

On the Saturday afternoon of the 65th Synod of the Edmonton Diocese, the Ven. Travis Enright, Archdeacon for Indigenous Ministries and participant in the previous week's Healing of Memories Workshop, interviewed Fr. Michael Lapsley. Following is a Q & A representation of that interview:

TE: Father, it's been an honour to know you over the past 5 years or so. You taught me how to hear story, how to tell story and how to engage with a person as a person, and a history, and a nation. You have given me the opportunity to facilitate the Healing of Memories Workshop here in Edmonton.

The question I have is this: There is a tendency in our context to be in one of, I think, two camps: those who are angry – the angry person who cannot 'get over' the history of Indian residential schools; they can't 'get over' (and I'm using that phrase purposefully) the colonial past. Then there's the other group – more the apathy people – who say, 'Why can't they get over it?' What word of comfort or direction would you give those two populations: those who are angry and those who are apathetic?

Fr.ML: I want to give an answer from a very different context. The Lambeth Conference some time ago passed the most disastrous motion that's ever passed on human sexuality. But, it invited the communion to listen to the voices of the LGBTQ community. The then Archbishop of Capetown set up a panel, inviting a people with a kaleidoscope of views about human sexuality and each person was given an opportunity to speak. At the end of the morning the Archbishop said, "The Lord be with you – go in peace." There was no discussion. It was an opportunity to speak and listen. And as you listened you didn't have to think of the clever thing you were going to say in rebuttal. It was an opportunity to hear each other's pain. That meeting had a profound effect.

If you think of the issue ordination of women that the church struggled with for so long. I remember when we decided in South Africa to ordain women to the priesthood. Speaker after speaker stood up who had not originally held the position, in favour, but they had met women who were called by God to be priests of the church. They were changed by the people they met.

So where you have apartheid societies, and clearly there are dimensions of apartheid society with the indigenous and non-indigenous (situation in Canada), which allows you to keep stereotypes. But when I sit and I listen to your pain, I can't walk away from that.

But you mentioned specifically the word 'anger.' I would argue that where we've been hurt, or when those we love have been hurt, we are totally justified to hate, to be bitter, to want revenge. It's a normal human response. But if we keep that stuff in us, it destroys us.

Joy is always good, happiness is always good, but where does anger fit? I want to suggest to you that struggles for justice are fueled by anger. We would still have apartheid today if the people of South Africa did not get angry. But if we stay with the anger, the anger consumes us. And it's all the much harder to transform the anger if we don't see people hearing and responding to us.

I also want to speak to this reaction of 'let's get over it' and link it to two concepts: knowledge and acknowledgement. Often when people are hurting, the first step on their journey to healing is when their pain has been acknowledged. But I learned something from another indigenous people: the Sami people, the so-called 'Reindeer People' of northern Europe and Russia. They said to me, "Our church has apologized for its part in our oppression." So they gave acknowledgement. They said that was great! However, they said the problem is that for the mainstream of the church there is no knowledge about what was being acknowledged. I spend a lot of my time in the United States of America and I often feel that white America has no comprehension of the pain which is black America. Where people have been violated, as a people, they carry with them in their bodies, their souls, their sinews, across generations, the memory of what was done to them, while often those who have done it remain in ignorance and denial. So the Sami taught me that knowledge – and not just head knowledge, but heart knowledge – is important.

But I learned something just a few days ago from a Jewish man who, very interestingly, is a member of the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. And he did this to me (*Fr. Michael pinches Rev. Enright*). He pinched me. And he said, "Who's feeling the pain?"

TE: I am!

Fr.ML: Now I can sympathize with you, but I don't feel the same pain that you do. So I can *hear* your pain. I can be empathetic to your pain as an indigenous person, but I can't feel it the same way. I can't. It's not possible. That's important for those of us who seek to be in solidarity.

On a lighter note, as a young ignorant curate I would go into the obstetrics ward of the hospital and say, "I know just how you feel." (*laughter*) "Father (*they would say*) – I don't think you do, actually." But there is an important insight there, because it's important to seek to be in solidarity, but don't kid yourself. I have spent much of my life fighting racism. But it doesn't mean there's none of it in me. I get nervous when I'm in the church and I hear, "Oh we're against racism! Can we talk about something else now?" The world we've been part of means we've inherited it. It's there in the air, even if our individual families may have been against it. I'm still the beneficiary of my privilege. I need to own that and face that.

TE: My next question is even longer. My mother experienced residential school, my grandfather, my grandmother, my aunt, my uncle, so I have a whole lineage of Indian Residential School experience thrusting (at me). And there is a desire within me to somehow seek a 'funny' identity because most of my life I've been ashamed of my indigenous ways, my indigenous culture. The thing I found most beautiful about the liturgy that we did as part of our (recent) Healing of Memories Workshop (in Edmonton) was the last smudge, and in our circle we smudged and I facilitated. The question I have is: How did it feel for you to see your 'baby', your Healing of

Memories Workshop, to have an indigenous component add to it, used in it? Did it change your identity? How did it facilitate you?

Fr.ML: I was over the moon. Just to explain what happened: as part of the workshop we create a ceremony, a liturgy at the end and if you went to a workshop full of committed Christians you might call that a Christian liturgy, but if it were Buddhists, Hindus or atheists it would be a different kind of liturgy. So one of the things we do right at the beginning is we ask people to write on a piece of paper whatever is toxicity or poison inside them that they would like to let go of or a burden they feel they've carried long enough and we burn it, which of course is sacramental. We use ordinary things physical things to do something spiritual and we combined that with smudging and most of what I know of smudging (I've learned from you). I've known of smudging and participated in it before, but you helped me to understand it more – and correct me if I'm wrong – as a part of a journey of purification. And in a Healing of Memories it is about that... it's getting rid of the garbage so that we can be more whole, and how beautiful that we were able to integrate it.

In interfaith work we sometimes remove anything which could be not the same as what other people do and so we go for the lowest common denominator instead of the highest common factor; instead of saying, 'let's bring our treasures to the table.' And you brought the treasures of your people to the table in a way that enriched all of us.

The country that I was born in was New Zealand. I haven't lived there since 1967. But one of the beautiful things in that country has been the increasing "Maori-ification" of New Zealand, where white people are celebrating their 'Maori-ness' as riches, so every child grows up and says, 'This is my culture.' And it's not just the Haka that helps them win the rugby! It's more than that.

It is a tragedy of human history that so many First Nations people have become such minorities, but it's not too late for the riches to be given to the human family and for them to become our riches, because we are all one family. And by the way, you all come from Africa! Which is always a bit of a problem for the hardened racist going for the DNA test and they find out – oh my god I came from Africa! Oh dear! But excuse me, we all did, actually!

TE: You've planted these Healing of Memories buds inside of me and (others who have been uplifted by it). What is your hope for the legacy of Healing of Memories in this context, in Edmonton specifically?

I need to use technology more in training so I don't always have to physically get on a plane, but one can do training with video conferencing and all of that. In terms of Edmonton, there's something about 'protecting the property and privileges?' (*This is a reference to vows made Friday evening when Bishop Jane installed Fr. Michael as Canon for Healing and Reconciliation in Edmonton Diocese*). (Emphatically) I'm going to protect the property and privileges of the Diocese of Edmonton to do Healing of Memories!

One of the beautiful things about Healing of Memories is, it's not about people around the world being dependent on me. It's a model of liberation. It's a model in which people are able to begin to travel beyond victimhood. If horrible things happen to human beings, it's likely to be one of two journeys: one is victims who become victimizers which creates victims. This happens across generations. It happens to individuals, to communities, it happens to nations. But we are the followers of the victim of Good Friday who became the victor of Easter Sunday – not spreading hatred and bitterness. So in a sense there's a profound gospel value in the kind of work we do. My concern is that it is done with depth and effectiveness and integrity. And there are more and more places in the world where I go from time to time, but I don't need to go all the time because they're doing this work and it's having its impact. So it's good if I can be part of equipping a team here to do this work and I want to suggest to you that it resonates obviously in a very profound way in terms of indigenous and non-indigenous and the Canadian nation as a whole. But it resonates in other ways as well. *(To the audience)* Excuse me – how many people here came from a totally perfect family? *(laughter)* For example, we do a lot of work with homeless war veterans in the US. Some of them have been profoundly traumatized by war, but often when they tell their life stories the greatest trauma was in the first five years of life. It was family stuff. Sometimes we're able to forgive the big oppressor but we can't forgive our intimate partner. We can't forgive the one who has really hurt us.

So Healing of Memories resonates in every possible way. I think also a dimension of our work everywhere in the world is gender-based violence. Some indigenous societies are matrilineal and matriarchal but most societies have been and continue to be patriarchal and I think there has always been a depth and a scale of gender-based violence. The only difference today is it's beginning to come on the table.

I was at a workshop in Hawaii, where a disproportionate number of indigenous people are in prison, similar to here, and the highest level of homelessness in the United States. But I was in a workshop in which everyone apart from myself and my colleague were women and a number of them were talking about inter-generational experience of abuse by men and at some point I felt moved to say, "I feel guilt and shame as a man for what has been done to you." And one of the women started to cry and she said, "Never in my life have I heard a man say 'I'm sorry for what I did to you.'" And it wasn't that I had done it, but I'm a man, and so in its own way it was a tiny tiny tiny but significant contribution to her journey of healing.

At this point the session was opened to questions from the floor.