

Drawn by Mystery, Destined for Life

*The Thirty-First
Congregation
Chapter 2014*

*Nairobi, Kenya
March 3rd to
30th, 2014*

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*Drawn by Mystery
Destined for Life*

*Thirty-First Congregation Chapter
Congregation of Christian Brothers*

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*The **Mystery***

we call

God

is the grace of our

Existence

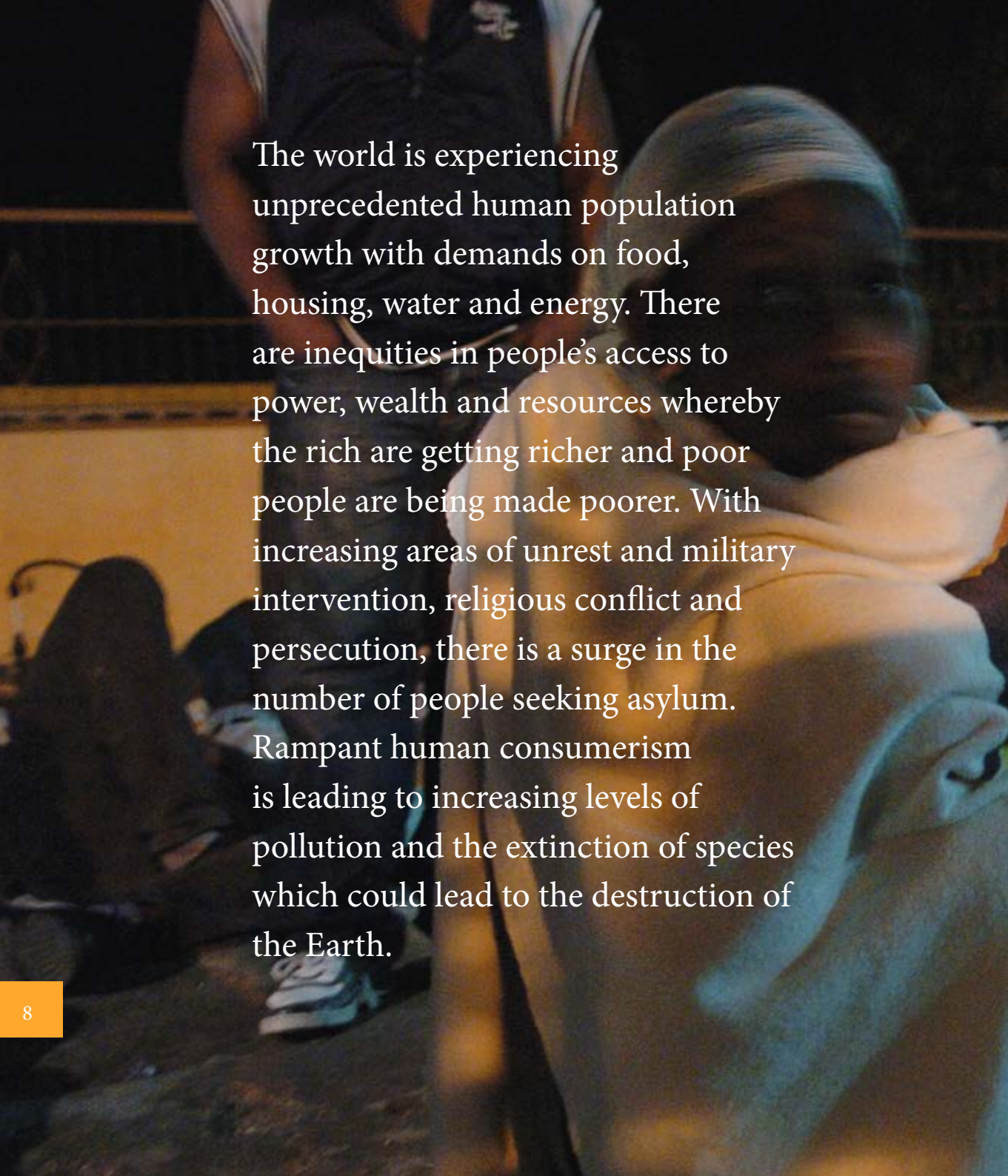
Karl Rahner

Encountering the Mystery

At the core of our call to be brother for the world is our being drawn into the Mystery we call God. At this pivotal time in the history of our Congregation we are awakened to the presence of God in our midst, as we seek meaningful and respectful ways of standing in solidarity with the whole Earth community.

The Context

The universe is in process of ongoing emergence. As new life appears, much that is familiar moves into chaos. Our Congregation is called to acknowledge the diminishment we are facing in some parts of the world, and to nurture the new life that is emerging. Our desire for new life leads us to attend to the obstacles that are blocking us and, with open minds and hearts, we participate fully in the creation of a new era.



The world is experiencing unprecedented human population growth with demands on food, housing, water and energy. There are inequities in people's access to power, wealth and resources whereby the rich are getting richer and poor people are being made poorer. With increasing areas of unrest and military intervention, religious conflict and persecution, there is a surge in the number of people seeking asylum. Rampant human consumerism is leading to increasing levels of pollution and the extinction of species which could lead to the destruction of the Earth.

A man with a yellow headwrap and an orange t-shirt is sitting in a bus at night. He is looking out the window with a thoughtful expression. The background shows the interior of the bus and some blurred lights outside.

*It is the agenda
of the world
that sets
the mission
direction of the
Church and our
Congregation.*

Haitians refugees huddle together for warmth at the Jimini bus station on the Haiti border after earthquake

We face the fact of sexual abuse of children in society and in particular by some of our Brothers. We are more than ever aware of the deep pain suffered by people abused.

It is the agenda of the world that sets the mission direction of the Church and our Congregation.

It is in deep listening to the groaning earth and her suffering people that the Church and Congregation experience God calling them to be agents of change, hope and transformation.

The Church has been blessed with the new and fresh message of Pope Francis. We have heard his call for the Church to be “a poor Church with the poor” and his preference for “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out in the streets.” Pope Francis has called consecrated women and men to be people who “awaken the world.”





This emerging way of being Church echoes our own Congregation's direction in recent years with its emphases on the God quest, simplicity of life, engaging with people made poor, and culminating in the invitation to all Brothers to be part of *A Way into the Future*. This has captured the imagination of the Congregation. *A Way into the Future* brings hope, direction and a means of transformation, as we desire a new and radical way of being brother for the world.

We express gratitude for the Congregation Leadership Team's vision, inspirational leadership and commitment.

Furthermore, we recall, with grateful hearts, the Spirituality Conferences of 1982 and 1988 and our recent Chapters and gatherings that have brought us to this moment. We acknowledge the fidelity of many Brothers who keep alive the memories, learnings and directions of these gatherings.

In this current reality, we are invited to awaken to an evolving consciousness of God's presence in the whole earth community. As consecrated people called by the Church to creative fidelity, our encounter with Jesus leads us to conversion. We explore with fresh enthusiasm the Gospel story, the story of Edmund and the universe story.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Edmund Rice". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'E' and 'R'.



Chapter Story

It is against this background that the Chapter delegates, invited Brothers and members of the wider Edmund Rice Network arrived in Nairobi to begin the Congregation Chapter.

The initial phase of the Chapter process included an immersion experience in the slum areas of Nairobi where we shared, for a short time, the lives of people living in desperate situations of poverty. Father Andrew Okeyo CP prepared us for this immersion and led us in reflecting upon our experience. His comment regarding his own time living in a slum, that *the only person who was certainly changed by the experience was himself*, was a key learning for Chapter members.

Transformation begins when we are disturbed and taken out of our familiar surroundings, when our hearts and minds are open to new possibilities and to new relationships. It is in reflecting together within this dislocation that we experience the presence of God drawing us ever deeper into the Mystery that leads to life. This immersion experience set the tone for the Chapter as we commenced the telling of our Congregation stories of the past six years.

The Congregation Leadership Team and Province presentations were varied and

informative. We also received reports from the Director of Edmund Rice International on advocacy and justice, the Congregation Bursar and Financial Advisor on the stewardship of our resources, and a presentation from the members of the Transition Support Team on the implementation of *A Way into the Future*.

It was the accounts of child abuse that shocked and jolted us into feelings of shame and humiliation. We heard about the horrendous impact that the actions of some Brothers had on those abused. These accounts moved us to humbly seek a pathway that would bring healing and hope.

Accounts of dysfunctional relationships among our Brothers in community concerned us. Incidents of misuse of power or authority, lack of respect for each other and bullying have damaged the quality of our life together. Our failure to listen deeply to our Brothers is often caused by prejudice and stereotyping. As a result, gentleness and compassion are frequently replaced by indifference and intolerance.



We were greatly encouraged by new initiatives in community living, in moving to the margins, in growth in new spirituality, as well as new energy in our schools and project ministries. We also acknowledged the ground-breaking work in advocacy done by Edmund Rice International and its impact on our approach to ministry and justice.


The work of these days was integrated into our daily life of prayer, reflection and conversation in the group. Our Eucharistic celebrations were key moments and a source of deep reflection on the memory of Jesus at this critical time of our Congregation's history.

The Chapter was blessed by the presence of the invited members of the wider Edmund Rice Network who added vitality and wisdom to the Chapter gathering. They were able to share with us experiences of their commitment to and passion for the Edmund Rice story and spirit.

Grateful for their contributions, we bade farewell to these women and men after their ten days with us in Nairobi. They continue to stand in solidarity with us and call us to new fidelity as they are drawn by their God quest and by the passion and inspiration they derive from the Edmund Rice story. Their presence was an encouraging reminder to us of how integral to our future is our partnership with all those attracted by Edmund's charism. We are full of appreciation for all the diverse expressions of the Edmund Rice Network across the world.

Their presentation to us [see Appendix] used the term 'movement' to highlight their desire for intentional commitment to take the charism of Edmund Rice deeper into their faith journey. We committed ourselves to being their companions on this journey.





*We are standing at the edge,
willing and ready to enter
a radically different way of
being disciples of Jesus and
followers of Edmund.*

Future Direction Destined for Life

The cries of our world in need call the Congregation to reclaim our founding charism.

The spirit impels us to open our hearts and minds, to embrace our fragility, and to move forward with newfound humility.

In our awareness of our brokenness, God is calling us to be compassionate people transforming old structures, cultural mindsets and practices, ushering in a new way of being brother for the world.

The Chapter fully endorses *A Way Into The Future*. It is now *our* way of sharing in the God quest, of being committed to intimate community living, and of engaging mutually with people made poor and the whole earth community. The Transition Support Team and leadership teams are committed to modelling this vision, and to assisting all Brothers to live it, recognising that *Our Way Into The Future* will be implemented differently according to local cultures and conditions.

A white, cursive signature of Edmund Rice, written in a fluid, handwritten style, positioned at the bottom right of the page.


*The Chapter
calls all Brothers
to give their
full energy and
commitment to*

The Chapter Call



The Chapter Call

To engage with one another as we are drawn to Mystery in the day-to-day events of our lives, and in personal and communal reflection on the Jesus and Edmund stories, in light of the evolving universe story

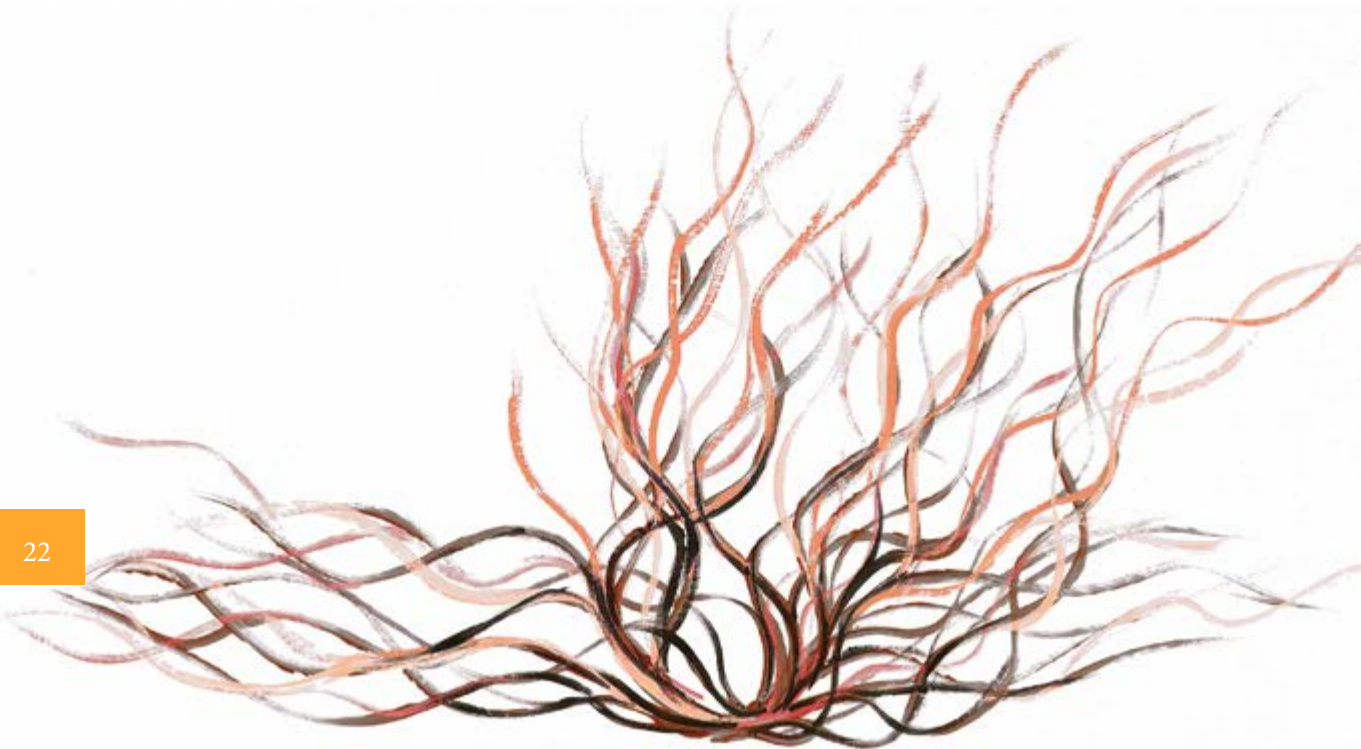


And then
once more the quiet mystery
is present to me, the throng's clamor
recedes: the mystery
that there is anything, anything at all,
let alone cosmos, joy, memory, everything,
rather than void: and that, O Lord,
Creator, Hallowed One, You still,
hour by hour sustain it.

Denise Levertov, *Primary Wonder*

The Chapter Call

*To build joyful communities
characterised by intimacy,
gentleness, compassion and love*

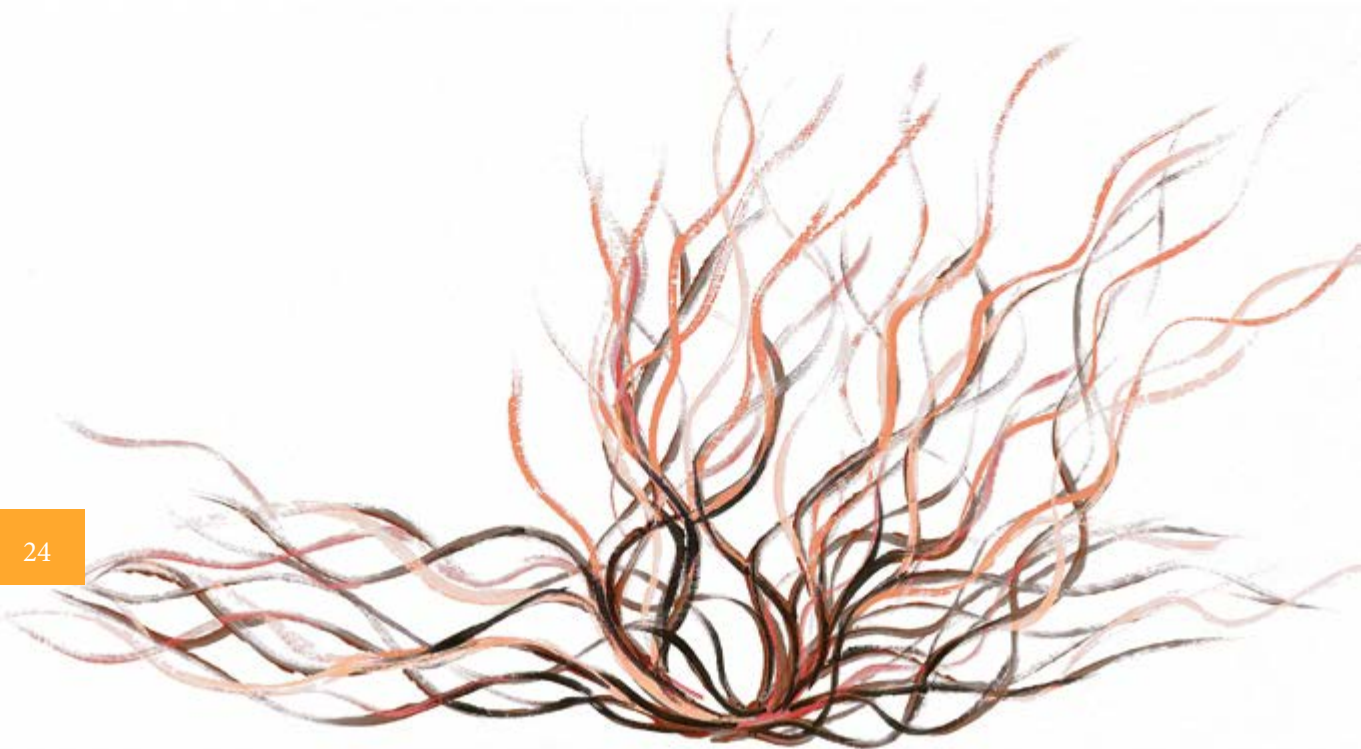


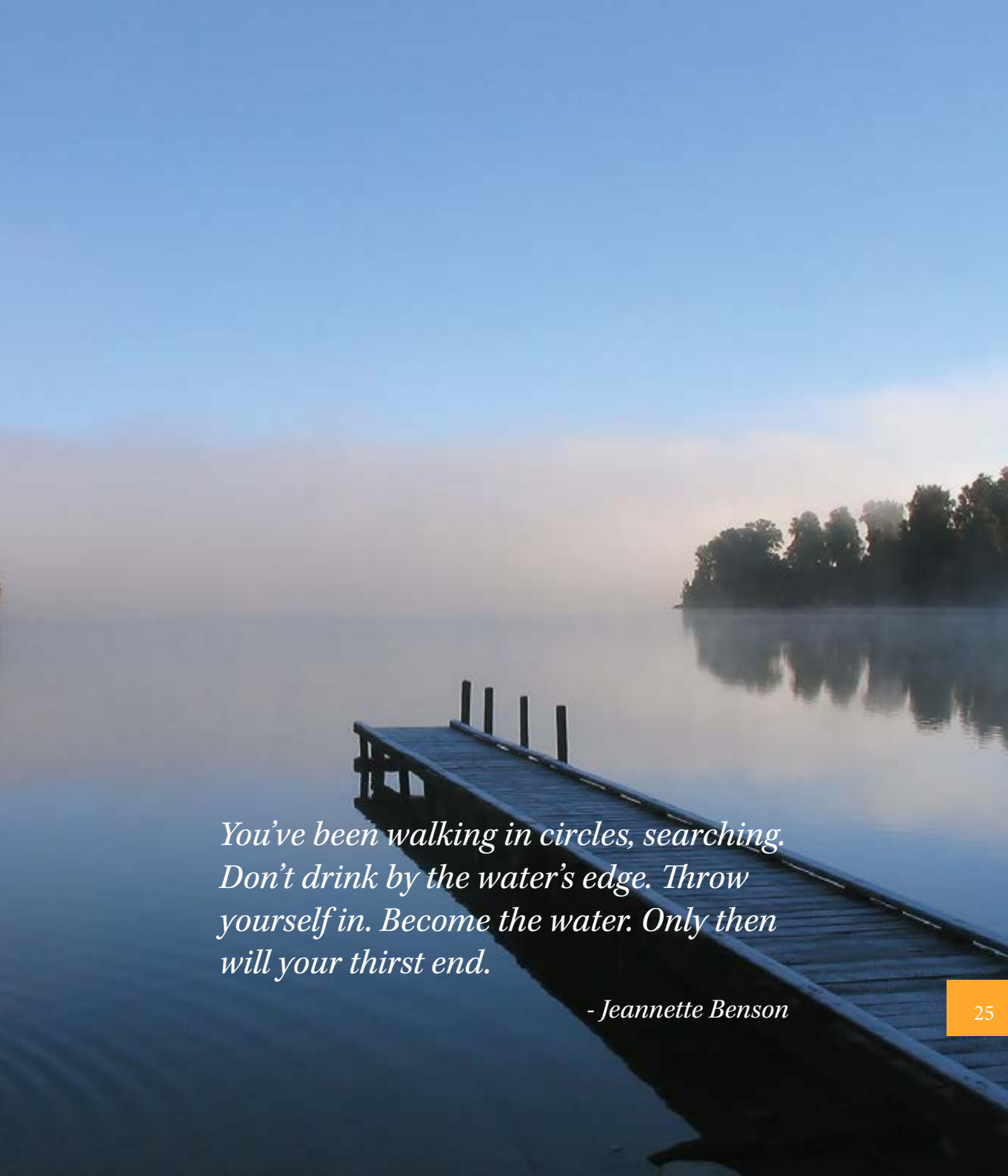
*A new way
of being
brother for
the world*



The Chapter Call

To live a simple and shared lifestyle with accountability, which calls us to a radical shift from our comfortable way of living



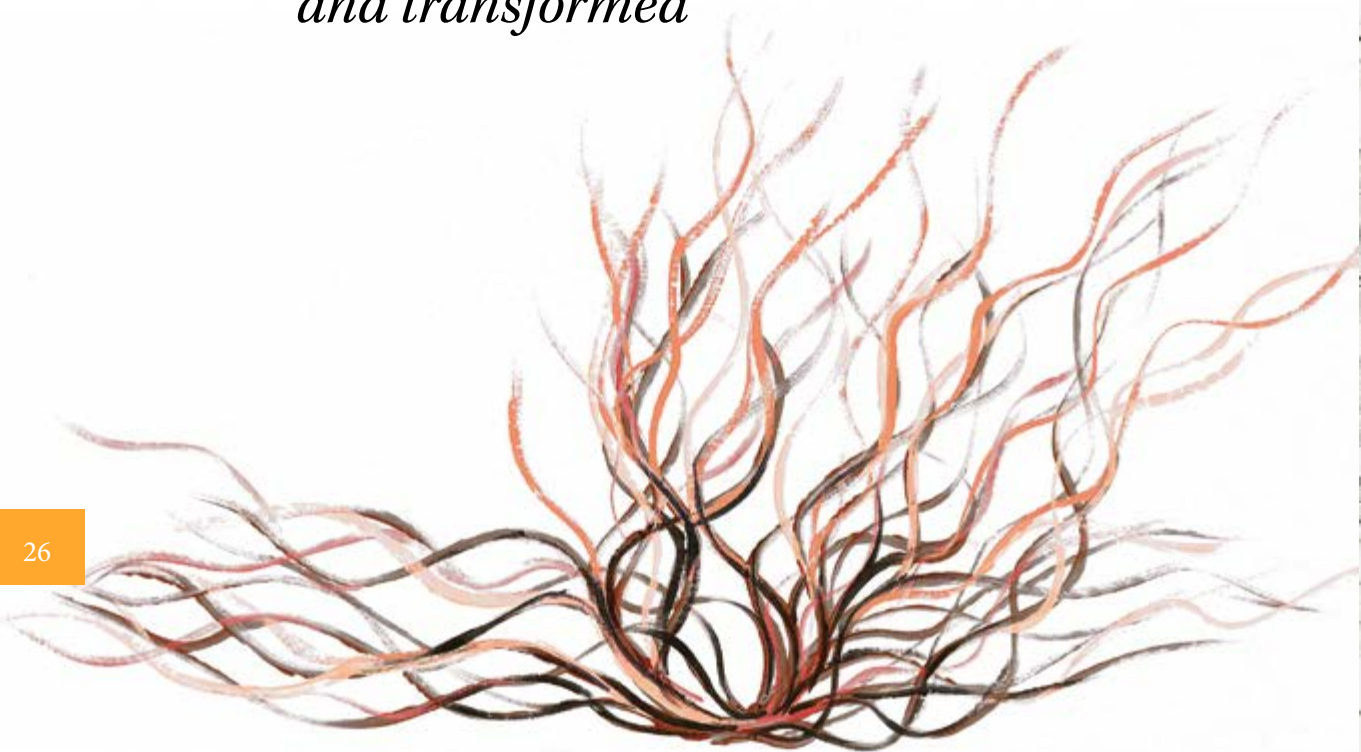


*You've been walking in circles, searching.
Don't drink by the water's edge. Throw
yourself in. Become the water. Only then
will your thirst end.*

- Jeannette Benson

The Chapter Call

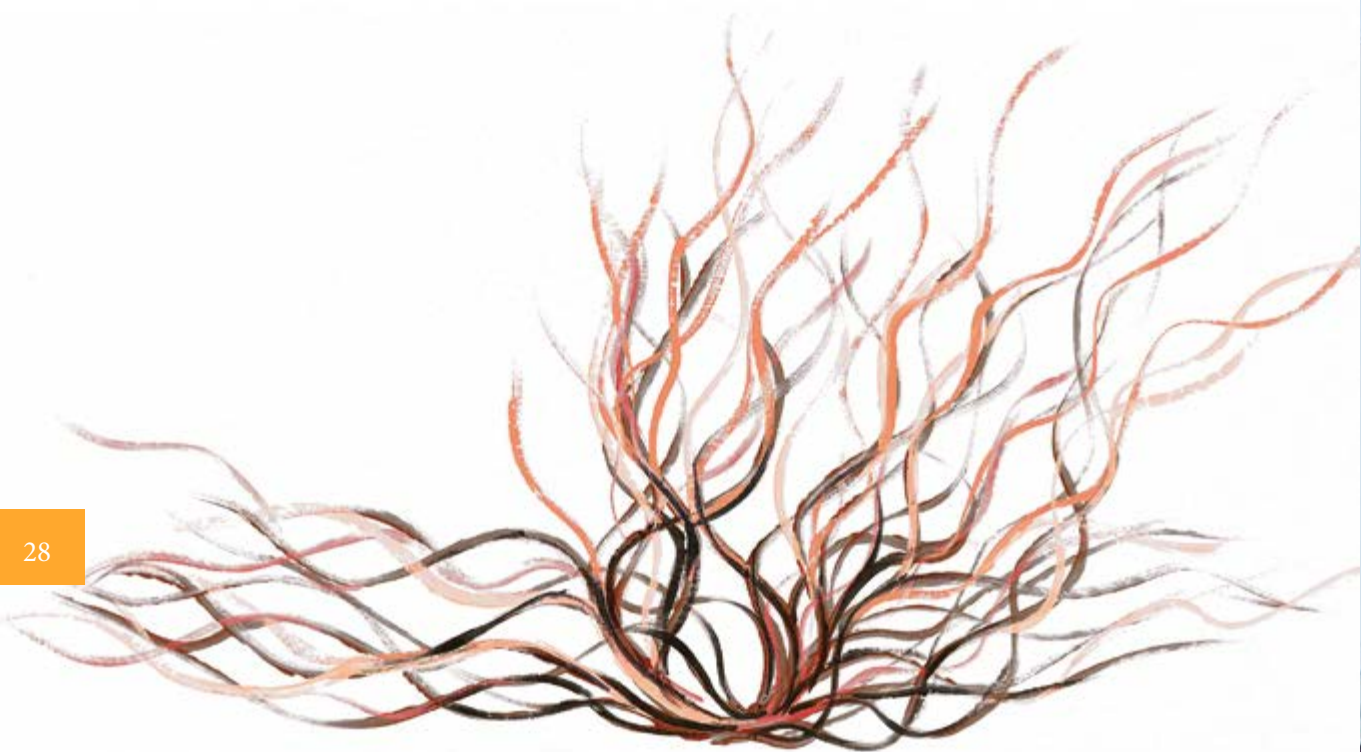
To be in right relationship as brother with each other, with people made poor and with the whole Earth community, conscious that being brother is our pathway to our being evangelised and transformed





The Chapter Call

To engage in advocacy with the voiceless, the marginalised and all that are oppressed





NO CHILD BORN IN INDIA

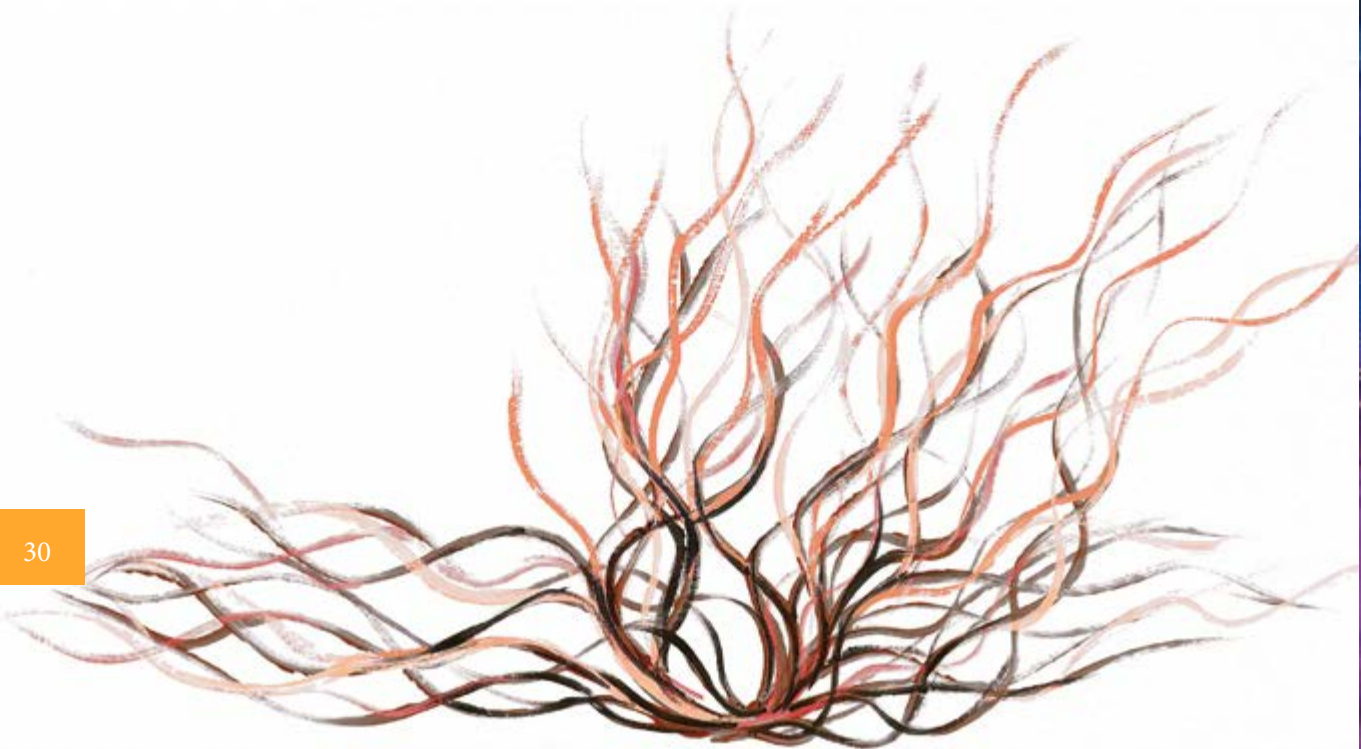
India spends only 1.2% of GDP
End this Injustice now

Give Me
5
% of
GDP

NINE
IS

The Chapter Call

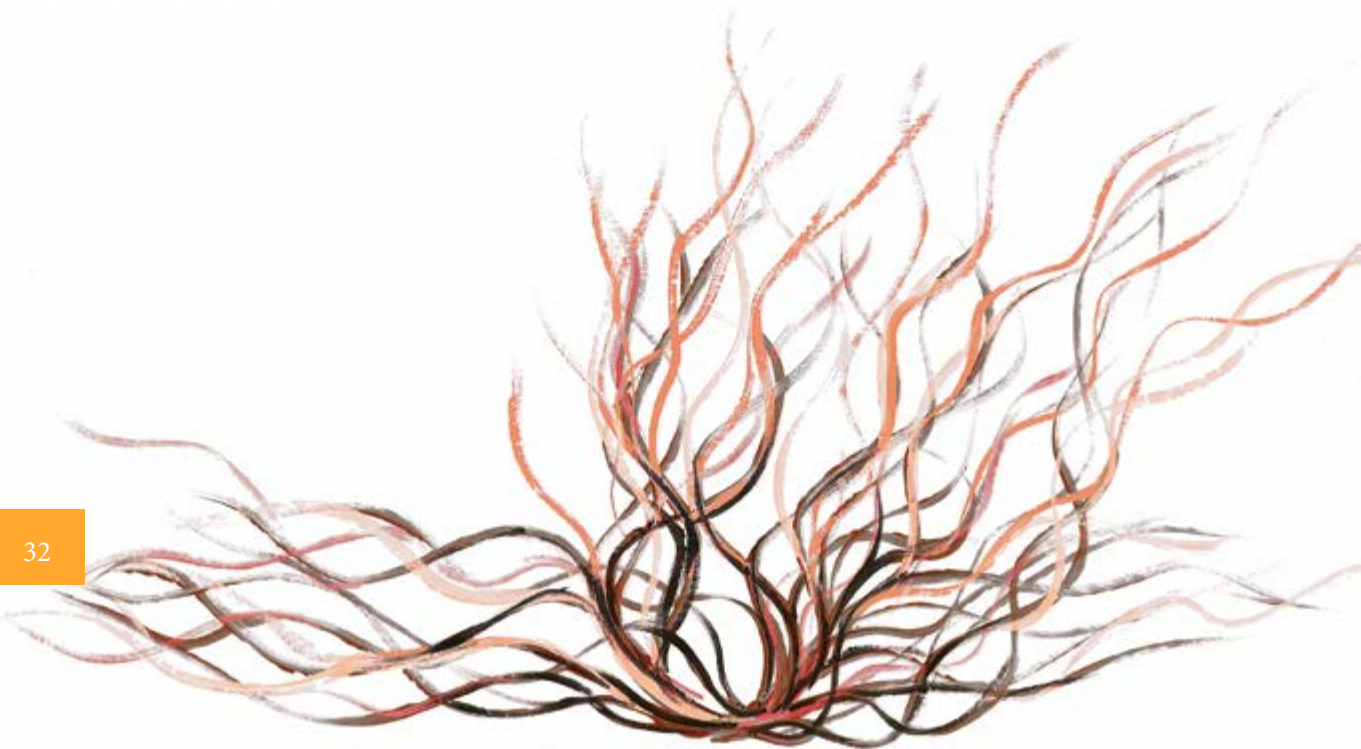
To work collaboratively within the Church and with others, valuing cultural and religious diversity and interconnectedness





The Chapter Call

*To welcome as companions
all inspired by the charism of
Edmund*



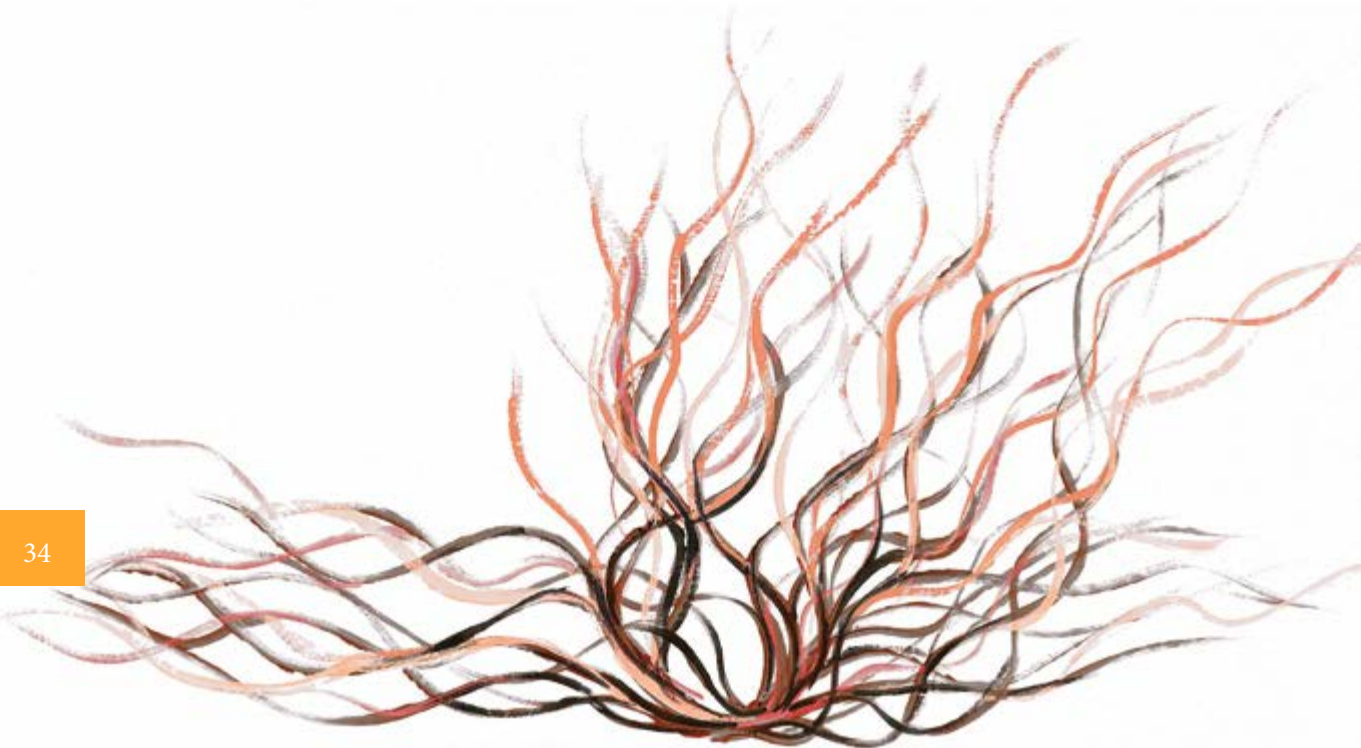
EDMUND RICE YOUTH PROJECT

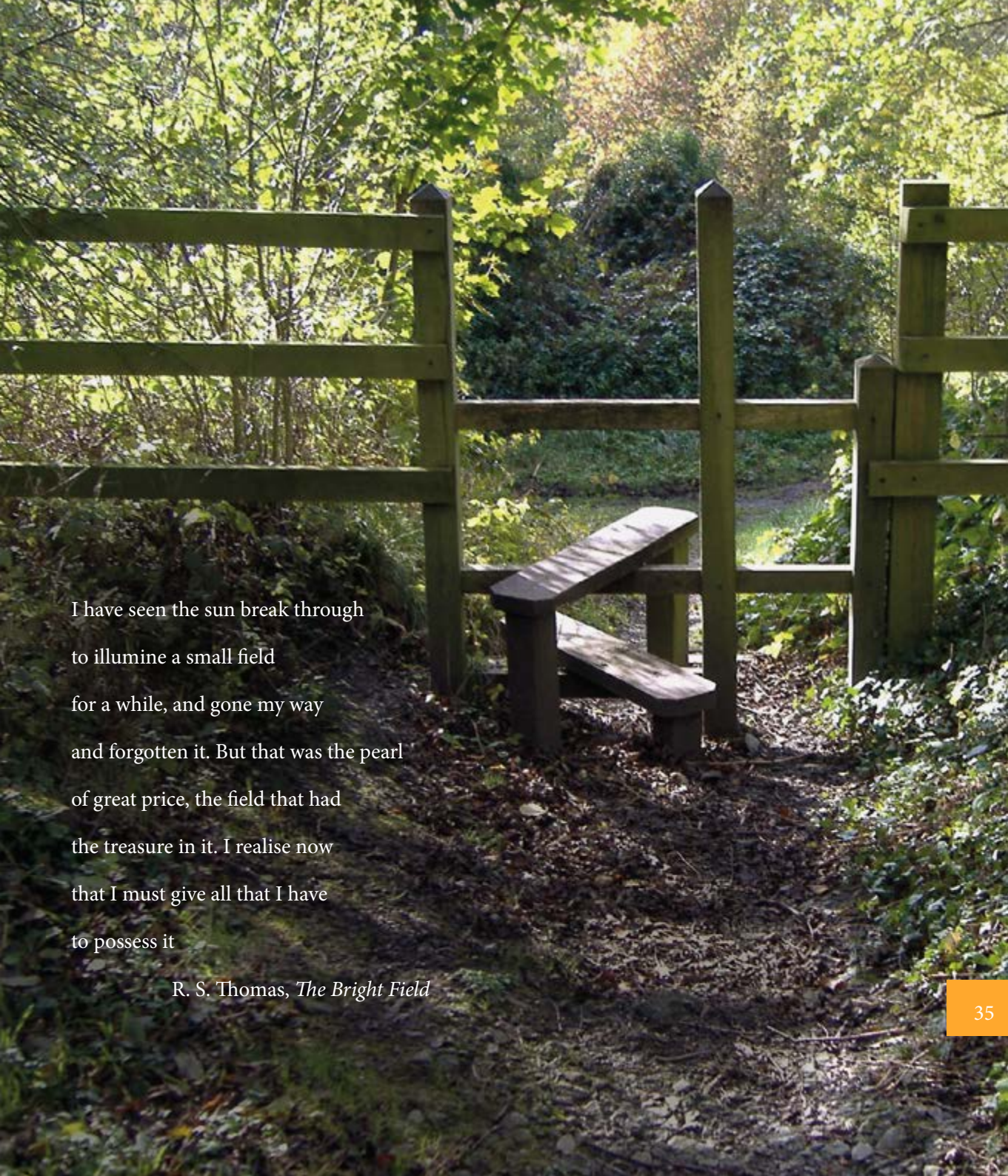
"YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT"



The Chapter Call


To seek and welcome new members to the vowed life as Christian Brothers



A photograph of a wooden fence with a bench in a sun-dappled forest. The fence is made of dark wood and has a bench built into it. The background is filled with lush green foliage and trees, with sunlight filtering through the leaves. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and twigs.

I have seen the sun break through
to illumine a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the field that had
the treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it

R. S. Thomas, *The Bright Field*



*This direction is the call of the Chapter.
This is where we see the Mystery we call
God drawing us to choose life.*



Our dream and our goal now are to challenge each Brother to re-examine his life and ministry in his own culture and context. It is only in this way that we will hear and respond fully to God's call to us at this point in our history. Choose life!

We pray through the intercession of Blessed Edmund, our Founder, and Mary of the Cosmos and our Mother of Perpetual Help, for the grace to be faithful to the call of the Nairobi Chapter.

Appendix



*The Edmund Rice Network
representatives presented their vision
to the Chapter*



- We embrace our internationality and share our joys and challenges.
- We nurture interconnectedness within the diverse expressions of the Edmund Rice movement.
- We participate with imagination in *A Way Into The Future* in order to find new expression.
- We celebrate a movement which is diverse and inclusive of all people inspired by the charism of Edmund Rice.
- We foster leadership and inspiration, which abound throughout our movement.
- We harness the energy and resources from our schools, centres and projects.
- We envisage a movement that is appropriately resourced and coordinated.
- We encourage appropriate formation opportunities for those within our movement.
- We seek intentional commitment of members of our movement within the Church.

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