

Written Personal Statement

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

My name is Travis Enright. I was born in Edmonton to a Cree mother, Donna Noella Constant, and an Irish father, Jim Enright. I am from the Cree First Nation of James Smith, in northern Saskatchewan – a community located within Treaty 6 territory.

“A Spiritual Autobiography”

I believe one’s spiritual journey is more than the facts of one’s life. It is the moments that have impacted one’s primary relationship with the Creator, and with others.

The most critical events of my spiritual walk came long before I was called to be a priest, and even before I was born. Historically speaking, my ancestor, Bernard Constant, was an original negotiator and signatory to Treaty 6. The direct consequence of his signing Treaty 6 was that my grandmother, my grandfather, my mother, and my many aunts and uncles went to an Anglican-run Indian Residential School.

The nature of these events profoundly affected my understanding of church and my walk with Jesus. My great teacher and mentor, Father Michael Lapsley, the founder of the Institute for Healing of Memories, has taught me to be authentic to my past and to be connected to my feelings. Spiritual health comes when you feel the pain, speak the pain, and hear the pain of others.

My mother was deeply affected by Indian Residential Schools and the horrible actions of a few people. Yet she never faltered in the knowledge that she was beloved in the hands of God. This societal injustice continued working in my family through generations. My younger brother, Mark, was affected by addiction and struggled to see a way out of it. Eventually, this led to his death, which was heartbreaking for us all. I was incorrectly taught that he was a lost soul. For me, the most transformative moments came in witnessing my mother’s gracious love of the church and her profound dedication to the Creator. With humour and tenderness, my mother would welcome church ladies and homeless friends alike with the same grace and love that she would offer me. She taught me that at the Lord’s table there is one healer of us all. Her healing journey is the bedrock of my faith today.

I think the best description of my spiritual path is the dance between the smoke from the smudge of my mother’s ancestors and the incense from my father’s Irish traditions.

My journey began with the usual Church initiation rites of baptism, first communion, and confirmation. Although I was baptized in the Anglican Parish of Saint Stephen the Martyr in Edmonton, I spent the majority of my early Christian walk as a Roman Catholic, including Catechism and Catholic schools. Over time, I came to learn the power of other sacred moments and to be moved by the life and resurrection of Jesus more broadly. This helped me to begin to acknowledge his creative power in my whole life. After some years of wondering and wandering after high school and in early adulthood, I returned to the Anglican tradition through the influence of my mother’s profound faithfulness, and because of one sermon from an Anglican Priest on the beautiful and majestic faith of those who live with Alzheimer’s disease.

My childhood summers were always spent in our Cree community, which meant being in ceremony with my grandmother, Hilda. She would take me to the land and teach me the ways of my Cree ancestry. I learned that we need to be connected to the created world just as we are connected to the way of Jesus. I was also taught to know my relationship to the land as my nearest relation, and how my actions impact the land and all my relations. In ceremony, we are asked to co-create with the land that supports us and the creatures that nourish us. The Cree word *kiyânaw* translates into English as “us together,” which is an invitation to see the “other” always as gift rather than enemy or commodity.

Today, because of these two formative influences, I am a beloved follower of Jesus as expressed through a Cree cultural lens; a person of this land and this time, rooted in the Triune Creator’s community, and grounded in the language of the people of this land. It is these parallel parts of my story that have helped to form within me an openness to learning from and partnering with people of many different journeys and spiritual paths. When I meet others who have experienced a dance and sacred initiation rites different from mine, it is my faith that the incarnate Word can speak to our shared common ground. Jesus has also given me the strength to know that there is never a lost soul: he reminds us that, through him, all the world is saved.

With prayer, and transformation through Jesus’ teaching and Cree smudge, I am confident that I am called to the administration of the Church; I believe I am called to be a priest of the common ground, where we all share and experience the world as Jesus sees the world – as beloved.

“What have you learned about systemic racism and how we can address it in the Church?” and “In what ways are you committed to a culture of inclusion and diversity?”

I have personally seen and lived the effects of systemic racism in deep ways, both outside and inside the Church. This personal history and learning has brought me to a place where inclusion and diversity are at the centre of my faith. I have always sought to share this in my ministry everywhere I go. The best way for me to show this is by telling another story.

In my second year of seminary at Wycliffe College, there were all kinds of activities around prayer and liturgical exercise. They were beautiful, and it engaged a part of me, but did not speak to all of me. To be frank, my studies did not always connect to the people that I knew – the scared, the outsider, the poor, the queer, and so on; but I knew they needed to.

Before I attended seminary I was a hairdresser, and this was no accident. It was a piece of secular work that allowed me to see people deeply, often at their most vulnerable. I have always had a certain gift of vision; I can see the potential of the gospel and inspire others to join. And so, after a year of sitting and listening in the classroom, it was time to move. So I asked the local priest if I could start a hair cutting service for the unhoused population that would come to the church every day for meals. This priest was excited but cautious. He informed me that it would be a dirty piece of work. The people that would come may not have showered for days or weeks. My gift of tenacity kicked in, and I scraped together a bit of money and bought some supplies as a way to share the gospel. The act of

washing and cutting their hair and hearing their experiences was earth-shattering. When it was time for me to leave this ministry, one beloved man, whose hair I had cut many times, held my hand, looked into my eyes, and thanked me for seeing him, for caring for him, and for praying with him.

This is the same spirit that I would seek to bring as a bishop – the courage to see and hear all God’s people at their most vulnerable, to take what I have in me to serve them, to strengthen their gifts, and to bring them into the community. We are all outsiders, and Jesus brings us into the circle, giving us love, freedom, and voice. As a Diocese we can choose to do the same; to revive and restore a way of being in ceremony where young and old, Indigenous, newcomer, BPOC, LGBTQ2S+, and all our relations will have an equitable place in the circle. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ falls on all, and the Love of Jesus fills all.

“What gifts and skills do you bring to the role of Bishop?” and “Why do you feel called to stand for this particular Episcopal election and how have you discerned this call?”

For many years I have served as the Diocesan Canon/Archdeacon for Indigenous ministry. In this role, I co-chaired the local committee for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission event that was held in Edmonton in 2014. It was a time of seeing and reliving old wounds; for some in the church maybe seeing them for the first time. Institutional injustice is about how our society is structured. However, to make real concrete change it has to be about relationships. The TRC was a first step on a journey. It was a time of humility when we heard the lived experiences of people who attended the schools. It was the start of a time of *miyo-wicêhtowak* – a time for truth with harmony, getting along well together, and beginning to live in harmony with one another. It was also a difficult time, when we discovered that we would need many more great moments of courage to make room for the voices of the hurt and disenfranchised. As we listened together, we heard and chose to act in a different way – to begin a “Healing of Memories.”

I believe this experience was forming me for today, and has given me gifts that will be needed in the leadership of the Church in this next stage. We are now entering into a new time in this place, and in our church, where we all have to be willing to seek healing and wisdom. With society’s growing division, we are straining the hearts and souls of our young and old alike. Fear and perceived scarcity are affecting the health of the land, the climate, and social wellbeing itself. We have to restore our balance – to restore all the directions of our “medicine wheel,” as Indigenous ways teach. There are so many ways we need to continue to heal. When we heal together, we can grow together.

I have also been serving for many years as the Rector of the parish of St. Faith’s, which is in a lot of ways a microcosm of similar challenges I know are facing all our parishes and the diocese as a whole. We were struggling, and we had to make some soul-inspiring decisions. We needed a vision, and a new way to engage the people and circumstances around the building. I proposed a way forward: we decided to open the doors of the church building not just on Sundays, but every day; not only for members, but for all. We needed to embrace *wahkohtowin*, a Cree code of conduct where we are kin to those around us. We said “yes” to those that once thought they had no place in the building or within the Grace of Jesus, and we embraced them as kin – as a beloved relation.

To do this the right way, and long term, we also knew we needed to come up with an administrative and financial strategy that would grow as the mission grew. We needed to have stewardship beyond what the Sunday parishioners could put in an offering plate. We needed to be bold in asking for financial resources, and be dedicated to the work of the Gospel. We needed to inspire and partner with the hundreds of people that came from various volunteering churches and broader community partners to say “yes” to their neighbours as well. We became a place of wicihitowin, another Cree word meaning “to help mutually.” Our PrayerWorks ministry grew out of this work over many years, and it continues to bear much fruit. In 2020/21, during the Covid-19 pandemic, we planned, funded, cooked, served, and delivered over 20,000 meals. Suddenly, the building became a ministry asset, not a financial drain. In other words, we learned that when we place the most vulnerable at our centre, we find greater courage and creativity to take on questions and challenges than we thought we had before.

Through these and other major steps in my ministry journey, I have come to a point where God has put a holy restlessness inside of me. I hear this as a call to discern something more. I want to see us renewed and transformed as a church, and I know we need to do it together in collaboration and partnership. These same lessons of interpersonal awareness, group dynamics, consensus building, making partners, and so on, have deeply shaped the way that I would approach the challenges of administration and leadership in the Diocese of Edmonton.

As part of my discernment for the priesthood, I attended sessions with the Advisory Committee on Postulants for Ordination (ACPO). One of my examiners gave me a piece of scripture (Joshua 1:5-7), and said I should pray it for the whole of my vocation. In this text, Joshua is succeeding Moses as the leader of the people. He is called to carry on from the place to which Moses had led, but also to bring his own gifts in response to previously unknown challenges. And he is called to follow guidance – both the guidance of the Spirit and the community around him. This is my call too.

I know with my whole heart that no one is called to be a bishop on their own. I also know that the way to lead as a bishop can change and adapt in response to different people and local needs. God has opened my heart, my eyes, and my ministry to the amazing gifts of the people of Edmonton. God has placed a vision in my mind that is inclusive of all my relations, and of a structure of church that is shaped like a complex web; a collective of deacons, priests, and laity, moving as one, with Jesus as the centre; a church that is flexible, strong, and courageous. With much intentional counsel from my family, friends, and colleagues, along with lots of prayer and smudge, I believe I am called to build and uplift the parishes, clergy, and laity into this vision of a collective community; a model that is shared and beneficial to the whole Diocese and Church.

An Elder has been teaching me for a long time that “we are the people we have been waiting for.” We have the gifts from the Holy Spirit to walk this journey. We have the collective strength to overcome the fear that whispers that we are no longer relevant, and that the Church will be closing its doors by 2040. My prayer is that I can be a mentor of the way. The time ahead, though a struggle, will have Jesus at the centre, and walking with us on our road – welcoming us, equipping us, pointing us outward to the world, and sending us to serve others.