

COLIN GRIFFITHS AND THE HEALING OF MEMORIES



To me the thing about reconciliation is that you start to see things from both sides. It is not necessarily that you are looking for agreement, but the point is to tell the side of the story which has not yet been told, and this is what generates so much heat, since some people do not want the other side of the story to be told at all.

Helping others to share, hear and act upon the truth of Indigenous Australian experience, has been at the heart of the ministry of **Father Colin Griffiths** over many years. Colin has been a member of the *Society of the Sacred Mission*, one of the religious communities of the Anglican Church, for over 25 years, and has been committed to Reconciliation work with Indigenous peoples for many years, including as Anglican Rector of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory between 1998 and 2005. As such, he is no stranger to the need for justice and healing within a nation. Indeed Colin draws on his experience of ministering in Southern Africa, where he was inspired by the examples of how to overcome violence with reconciliation lived out by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. Crucially also, Colin learnt the importance of *truth-telling* as demonstrated so practically in the work of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in South Africa.



Dullar Omar, South African Minister for Justice, on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's aims:

1. Instead of revenge there will be reconciliation
2. Instead of forgetfulness there will be knowledge and acknowledgement
3. Instead of rejection there will be acceptance by a compassionate state.
4. Instead of violation of human rights there will be the restoration of the moral order and respect for the rule of law.

(from *To Remember and to Heal* ed. H.Russel Botman and R.M.Petersen)

The **'Bringing them Home' report** (of the *National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families*) was therefore for Colin a particularly vital example of 'truth telling'. As he says:

A painful part of our past was examined and people affected were given the opportunity to tell their story. Many people were upset because this was an episode in Australia's story which had not yet been told. That is the point. 'Truth telling' can often be dangerous, it can be upsetting, it can certainly be controversial, but if we are ever to be a mature nation it is so important that all stories are told, not only the nice and sociably acceptable stories...

What worried me as a pastor was that when people tried to tell their stories about forced or unforced removals from their families, people would often interrupt them, saying 'yes, but you had a good education', 'yes, but you were able to learn a trade and make a valuable contribution to society.' I wanted to provide an environment where people could tell their stories without being interrupted or made to feel that it was all their fault for not being mainstream, for being different. For me reconciliation does not mean we agree on everything, but it does mean is that we learn to understand and to respect the other person's experience.

SEEDS OF PEACE

Fr. Michael Lapsley SSM and the Institute for the Healing of Memories

As part of the Anglican Diocese of the Northern Territory's response to the *Bringing Them Home* report, Fr. Colin Griffiths helped introduced **Fr. Michael Lapsley** from South Africa to the Northern Territory, where he has conducted a number of the **Healing of Memories Workshops**, for which he is known worldwide. For as Colin relates:

'I have known Michael Lapsley for over 30 years. In 1999 he set up the Institute for the Healing of Memories, and started running workshops for people on the principle of truth telling. He provided a sacred space where people could tell their stories without the fear of being interrupted or corrected. This concept greatly appealed to me and I thought that it was a concept that would work well in central Australia.'

I found the workshops very helpful in central Australia because it enabled people to tell their stories without being interrupted. This had a very powerful and healing effect on the participants. Moreover, it facilitated reconciliation because people were hearing stories which they had not heard before. Also in a practical way it helps me to engage in situations where in the past I may have withdrawn, or got angry or acted in outright opposition, so the process has encouraged me into dialogue as a way forward rather than confrontation. Revenge is out. I have been challenged to see forgiveness as a daily ongoing activity. It has given me a framework to tackle life's challenges in a far more positive way.'



Fr Michael Lapsley himself is one of the leading 'Seeds of Peace' and 'wounded healers' to merge from the violence of South Africa. Born in New Zealand and trained as a priest in Australia, he was expelled from South Africa for his commitment to ending apartheid and went on to become an ANC chaplain while living in both Lesotho and Zimbabwe. In 1990, while in Zimbabwe, he opened a letter bomb and lost both his hands and an eye, in the subsequent explosion. He now lives and works in Cape Town as the Director of the Institute for the Healing of Memories.

Marlene Jackamarra and the Circles of Healing

Michael Lapsley has also run workshops for Indigenous men and women in Western Australia, at the invitation of **Marlene Jackamarra**, who works as Indigenous Issues Officer for Holy Spirit Province (WA and SA) and the Edmund Rice Centre at Mirrabooka. Employing such resource people as Michael, his colleague Themba Lonzi, as well as other 'Seeds of Peace' like Brendan McKeague (with his 'Spirituality of Nonviolence' workshops, Marlene has been able to extend the impressive work she has developed), giving empowerment to Indigenous people within the community by tangibly raising self-esteem and providing effective awareness raising for all people present at the workshops about their infinite worth.

Sources and more information

'Truth-telling and Reconciliation, *Ministry Society and Theology* (Vol18 no.2 2004)

www.healingofmemories.co.za

www.anglicord.org.au/projects/sa_reconcil.html

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