



Signs of hope in the midst of mayhem



Holy Cross worker **Brian McKee** was on the streets of Ardoyne over the Twelfth. He shares his reflections on how, despite the violence in Woodvale, there has been real progress in the area

THERE was a surreal atmosphere in Ardoyne as the Twelfth dawned.

Months of meetings and lobbying had resulted in the news people had just not thought possible – the Orange Order parade would not be returning past Catholic homes on the front of the Crumlin Road that evening.

While some did not believe the Parades Commission determination would be implemented, others remained hopeful that peace would finally break out on the streets of Ardoyne that evening.

In the midst of mayhem, a light of hope was breaking through.

However, a darker, more ominous, shadow was cast when the morning parade approached.

There was a stand-off, followed by the breaking of the parade conditions. A crowd of several hundred followed the band, with beating drums and unfurled banners. Marchers mockingly danced as they passed the residents' protest.

But there was restraint from the residents in the face of provocation and undiluted hatred – in the midst of mayhem, a light of hope was again breaking through.

On the Eleventh night, a statue of Mary had been brought to Holy Cross from the bonfire on Lanark Way.

I greeted the messenger from the Shankill at the door; sent by residents of the Shankill who believed that the placing of the statue would cause an offence that went beyond the realms of acceptability.

It was a brave and responsible act,

proving there are leaders within our communities who remain committed to taking positive steps for peace. In the midst of mayhem, a light of hope was breaking through.

Back to the Twelfth and as the time for the afternoon return of the parade neared, people gathered and tensions began to rise.

Young people and residents mingled with police, and police vans were used as goal posts. Time after time the same sentiment was vocalised: "Never thought we would live to see this..."

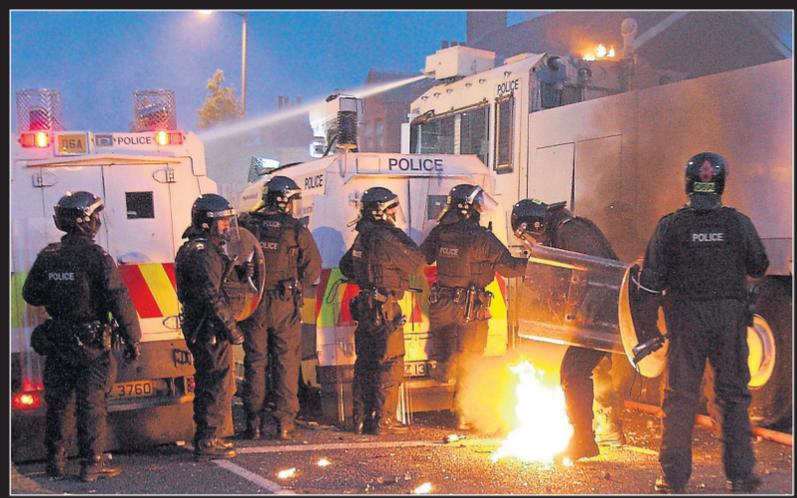
An incident of provocation was quickly dealt with, as community leaders worked in partnership with police.

Unionist politicians and some church leaders spoke of "the anger within the loyalist community". Ardoyne residents spoke of their 40 years of hurt and anger in the brunt of coat-trailing and triumphalism; their dead insulted by marching bands.

Yet there had also been the brave decision to enter into dialogue; in the midst of mayhem, a light of hope was breaking through.

Further down the road, the dogs of war were unleashed by careless words and ill-judged comments, their own people the victims; leaders calling for protest, then once again walking away; moral bankruptcy exposed as they refuse to acknowledge their role in inflicting such pain upon their own community; police caught again in the middle of blatant hatred and intolerance...

Where are the voices of reason go-



ing to come from?

As Fr Gary Donegan and I walked through Ardoyne at 2am, we came across a family celebrating outdoors in the summer warmth – the father critically ill but wanting to mark this Twelfth with a memory of peace and calm. In the midst of mayhem, a light of hope was breaking through.

The following day as protestors gathered and roads were blocked, the danger of mounting tension was evident.

Yet even as a unionist politician spoke of the Crumlin Road as "a cold house for Protestants", protestors were leaving their lines to come across for ice-cream

and refreshments.

One young loyalist had the courage to cross over to meet with his friends from Ardoyne whom he had met at a youth project: in the midst of mayhem, a light of hope was being made visible.

There is no room for one-upmanship. The nationalist community has its own share of blind hatred and gratuitous violence.

As I stood talking to a policeman a nail bomb landed 20 yards away. Standing some 10 yards closer to the blast, a father shields his daughter – a seven-year-old child encounters the ugly face of naked hatred.

A more stupid, irrational and cowardly act could not be countenanced.

“Life can change so quickly. One incident or careless word can spark off violence... but the experience in Ardoyne this Twelfth was that even in the midst of mayhem, a light of hope can break through



■ **DARK DAYS:** Above, loyalists confront police in the Woodvale area of Belfast on the Twelfth. Far left, the stolen statue of Our Lady on the Shankill Road bonfire last Thursday. Center, police come under attack in Belfast on Saturday night. Left, a loyal few listen to speakers on stage at the Twelfth celebrations at Barnett's demesne in south Belfast

■ **PICTURES, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Aidan O'Reilly, Bill Smyth, Cliff Donaldson and Mal McCann

Did those responsible find it hard to stomach that dialogue had worked? Did they find it unpalatable that the people of Ardoyne were supporting the proper exercise of law and order? Did they fear that the experience of a violence-free Twelfth in Ardoyne would expose their moral and political bankruptcy?

Whatever their reason, people gathered again that night and once again footballs were kicked and Land Rovers became goal posts. In the midst of mayhem, a light of hope was breaking through.

Life can change so quickly. One incident or careless word can spark off violence. Peaceful streets can become littered with glass and stones,

but the experience in Ardoyne this Twelfth was that even in the midst of mayhem, a light of hope can break through.

Our prayer is that this same light of hope is made visible on the streets of the Shankill and Woodvale; that dialogue replaces violence, that words of reason replace centuries-old clichés, and that the recognition of mutual hurt provides a new momentum for moving forward on that still-long road to peace.

■ **Brian McKee works with the Passionists at Holy Cross Parish in Ardoyne, north Belfast and Tobar Mhuire retreat in Crossgar. He is the director of Seedlings, a consultancy on pastoral renewal.**

Faith proclaimed becoming lost to order's feet parading

THE Orange Order sits at that intersection peculiar to Northern Ireland where the kerbs are painted red, white and blue and the juggernauts of religion, culture and politics hurtle towards each other. This July, as happens every year, the traffic lights are out of order and the three forces have collided, most catastrophically in Woodvale in north Belfast.

Balancing its competing interests is obviously no easy matter for the Orange Order, especially against a backdrop of unionist power-sharing with Sinn Féin and traditional routes becoming contentious.

It is easy to see how nationalists or people from Catholic backgrounds might have difficulty with the Orange Order.

What is more interesting is that a growing number of Protestants are becoming apathetic towards it, or disavowing it altogether.

Most of those I spoke to for this article would call themselves critical friends of the organisation; they want it to find a way to confidently, but without confrontation, express its beliefs, rather than be caught in a maelstrom of violence every summer.

Sorting out where it stands on faith would seem to be central to that. After all, the Orange Order describes itself as a religious organisation – a “Protestant fraternity” – and says its purpose is “to maintain the Christian faith by word and deed”.

It calls upon its members “to propagate and defend that faith which we have received from the Church of the New Testament through the faithfulness of the Protestant Reformers”.

“It is Christ-centred, Bible-based, Church-grounded. By it we are moulded in character and conduct.”

Yet something has clearly gone badly wrong for the Orange Order, certainly in Belfast, if feet parading has become more important than faith proclaimed. That would have been the impression one would have come away with after a visit to the Belfast demonstration's field at Barnett Demesne last Friday.

As what might with generosity be described as a sparse group gathered for prayer and to hear Scripture reflections, nearby a much larger crowd grew increasingly inebriated. But there was no need to go to the field to see the disconnect between faith and practice; it was there later that day in Woodvale for the world to see.

And it is difficult to see how inflammatory language in the run-up to the Twelfth or that cack-handed protest in the north of the city which turned into successive nights of disorder helps maintain the Christian faith by either word or deed.

Or if attacking police officers with swords is a way to help propagate the faith. And as for explaining how character and conduct had been moulded in such a way that someone thought it an appropriate expression of Orange culture to place a statue of Mary on an Eleventh night bonfire. What faith is this? It isn't just Catholics who look at the disconnect and wonder how sustainable it is for the Orange Order to claim the role of ambassador for Christ yet also be a catalyst for widespread disorder.

Many Protestants, including – in a

Violence followed when the Orange Order called a protest it couldn't control in north Belfast in a move which was hard to square with its Christian credentials, writes **William Scholes**

sign of how bad things have become – some involved in the Orange Order are asking the same question.

At this point it must be stated that the expressions of Orange culture in places like Fermanagh are of a very different tenor to those in Belfast, with this year's Twelfth in Derry city showing the value of sustained dialogue.

It seems to be a question of identity. If the Christian's identity lies “in Christ”, then while flags, parades and other expressions of culture can remain vitally important, they are not all-consuming.

Yet if that Christian identity – “Christ-centred, Bible-based, Church-grounded,” as the Order describes it – is not the most important thing for an Orangeman, it is easy to see how any opposition to their cherished shibboleths can become a source of conflict.

As the Rev Norman Hamilton, a former Presbyterian moderator, puts it: “The whole of the unionist and loyalist

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community needs to work on other expressions of identity rather than concentrating on flags and parades.” I have spoken to many clergy this week, including several who hold office in the Order in rural areas, who will privately say that the Belfast Orange Order has fallen a long way short of being an advocate for the Christian faith, but aren't prepared to be quoted on the record.

The reasons are varied. They include fear of reprisal and being regarded as anti-Orange, even among men who have a long history in the organisation. They are embedded in the Order in such a way that it can be very difficult and costly to speak out.

Others told me they believed that, so soon after the Twelfth, it simply wasn't the time to speak out. After all, perhaps no-one is much in the mood for listening while tensions remain high, police flood the streets and burned-out cars smoulder. There was also a perception that the Orange Order had allowed itself to be dragged into a political fight that has compromised its Christian integrity. In some areas, to criticise politicians can be riskier than criticising the Orange Order, even where they are the same thing.

The focus of Orange anger, apart from the police, is the Parades Commission. Dr Hamilton is better placed than most to comment. A Presbyterian minister

at Ballysillan in north Belfast as well as a co-convenor of the denomination's Church and Society Committee, he has long been involved in attempts to build relations between the nationalist and unionist communities in his area.

“The protesters absolutely want the Parades Commission to be abolished,” he said, before adding, somewhat forlornly: “I've had no conversations with anyone who would have any clear idea about what it should be replaced with.”

With community relations at Woodvale at “the lowest ebb that I can remember”, Dr Hamilton said it was a “place of great turmoil – physical turmoil, identity turmoil and emotional turmoil”.

“A leading nationalist said to me, ‘Be assured we do not take any pleasure in what we see across the road’,” he said.

When it comes to attitudes to the Orange Order, the Presbyterian Church seems to be a broader Church than most, with Presbyterian minister the Rev Mervyn Gibson the institution's current grand chaplain.

Dr Hamilton said “both personally and on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland I utterly abhor any expression of sectarianism or racism or any other ‘-ism’”.

“There is no ambiguity on this point,” he said.

Church of Ireland leaders, meanwhile, said the violence and disorder was an affront to Christian values of “forgiveness, the valuing of every person, and working for the common good”.

“To raise a hand in anger is to step away from those values,” Archbishop of Armagh Richard Clarke, Bishop of Down and Dromore Harold Miller and Bishop of Connor Alan Abernethy said. Rather than protest and violence, they said there needed to be “new ways of dealing with difficult issues through meaningful engagement”.

“We need to talk now and not leave it too late.”

They said they were willing to be involved and offered to “help and support to any such sincere processes of mediation and dialogue within our communities”.

The Rev Dr Heather Morris is the president of the Methodist Church. She threw down a challenge to think about how peace might be built.

“The first thing I need to say is that for Christians, allegiance to Jesus must be our primary allegiance – everything comes under Jesus' Lordship,” she said.

“Allegiance to Jesus and what Jesus teaches must affect the way I think about others.”

“It must affect the way I live my life, and my allegiance to Jesus will impact my political thinking. Jesus must come first.”

Yet that is also what the Orange Order means when it describes itself as “Christ-centred”.

Its critical friends in the Protestant community and beyond will be praying it works out how to apply that truth in Belfast and beyond before July 2014.