edmund also knows how to live well; he courted her for many a month and all the well to do of Waterford were at the wedding. I’ve never seen a man so happy – I said to me once – “Padrick – I might have done well with the business but nothing beats being in love.”

17. Eleanor Murphy @ [bridesmaid]

Eleanor Murphy @

“We could always see what Mary saw in Edmund Rice. He was quite a catch; a fine singer, dancer and for many a year in the inns of Waterford on a Friday or Saturday night we’ve seen him and his friends out having a good time. Some say Rice was a little serious – perhaps too religious – but them that know him well say that for all of that he knows how to have a good time, is grand with money and is kindness itself.”

18. Mary Elliott # – Ballybricken

Mary Elliott #

“I’ll never forget my wedding day. Edmund and I were so in love. I have never in my life been treated with so much respect – I’ve never heard a cross word from his lips and he has done everything possible to ensure my happiness. I know we will have a grand life together. We’re living in Ballybricken – a nice part of the city – I wish Edmund would not work so hard – and when not working he is forever off trying to help some poor

family or those kids that hang around the quays. I know he can't wait to become a father."

19. Patrick Rice # [Ed's brother – referring to the death of Robert Rice # in 1787 and Ed being made executor of the will]

Patrick Rice #

"We always knew Edmund was going to do well so it was no great surprise when Uncle Michael # asked Edmund to come and work for him. But it has been hard for us all these last few months with our father Robert Rice # taking ill. He died so suddenly in the Year of our Lord 1787 – ah and Edmund only newly married too. Again – it showed the trust our father had in him when he made Edmund executor of the will; he will ensure that all in the family are taken care for."

20. Mary Kirwan # [referring to Ed's letter – about the depths of misery around the death of Mary]

Mary Kirwan #

"One of the most precious things in my life was a letter I received from Edmund Rice upon the death of my wonderful husband Martin @. Edmund shared with me the depth of pain and sorrow that he had experienced at the time of the sudden death of his beloved Mary – I recall his words well, 'the dregs of misery and misfortune'. How he loved her – they were not long married – only four short years, yes, it was January 1789 – he was so proud of her and they were so much a part of the social life of Waterford – quite a dance couple and fond of poetry and singing. His words of consolation touched me deeply – if he was not such a person of deep faith I don't know if he would have coped."

21. Daniel Burke @ [man in the men's spiritual group] – buys his own Bible in 1791

Daniel Burke @

"Edmund Rice was a special part of our association of Catholic laymen. We would gather on a Thursday night after supper at the back of the Jesuit church of St. Patrick's in Newry Lane – we would share about our faith, about the Word of God and how we might put it into practice to make the lives of those poor souls around us better off. I will never forget the night – early in 1791 when Edmund turned up with his own Bible; he was his pride

and joy. He knew the Scriptures so well – I think only old Father McGoldrick @ over at St. Finbars may have know it better than Edmund Rice – he knew every passage that was about justice and how to treat people fairly – with respect and dignity – he lived it in his life he did.”

22. Mysterious Friar – Cormack O’Haire @

Cormack O’Haire @

“After the death of his beloved Mary, Edmund’s faith only grew stronger. I can remember him recalling to me how he felt that God might now be calling him into some sort of new life – perhaps as a monk in Europe – like his brother John # – an Augustinian monk. I remember him telling me how on one of his business travels he stayed the night in a wayside inn – he shared a room with a travelling monk – some Friar – the Friar stayed up half the night in prayer – so wrapt in love with his God – it truly inspired Edmund to ask what was he doing with his life.”

23. Sr. Anne Jordan @ PBVM – wisdom from and given care of Black Johnny – small house.

Sr. Anne Jordan @

“We Presentation Sisters always had a close bond with Edmund. When we first came to Waterford from Cork – at Nano’s # insistence – in 1798, Edmund purchased the land for our Convent and school and took great care of us. I remember clearly him coming to us one dark Winter’s morning with this poor, thin boy – a negro boy from the Americas – he had been slave cabin boy on one of the ships down at the Quay and Edmund had purchased his freedom. We took him in, gave him a schooling and instructed him in the faith – at Edmund’s wish. Later on Brother Rice set Johnny # up in a small house and ‘Black Johnny embarked on a very successful pig-rearing project. He never forgot Edmund’s kindness to him.”

24. Tadhg O’Sullivan # – poet – practical kindness and spirituality – music and poetry – publish poems with Ed help.

25. Joan Murphy # [step sister – caring for young Mary – in Arundel Place] – “It would be better for you to stay at home and devote yourself and your money to educating and instructing Irish boys – like Nano Nagle # is doing for the girls.”

Tadhg O’Sullivan: #

“Aye, I remember Edmund Rice well – he loved his poetry – especially anything Irish – he was a proud son of Ireland he was – but he also could understand the English. Many a Friday or Saturday night I would meet him at the Bell and Salmon or the Erin Lilly for a pint – I shared many of my poems with him first. He and his friends and I – we all loved our Irish music as well – the young these days don’t understand – but it stirred our souls it did. If it wasn’t for Mr. Rice I would have drowned my sorrows in drink I would. He helped me out – helped me publish my poems and encouraged me to give up the drink he did – a fine man – our country needs more of them.”

Joan Murphy: #

“When Edmund’s beloved Mary died he tried his best to take care of young Mary – he was indeed a dotting father – but you know he has not got that woman’s touch. I moved in with Edmund for some years – raised young Mary I did. Edmund was always the highest of kindness he was – always thinking of Mary and how to care for him. I think there was many a night he missed his beloved wife Mary – they would talk through their difficulties and they shared their joys – a huge hole was left in his life when she died. But then the silly fellow was a thinking of leaving us all and off to France or some place – some silly dream of living like a monk – typical man – while all these poor kids are here on the streets of Waterford and every city of Ireland – who is going to care for the boys like Nano Nagle’s Sisters care for the girls. I asked him that – and typical man – did he have an answer – no. I said to him – look out your own window first before youse go cleaning someone else’s!”

Venue 4 – indicating the change from his life as a business man to the beginnings of this life as a Brother caring for youth.

26. William Connell @ – an assistant – paid for – stables in New Street

William Connell @

“Ah, that Mr. Rice is a good man but naive. He should have stuck to what he does best – making a living down on the quay – providing for the ships. These young rascals are beyond help – they are rude, unruly, ignorant and are no hoppers. It ain’t worth the money he’s paying us to try to teach them.”

27. Liam Tynan @ – an assistant – paid for

Liam Tynan: @

“Aye, William is right – I’ve know Mr. Rice for many a year and he is a good and just man but when he approached me to work for him on this project – I had no idea what I was getting myself in for. And the rooms – they are just stables – New Street is hardly one of the better parts of the city. Every day we get new pupils wanting to come – The Good Lord only knows why – they are wretched, unclean and have not a scrap of discipline. Mr. Rice can have his job – it is doomed to failure.”

Fifth Venue – or remain at venue 4.

- d. But these first assistants left him – it had been for Edmund 17 difficult years. His young heart stretched and challenged; broken and mended – what sustained him and sustained his dreams?? Edmund the deep man of compassion; the prayerful person who trusted that in all of the pain and confusion His God was with him – walking with him and loving him – calling him to follow. Light candles – for those who suffer – paste in next bit of Icon and sing ‘Galilee Song’. It was in the chapel, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament that Edmund wrote his important letters, made his big decisions, attended daily mass and sought solace and courage. Where do you find your courage???
- e. Edmund’s life to this point had been a journey – a journey into two key words – PRESENCE and COMPASSION – they flowed from each other. Taught presence and taught compassion in the school yard of his family home, on the quays of Waterford, by his love for Mary his beloved. All of this led Edmund to a burning desire for the LIBERATION of all whom he met – their inner and outer liberation – their liberation from poverty and from ignorance – and their liberation from hopelessness and despair – any thing that was holding them back from becoming all they were called to be. Initially Edmund was tempted to ‘run away’ – to go to the continent and to perhaps become a monk there. But others invited him to look out the window – to the poor on his own streets, to the poor in his own backyard, to those in his daily life who were not free.

28. Thomas Grosvenor # – the first Brothers.

Thomas Grosvenor #

“I had heard about Edmund’s efforts in Waterford. Patrick and I had known Edmund in Callan – so we came to Waterford and asked Edmund could we join him – could we share in his dream – his dream of a Brotherhood of Compassion and Presence – Brothers who would walk beside the poor and ‘brother’ them to be the best they could be.”

29. Patrick Finn # – the first Brothers.

Patrick Finn #

“Aye, I’m not sure whose idea it was at first – Thomas’ or mine – but we knew God was calling us to take a risk and throw our all in with Edmund and his dream. Strangely enough – neither of us were school masters – but then we thought that wanted the poor youth wanted and needed was compassion and care. We had seen Nano Nagle’s # sisters doing wonderful work for the young women in Cork and Carlow, Limerick and Waterford and up in Dublin, Catherine McAuley’s # ladies were doing great work too.”

Conclude the ‘roll play’ by inviting the participants to reflect on ‘What did you learn about Edmund today and how could you apply that in your ministry?’