

# Parades and Protests

*some unheard voices*

*Compiled by Michael Hall*

Published March 2016 by  
Island Publications / Farset Community Think Tanks Project  
466 Springfield Road, Belfast BT12 7DW

© Michael Hall 2016  
mikehall.island@yahoo.co.uk  
<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/islandpublications>

*This is a **Belfast City Council Good Relations Unit initiative**  
delivered by*  
**Island Publications and Farset Community Think Tanks Project**

We would like to thank everyone who took part  
in interviews and discussions which informed this publication

The views expressed are not necessarily shared or endorsed by Belfast City Council.  
The Council does not accept any responsibility or liability for the  
views expressed or content in this publication.

Printed by Regency Press, Belfast

# Introduction

In Belfast, parading and protesting has long been an integral part of cultural, religious and political expression. Mostly such expression remains peaceful, even colourful. At times, however, it has been a cause of tension between the city's two main traditions. Much of this tension undoubtedly stems from our current inability to resolve deep-seated, identity-related fears and apprehensions – in both communities – and this is also compounded by legacy issues arising from decades of violence.

These tensions have sometimes led to open conflict, resulting in rioting and costly policing operations. The consequences have included damage to the reputation of the City, physical injury to both police and citizens, damage to property, deterioration in inter-community relations, erosion of trust between key players and communities, social (and justice-related) consequences for those caught up in rioting (particularly young people), as well as exacerbating the sense of hurt felt within communities. Given that this situation has negative implications for Good Relations and Community Safety, Belfast City Council's Good Relations Unit felt it would be useful to undertake a series of discussions embracing a range of people not directly involved in decision-making around parades and protests, but who nevertheless, as citizens of Belfast, are impacted upon by the ongoing situation. The aim of these discussions was not to 'solve' parading/protesting issues, but rather to inform and enlarge the debate around them.

These discussions engaged individuals from a variety of sectors: women, older people, young people and new communities. Participants were asked what parading meant to them, what impact it had on their lives, and how they felt it impacted upon wider community relations.

Farset Community Think Tanks Project, given its long-established involvement in facilitating debate and dialogue across all communities in Belfast, was tasked with co-facilitating the discussions and producing an edited summary in this pamphlet, copies of which are to be widely disseminated to a variety of stakeholders involved in discussions around parades. It is hoped that these voices, largely unheard when decisions around parades and protests are being made, might provide decision-makers with some additional considerations in their deliberations on such complex issues.

# Parades and Protests: *some unheard voices*

## Women

- To me parading/protesting means the potential for trouble, or something happening – that’s my initial thought. You don’t sort of think: oh, there’s a great wonderful parade happening. You go: where’s it going to be? is it going to affect me? is it going to shut down the shops? is it going to affect me getting into work? is it going to lead to other consequences? is something going to happen from it that’s going to get somebody else riled up?
- I find it all an irritant. I have no time whatsoever for parading. It irritates me when I’m in the car and stuck behind a parade, or redirected because of them. I also think parading has the potential to reinforce segregation and division between communities, and I rarely find anything positive at all about it. Now, I do fully appreciate people’s rights to engage in it, and I understand that it is of particular significance to certain communities, but I believe there needs to be some effort made to look at the future of parading and where it’s going.
- I find it has changed radically over the last ten to fifteen years, partly because the number of parades seem to have increased all across Northern Ireland. And I also think that it has been hijacked and is being used in a triumphalist way, and is part of a wider programme of territorial marking by certain communities, rather than a purely traditional cultural practice. I was chair of my local community group for five years and we did a lot of cross-community work in our area, and wanted to do more, but much of our energies were taken up with issues about flags being erected, or parades that came right up to the interface. I found that so frustrating.
- When I was a child growing up in Belfast, it wasn’t of my community, even though I lived within the community which paraded. My parents kept us indoors. We heard the Lambeg drum, and I used to think: what *is* that? It sounded scary, but it also sounded very powerful. And because we were kept indoors, the associated negativity was there: that’s not for us. When I was of an age to be able to go out and look for myself, I still had no understanding of that culture.
- I live in a Protestant community and I have mixed thoughts. On the one hand there are a lot of young fellows meeting up and learning a musical instrument, which I think is absolutely fantastic. And there is also a sense of community, which I think is terribly important. But the band music seems to go on and on. It starts at one part of the year and never seems to end. If you like band music, fine,

but if you don't.... It's like they're saying: we need to blast our culture out here – and tough if you don't like it! And in my area it is always males, never females.

- I grew up in Ballymena, and when there were parades going on we didn't go. It wasn't that there was any fear, it was just that we didn't go into that space. Or if I did happen to be near a parade I felt conscious that I was different from the other people who were watching it. I wasn't frightened, but I was anxious to get away from there, yet worried that people would see me wanting to get away and realise I was 'different'. I understand that that was all my own internal apprehensions, that those people would not have known I was different. Through work in East Belfast I now see the positive aspects of parading, the sense of community and the opportunities it provides, but I would echo the view that it has often been hijacked in a way that is more negative. I also feel they are divisive.

***I see the positive aspects of parading, the sense of community ... but I would echo the view that it has often been hijacked in a way that is more negative.***

- I lived in Ballymena too and as a child we were always brought to them. My immediate family would not have been involved in the Orange Order, but it was like a family day out. And where I lived in Ballymena it was a mixed area, and at one point we [children] had a band made up of everybody, tiny drums and stuff, going up and down the road, carrying wee flags. But we didn't know anything about Orange culture; to us it was just a day out, and we were going to see people we knew. As they walked past they waved at you. And you would have got your wee outfit for the day and been taken in the car to the 'Field'. But I would never go now, for when I got into my late teens I couldn't see how it was relevant to me. And I suppose now having lived in Belfast for years, I only went to see one parade, and, to be honest, I found it threatening. It was so different from the parades I had grown up with as a child, especially the whole alcohol aspect to it.

- I am not interested in parading at all, at any level, and from any side – I just find it all a bore. For example, the St Patrick's Day parades bore me to death, and they always have done – and that *would* be of my culture. I don't know the history of parading, but I often wonder how long we have all been doing this. And do we all love it, or do we just do it because we have always been doing it?

- People have a right to express their culture, but there is a responsibility which sits alongside that. My impression is that that responsibility seems to be increasingly diminished. In England, if there is a large-scale event the organisation which organises it pays for any associated costs with it. Whereas here the state picks up any costs – for all kinds of parades. And I think that that

is the key to moving forward: yes, you have a right to cultural expression, but you have a responsibility to do it in a certain way.

- I can remember going down the Shankill Road on the 13th July, and it looked apocalyptic! I had never seen so many beer cartons, bottles, piled up on the side of the road, rubbish everywhere, Union Jacks lying strewn all over the road. It really was an apocalyptic scene: people had done that and just walked away, to leave someone else to clear it up.
- My grandfather was a Hibernian. Now, I don't even know if they exist any more. The 'Hibs' would have paraded once a year; they had their Hib hall and they held Christmas events and pantomimes, discos. And the Orangemen further down the road paraded once a year. But now there is a proliferation all over Northern Ireland, and you could be on a wee country road and suddenly find yourself stuck behind a parade, and you're just expected to stay there.
- Take the triumphalist marching in circles outside St Patrick; almost creating a new interface in the city. The accountability for instances like that is very fudged. Maybe it's more of a Belfast problem. I know there's fantastic work going on in Derry where you have the whole Maiden City Festival around the Apprentice Boys Parade; that is just phenomenal.
- I remember a Loyalist explaining to me that the more they feel their culture is being chipped away the more important parading has become to them. And I would think that since the removal of the flag the whole issue around parading has increased massively, and they have become more triumphalist, and more intimidatory. And whether it's a Loyalist parade or a Republican one, I can't stand the music, I can't stand the uniforms, the posturing; I just find it all a distorted expression of culture, and I don't see the need for any of it.
- Most of my friends don't bother with it any more. Sometimes we now ask: what *is* our culture? And, to be honest, the bands and the parading doesn't feel like my culture any more. To me it has so changed. It's as if people are in a siege mentality and they have to cling to it so tightly and almost shove it in people's faces. I would rather go to things which are inclusive, than something which separates. My friends don't see it as relevant to them either, partly because it was all males involved. I no longer feel that that's what defines *me*, as my identity. Indeed, now I even question what it is all for. It doesn't resonate for me.
- I am actually not negative about the expression of culture. It's how to let that happen without it stopping everyone else from going about their daily lives. When my sister went into labour, it was frustrating having to divert the whole way round Belfast to get to the hospital. And not even emergencies, just getting to the shops.
- I think the whole problem with parading – whether from the Unionist or

Nationalist communities – is that it is not inclusive. That was why I found the *Giro d'Italia* such a positive thing. It was cross-community, everybody could feel part of it. I live in Glengormley and everybody took part in it.

- The *Giro* gave us *all* a chance to go out and celebrate. It was a chance to celebrate a collective identity, one which wasn't hinged on 'otherness' or differentiation or triumphalism. It was a chance for everyone to celebrate together a huge global event.
- I suppose at one time it was possible for both sides of the community to come out and enjoy these cultural spectacles, until they were politicised, either by nay-sayers within Republicanism or Loyalists marking out territory. In effect, both Republicans and Loyalists were saying: this is for us, not for you.
- Is it a working-class thing? I often wonder whether the Protestant middle class care much for the bands and parades. When they *are* there, say from the political or religious leadership, I suspect they are often only there to be seen. There are certainly not there afterwards, dealing with the fallout.
- How can it be progressed? I don't think you can take a group of people who feel their culture is under threat and say: could you do it a bit less? But could we not have a twin-track approach? Let those who want to engage in triumphalist marching keep doing it, while letting others begin to celebrate culture in more inclusive and creative ways. Hopefully the need for the triumphalist marching will then gradually diminish.
- I once heard an Irish musician playing *The Sash* and someone asked him to stop. His response was that this was a traditional Irish piece, but nevertheless he was stopped. It was as if the audience had the view: that tune belongs to 'them', not to 'us'. This society is being held back from the proper integration of our identities. It *has* happened: both sides going to Irish dancing; bands lending each other instruments. We all need to encourage this integration to grow.
- We do have to admit that the media focus on problems around parades and that reinforces negative perceptions. Every time you hear about parading on the media you don't hear the positive things that I know are going on. Like that TV programme about Dan Gordon's engagement with the young bandsmen. It focused on their camaraderie and music, and to me it provided a great insight.
- I think it's an unfortunate consequence of the increased incidence of Orange parades that we now have increased parading on the Nationalist side, and a return

***The media focus on problems around parades and that reinforces negative perceptions; you don't hear the positive things that I know are going on.***

to bonfires, which had been gradually diminishing. Both sides are using parading as clubs to beat each other with. As a woman, I find this aggressive group of men and their macho posturing very intimidating – on both sides.

- You're right about their intimidating nature. When one parade was going through Belfast I actually had to comfort a tourist who was in tears after being aggressively accosted for trying to cross the parade. I spoke to one of the marshals; he insisted that an agreed number of 'crossing points' had been publicised beforehand and she should have used one of these. Now, how many tourists would be aware of things like that! She said she thought it was a festival-type parade, part of a 'fun day' – and was taken aback when she learned how deadly serious it was. We need to lighten up. Make allowance for other people, tourists especially.
- It is not a 'fun' thing for me. Does cultural expression always have to be celebrated in such a militaristic manner? I feel our whole approach needs to change. Look at all the summer festivals which take place in many villages – and you see a lot of women in there being very creative – and most of the focus is on having fun.
- Take the Lantern Parade in North Belfast, which was largely started by women. That began small-scale, a couple of communities, largely Catholic communities, having a little lantern parade with the kids all dressed up. That has grown massively now, where they actually walk through each other's communities with their children. So there is an example of parading done in a positive way.
- I would love to be part of it, I would like to share it. I would like to understand it all better. But I would also like it to be reduced in terms of the disruption it causes.
- I think you have the politicians going into their bunkers around major parades: Gerry Kelly comes out and takes his stance; Nelson McCausland and Nigel Dodds come out with their opposing stance .... They are all serving their respective constituencies, so any chance of inclusivity goes out the window.
- Where I grew up one neighbour, an Orangeman, was genuinely trying to encourage us to go to the parade. We felt: but this is not for us, why is he even asking us? But he was so genuine about it, he saw it as a great family day out.
- We can't tell people how to do their culture, but we can support those who are trying to explore culture in an inclusive way. We should broaden the idea of culture *beyond* the parades and marching. We have great writers and playwrights from Loyalist communities exploring culture in new ways. That should be promoted.
- We need our leaders to say positive things about each other's identity. Like Arlene Foster wearing green on *The Nolan Show* and saying she supported the Irish rugby team. As she said: 'Well, I'm Irish for the rugby.' We need more of our leaders doing that, giving out positive messages about both communities. And people like Linda Ervine, running Irish classes to show that culture is for everyone.

## Older people

- I'm not from Belfast originally, I'm from the country. And when the bands came out, *everybody* went out, there was none of this nonsense: 'We're better than you', or 'you shouldn't be walking here' ... all this crap. It was a day the kids loved, they loved it. It was quite different when I moved to Belfast – it was so different.
- I was born and reared on the Grosvenor Road, in a mixed community, and we all got on together. I played football and half our team was Catholic. Things changed in this country in 1969, that's when all the divisions really started. That's when all these organisations started: the IRA, the UDA, the UVF. I had no animosity towards anybody. I joined the Orange Order, I walked the Twelfth, but there were things I didn't agree with in Orangeism, and things which were said, so I eventually came out of it. I think what's wrong is that there are people in both communities who just want to knock the block off each other, they're spoiling for a fight, and parading is being used in the middle of all that. But when you're living in a community which is run by paramilitaries it's hard to openly say anything. There would be things I would love to say about the parades to my neighbours but I can't. Now, I can come to a meeting like this and talk to these [Catholic] girls here the way I'm doing now, but yet I couldn't talk so openly in my own community.
- Yes, 1969 changed everything. Areas like mine [in Catholic West Belfast] became ghettos. People stayed in their own areas, they didn't even feel able to visit friends in other areas. And now, there are so many young people who don't have any contact with other young people from the other community. I think that's so sad.
- After 1969 people started to live in fear. When I was in the Orange Order I paraded up the Grosvenor Road to Drew Memorial Church, which was in the heart of a Catholic area. I also walked to Broadway on the Falls with the Orange Order. That all stopped. Everything changed completely. People were living in fear. I played a lot of snooker in my younger days, and I played on the Falls Road. It didn't worry me, but once the Troubles started, that all ended.
- Many people from the Falls would watch the Twelfth. My mother used to take us to watch the parade down in Bedford Street; we loved the marching bands. We saw it as a festival then, and there was the feeling that you had to respect one another's culture. But that has all changed.
- Many bands used to be – and I might as well be honest about it – 'Kick the Pope'-type bands. But

***Many people from the Falls would watch the Twelfth. We saw it as a festival then, and there was the feeling that you had to respect one another's culture. But that has all changed.***

see nowadays, the bands play more harmony, and all these contests, and band parades, where they're playing marching tunes. And the only time you hear those bands play *The Sash* is on the Twelfth.

- I would agree. They also play Christmas carols, hymns, there's a lot more tunes and a lot less 'Kick the Pope'-type music. They are playing a lot more contemporary music as well. Like songs in the pop charts.

- I think they *are* trying to make it more of a 'fest'.

- As someone from the Protestant community I spent my childhood with my aunt and uncle who lived about half a mile from the border in south Fermanagh, and the army checkpoint was about two hundred yards down the road. And Protestants in the area felt very embattled. The news constantly showed another farmer murdered, another grieving widow and children. And I felt the same way about the IRA then as people do about ISIS today. My community felt embattled, and so when it came to the Twelfth it was a day when we wanted to express our culture. And it was colourful, and a pageant, and full of crack, and people could come out and enjoy themselves. That's what I say: it was a celebration of our culture and we had the right to celebrate it, in spite of all the gruesome murders taking place in the adjoining fields. I now live in an area of Belfast which is very mixed. My next door neighbour is a Catholic guy, and the best neighbour you could ever have. And there are Chinese on the other side, and Indians across the road.

- I must say that I felt really angry about the decision about the Union flag flying on the City Hall. It was a very rushed thing. Who was thinking about where such a strategy would lead, or what its outcomes might be? I think working-class people, Protestant and Catholic, are just being used like chess pieces on a board. And these people [residents groups] are inflaming passions within their communities; I think they are very mischievous. What is wrong in letting a parade go past; for the sake of ten minutes, let it go... It seems that some people get up early in the morning with an eye to having as many offence-taking opportunities as they can. For God's sake live and let live. My attitude towards parades is that it is a legitimate expression of culture. Let us all, Catholics and Protestants, express our cultures, and for God's sake exercise a bit of common civility towards one another.

***Let us all, Catholics and Protestants, express our cultures, and for God's sake exercise a bit of common civility towards one another.***

- I think we would all agree with 'Live and let live'. In our age group we all worked alongside people from the other community. But when '69 came I couldn't get to my work, so everything changed. And it's sad for young ones now, and I'm even talking about some of my ones who are now in their forties. They

were born after this all started and they don't know how it might be different.

- As you can gather by my accent I am not exactly a born-and-bred Ulsterman. I am English, I love my Royal Family, but I find that so much of the flag-waving that is done here is bastardising my flag. It worries me that they are using it for political ends, or to insult other people. My father fought for that flag. And when I see twelve-year-old kids rioting against the PSNI – whether in Andersonstown or the Shankill or wherever – I say: hold on a moment, those kids were born *after* the peace process, what are their parents doing? These kids have imbued the hatreds of their parents, and I think that is awful. I agree that marching is an expression of culture but you don't have to get up people's noses at the same time. I am pleased to see that the main parade through Belfast is becoming more like a festival, almost like a *mardi gras* – and that's how it should be. How to forget the past is difficult, but don't teach your kids to keep it going – that is so wrong.
- People need to find ways of properly managing conflict; we need to cultivate leaders in our society who have the foresight to be able to nip trouble in the bud before it gets out of hand.
- I think we should start in the schools, with the consent of the parents. Try and get the parents to come into the schools to hear what their children are saying. Get everyone involved in a dialogue.
- I agree, we need the right leadership, but unfortunately in this country when people get up there and get into those positions it stops being about the actual grassroots issues, and is all about the politics and money.
- I am an Orangewoman – I'm proud to say that – and I have great friends in the Catholic community. And in an ideal world that's what this should be all about. But it's not. There's an inbred hatred with many people in this country and some of them are not going to be able to get over that, no matter how much money you throw at it, or how much talking we do about it. All we can do is keep plugging away at positive things, and we have to keep plugging away at the people at the top as well.
- Before 1969 it was non-confrontational, but now there is an element – in both communities – who go out of their way to be confrontational. There needs to be some way to march and parade, but without being confrontational.
- In the Clonard area of West Belfast we have carried the cross at Easter time right over to the Shankill, and the people in the Shankill met us.
- I think some people get addicted to taking offence. It gives them a buzz.
- I think when you live outside this country for a while you realise that many people here are caught up in their wee bigotries. You notice it more when you come back.
- We've talked about the Twelfth July and how it might be marshalled better. But

take St Patrick's Day, which is an amazing parade. It always goes off very well, everything is absolutely brilliant, but then at the very end of the day there is an element who make sure that all Hell breaks loose, and the town becomes a no-go area for families – and everybody. That's just not acceptable. And the organisers of the parade have done absolutely everything that they possibly can, the whole parade has gone exactly the way they wanted it to go, the timing has been right, the floats have been excellent, everybody who has been involved in the parade has done exactly what they're supposed to be doing, and it all goes off well. And then all Hell breaks lose! Drink clearly plays a factor, but to me the main problem is that some people are just plain stupid. Some people just want to behave like this.

- I think communities should have 'role plays', where people act out one another's behaviour, so that they can all see what is happening, and maybe learn from it.
- My mother and father were both in the Orange. My mother has been in it for sixty-odd years; my daddy was in it from a Junior, right up. He was also Domestic Supervisor in the Royal Victoria Hospital, and the vast majority of his staff, mostly ladies, were Catholics. And my daddy was a very sociable man. On the Twelfth day: very proud, bowler hat, suited and booted – and all his workers used to come out to see him. And he would be walking along the road on the Twelfth, proud as punch, and he would see his workers as he walked along the road, and they would call out to him. And he loved seeing them and being able to wave back at them. And they had their families with them, it was a celebration for everyone.
- You have always got that element now who won't tolerate the other side expressing their culture. And they ruin it for everyone else.
- Is it because people's British identity is being challenged, and that in turn is making the Prods more defensive? Because it is part of their sense of self, their British identity?
- I think the media make things worse. They blow things out of proportion. I actually think they *want* to see confrontations, so that they can focus in on it.
- Can I be honest, speaking as an Englishman. Protestants here don't realise, when they talk about their links to mainland Britain, that most people over there don't understand them, and, what is more worrying, they don't *want* to understand.
- And the establishment down South don't really want the North. The irony is that our two communities have really only got each other as friends!

***You have always got that element now who won't tolerate the other side expressing their culture. And they ruin it for everyone else.***

## Young people

- Parading is an enjoyable time for me. Why? The music, for one. Large groups of people coming together to support and watch their culture.
- The police sometimes cause problems. Policing is often seen as being very one-sided, like you have republican parades, and they're allowed to have their parades and there's no police attend them; and then at loyalist parades there's police wagons everywhere and they have streets cordoned off. And that provokes people into starting trouble so that the loyalists are seen as the bad ones.
- That's not strictly true; at any parades that I've been to in Catholic areas there have been plenty of police. Especially if they are viewed as being republican.
- But take the one which happened in Londonderry [a reference to the funeral of the mother of an INLA hunger-striker]. There was one police vehicle present during the whole parade. Even though there were scores of people marching in paramilitary uniforms, their faces masked – things which are supposed to be illegal. Whereas at Whitreock there are police vehicles everywhere.
- I find that parades that I attend are sociable. I look forward to parades... Easter parade, St Patrick's Day... because it's people I maybe haven't seen all year round, so I look forward to parades.
- I fully accept that when parades are taking place near an interface, with the potential for riots, there will be a higher police presence.
- I have only seen one Twelfth July parade – and that was by accident! A friend and I had gone into town and we had forgotten all about the parade. The parade was just coming round so we escaped into McDonalds, and we were heart-scared. We were smiling at people, hoping they would assume we were Protestants. And we were terrified, for if someone had've known we were Catholics standing there on the Twelfth of July, God only knows what could've happened.
- I accept that the Twelfth is seen as only for Protestants, but I think in recent years there have been efforts made to make it attractive for *all* families. I think there are also efforts being made to teach people about our [Protestant] culture.
- It wasn't the Twelfth of July parade itself which scared me, it was that someone standing watching it, who might have been sectarian and who knew I was a Catholic, might want to make trouble. It is the people, not the celebration itself.
- I would feel the same way about St Patrick's Day. You're just not sure about who might be there. I would like to explore a different culture but I just don't think it would be safe.

- I think alcohol is a big problem. People change once they've taken drink. It can bring out people's sectarian attitudes. How do you prevent that – from both sides. I am a Catholic and I would love to see Protestants going to festivals that they might have thought were only for Catholics, I would love that. And I would love one day to be able to go to a Twelfth of July parade without having any fear. But how do you get to that stage? How do you make sure that people will feel safe?
- I think that cross-community things, like we're all involved in, might help. Maybe if you go to an event with friends who you have met through groups like ours, you might feel a lot safer. I mean friends who are from that 'other' community, and who are used to that environment. They can look out for you.
- I think religion comes into it too much – on both sides of the community. On each other's bonfires they would be attacking one another. On Protestant bonfires there would be Tricolours and all, and on Catholic bonfires there would be Union flags. It is too much about our differences, especially our religious differences. I don't feel comfortable being in an area where they are Union flags on the lampposts, never mind being near a bonfire. I would automatically go: woah, I shouldn't be here!
- But I'm the same; whenever I go into Catholic areas and see Tricolours I really don't feel comfortable. I feel intimidated by them.
- I wouldn't. It's just a flag, so what?
- It's as if flags are trying to say: this is *our* territory! And you don't belong here.
- Every year I go to loads of events during the *Féile an Phobail* [West Belfast Festival], and my sister's boyfriend, who is from a staunchly loyalist area, comes along with us to all the things. And I feel proud that he feels safe to come, and I welcome that so much. I know a few people and some of their friends from other communities come. And I love it that people feel comfortable, because it should be for everybody.
- I think all festivals should be promoted in *all* communities. And they should approach organisations in other communities, and talk to them about it, trying to remove any suspicions.
- I would like to see more festivals than involve *everyone*, from all ethnic backgrounds.
- I know nothing about Protestant history or culture. I know nothing about the Orange Order. And I think that is a shame. You see on the news people from Camp Twaddell complaining that their culture is being put down. I would like to know more about that, I would like to know why they think like that. At the same time I don't imagine they would welcome Catholics into that discussion.

But I think we need to learn more about one another's culture.

- I don't see the point in that. I think we should put it all behind us.
- The only time I meet Catholics is through cross-community schemes. Before I got involved in this, the only way I knew Catholics was through rioting with them. But now I'm talking to them, or going out and doing sociable things with them. And through that you see them as people just like yourself. But although I am friends with Catholics I am still worried about going into their areas.
- I once stayed overnight in my friend's house; she lives in a Protestant estate in North Belfast. And when my father found out he started screaming at me: "What were you even thinking, staying there! Are you mad!" And I told my mummy, and she said the same: "Are you mad! Did you not understand how dangerous that is?" And that was only four years ago. My daddy wouldn't talk to me for days. But I didn't understand what the big deal was, and how deep the divisions still were.
- I live in a loyalist part of North Belfast and C\_\_\_ lives in a neighbouring republican area, and I feel intimidated going down to see her.
- I'm the same when I go into her area too.
- Politicians are not doing enough to bring people and communities together.
- You have bigots on both sides, who don't want to see the 'other' community expressing their culture. When there are republican marches or parades through the centre of town you will get crowds of Protestants coming out to protest at them. And for many Protestants this is because republicans have stopped them from walking past Twaddell, or took the flag down from City Hall. I think the older generation still stir things up and then young people get sucked in.
- It's not the actual parade itself, it's what happens *because of* the parade. I love parades, I would have a parade all the time – it shows our city has culture – but there are so many negative things that happen because of them. Like the rioting. I am sure that thousands of people who go to see the Twelfth July parade enjoy it and have a good time, but it's all the things which happen around it. For example, they are not allowed to walk where they want to walk and so there are riots.
- I don't see why they can't be allowed to walk.
- But there will be trouble if we *don't* get walking up, and if we *do*, there're will be rioting from local residents.

***It's not the actual parade itself, it's what happens because of the parade. I love parades, I would have a parade all the time, but there are so many negative things that happen because of them.***

- People come from all over to riot at the interfaces. Both communities need to allow each community to have their day of cultural expression. If residents in Ardoyne don't want to watch Orangemen on the road, well then, just stay indoors. Similarly, if republicans want to parade down past Carlisle Circus, then let them. Leave each other's culture alone. People need to move on a bit.

- Perhaps people could begin to share culture. Now, I don't know if there is a band in [Catholic] Ardoyne, but if there was, maybe they could take part in a parade, out of respect, say, for the 16th (Irish) Division which fought in the First World War. So the parade could respect people from both sides of the community.

- But some people will never be happy, no matter what you do. Take the chapel where there was trouble when the bands walked in circles outside it. However, the last time they walked past they just played a hymn and people *still* kicked up an uproar over it. I didn't see what was so offensive about playing a hymn.

- The parish priest said that he enjoyed the hymn, so the main person himself didn't have a problem, it was all those other protestors who did.

- There's a youth project which is bringing people from both sides together. Springboard have a project called *Fusion*, which has six members of a republican flute band and six members from a loyalist one. And they have come together. They are all good musicians. I think two of the group play twelve musical instruments each, they are great musicians. So the group has real talent. They are doing community-relations training and then at the end they will do a joint performance, and for this they will make their own band, their own uniform, create their own symbol. They have been to Belgium and stuff, to the Menin Gate. This is the first time such a coming together has been done in Northern Ireland but the project is flying, like.

- I think people here have to humanise one another.

- I would like to think that in an ideal world we could all celebrate one another's culture. But we are not even at that stage here; we are still at the stage where we still have to appeal to 'tolerate' one another. I hate that word.

- There are other parades here which don't create these problems. Like the Gay Pride parades, or the *Mela*. But they are based on fun. Our traditional parades just aren't fun, they are all too serious.

- I just don't like parades at all. From both sides. I like locally-based festivals, or fun days, but not parades – I just hate them.

***There are other parades which don't create these problems. But they are based on fun. Our traditional parades just aren't fun, they are all too serious.***

- Projects should bring groups of people together to explore each other's culture and heritage, and then go *as a group* to attend different parades and events in one another's areas.
- Someone just said the parades should be made more 'fun'. But the Twelfth is commemorating a battle in which people lost their lives. So it can't really be turned into something which is all fun and games.
- But you can't deny that many of the people who go to watch the Twelfth *do* see it as all fun and games – drunken fun and games. Their antics are not being respectful in any way.
- I don't think we learn enough of our own local history in schools.
- And not just for children and young people. I think older people are uneducated about our history, and young people are picking up things from their parents.
- I don't really bother with parades. I like the bands, but I don't like the drinking that goes with it. Many of the people round where I live see the Twelfth as one big drinking session, that's all it is to them.
- The [Catholic] community tried to stop the bonfires as a way of getting away from the trouble which always arose round the Internment commemorations.
- A lot of people just don't like bonfires. Many people around them are just seen as hoods.
- But some communities *do* want to have their bonfires.
- I think *all* bonfires are stupid. I think people should do something better. Bonfires are just ruining our earth, I hate all of them. There was one in my area and I cracked up. I got a petition and was going round getting people to sign it, and my friends were saying to me, "Would you wise up!" I said, "No, I hate them!"
- There is too much suspicion between communities. One of the churches in my area, which would be seen as loyalist, organised a community festival and the dates they picked just happened to be the same as the *Fleadh* in West Belfast. And a small minority of people protested against it, accusing the organisers of holding a festival in our community as part of the *Fleadh*: "Why are you doing this!" And it had *nothing* to do with the *Fleadh*, it was just that the dates coincided!
- Coming from a different country, to be honest I see nothing good about all your parades. The only way I see people being able to move on is if they let go of the past. In my country everyone knows about the violent past we had, but they try not to hold on to it. What is the point in trying to remember or commemorate something which was very negative and painful, for that is only going to stir up hatred and division again? Remember but move on.

## New communities

*(The twelve women who participated in this discussion were from India, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan, and were Christian, Hindu and Moslem.)*

- When we go for the first time [to see the Twelfth] I am really very, very scared, because I listen to lots of things about... parades. But when we see it, I don't feel scared any more, so I am going with my family again.
- For me, the very first things I heard about parades is scary stories. I have never been to the one in the city centre, but one day I said to myself: I *want* to see what is going on. And so we went and saw it... and it was a colourful event. I mean, we like it! I don't know if it ended up in whatever they say, the fighting, but I have not seen that. And it is a colourful thing. If the government can make it even more colourful, and more inviting, then a whole lot of people can come and see that event. That's the way I feel. I mean – it's nice. Maybe if they can make it in a more positive way people will stop fighting. But because of what I had been listening to, I thought: oh, they're going to fight, I don't want to see that happen! But now I want to see more of it. It is a colourful thing.
- This year I could not go outside because the weather was not good but when I watched [the Twelfth coverage] on TV it reminded me of our Independence Day and Republic Day celebrations at home. People dressed very colourfully. I really liked the colourful orange [sashes] people wore, and the music. It was really good. But that pyre [bonfire] I didn't like, it was a bit scary for me. But I enjoyed watching the parade on TV.
- The same for me. My son really liked the drumming, so he wanted to take more time to see the parade.
- Yes. All the kids wanted to go. Even my wee ones.
- I thought the parade was very beautiful. And everyone is wearing nice dresses, and even small kids were wearing proper clothes and dresses – I liked that.
- Everybody is happy, and very cheerful.
- People are eager. My kids are eager to see them; they could watch them all day. They want to stay out on the streets, they don't want to come inside. When I say, "Let's go back," they don't want to go, they want to watch the bands, the clothes, the costumes... And my mother likes it as well.
- Some people told me that I shouldn't go to see it, it will end up in fights and everything, and I should stay inside. But one day when they were passing by my

***I really like the colourful orange [sashes] people wore [on the Twelfth parade], and the music. It was really good.***

street, I said: “I will go to see this!” You hear the sound of music, and the kids are asking to go, so I say I will go for the first time. Then I realise that a lot of people are out on the streets watching them also. So we went to see them – and we don’t want to leave!

- I think there are now more people, from outside [Northern Ireland] who are living in Belfast, and that is why more people go to see it than ten years ago. I am happy with it.
- Where I live there are lots of band parades... every Sunday! And marching. We went out to see it, and my girls liked it. Sometimes it is noisy, but it is nice.
- My kids tell me they want join in the drumming; they want to join the parade!
- In my street, everybody watching the parade is happy. They are waving to us. And my children are the same as yours – they don’t want to leave.
- I only worry about the bonfire. It was so close to the house; that was scary.
- Yes, I am never going to see the bonfire. It was not nice. I feel scared.
- I don’t like all the drinking. I think each community would be better to have an area where they can drink alcohol, but not walking around in the streets with it. So that people don’t feel scared. If you want to drink then you go to that [designated] place and have your drink. And not be drinking around children.
- *[When asked how the Twelfth compared to the St Patrick’s Day parade]* I don’t know which one is Catholic and which one is Protestant. I just saw a parade which is colourful and beautiful, and I like it. It doesn’t matter to me if it is Protestant or Catholic. I take it for what it is.
- Everyone was happy. People were waving to us.
- When I am watching [a parade] in city centre I never feel scared. But I would never go outside city centre to see parades. I don’t feel as safe. Sometimes we watch TV after parades and there is trouble.
- I took my boys to see the St Patrick’s Day parade, it was good.
- The clothes were nice. I like all the green. And the music and the dancing.
- I think there should not be parades *all* the time. For one, it disrupts services, like buses. So, not every week.
- It is better if people are told when there is a parade, and which roads will be closed. Everything is disturbed when there is a parade, so, yes, not *all* the time.

***I took my boys to see the St Patrick’s Day parade, it was good. ... The clothes were nice. I like all the green. And the music and the dancing.***

- *(When told that some residents object to parades going past their areas:)* I think they should just bring their chairs out onto the street and watch them! And enjoy them!

- I like the drums. And the music.

- We did some Samba drumming ourselves, as part of a local festival.

- Where I live sometimes there are [band] parades. I like them, I feel safe. Sometimes a few individuals who are drunk might say a few words to you, but the majority of people are okay with us. I don't mind most parades.

- The only negative thing I can say is that if I have somewhere important to go to, when there is a parade on it might be difficult to get there. And buses will not be on. And I too would be worried about the alcohol. In the Holylands area I would be fearful on St Patrick's Day because of all the drinking.

- Where I am staying there is a band parade, every month. But they mostly happen on Saturday and Sunday, so it doesn't matter that much. But weekdays it would be difficult.

- I came here in 2008 and at that time frankly it is very scary for me. Because everybody says "Don't come out for Twelfth parade, better to stay at home." So we never went outside. But my husband experienced it this year, and he said, "You *can* go out, it is okay." And he went and took some pictures. And he said, "It is totally different from what I was told. I heard lots of bad things, especially about Twelfth of July, but everything is okay, everything is normal."

***I think we would like not just to go out and watch the parades, but be able to take part in them. Our children especially would like to do some drumming.***

- Years ago there were only local people living beside me and I kept to myself. But now there are more people from other countries living in my area so we all go out to see it. And also, more people in communities are talking to each other, we are meeting up with one another, which is good.

- We were all scared about Twelfth, because we heard lots of bad things. But I think things are changing. Next year I will go out to watch it.

- I think we would like not just to go out and watch the parades, but be able to take part in them. Our children especially would like to do some drumming.

- I personally love Belfast. I don't mind the cold – but I don't like the rain.

## *Additional comments*

• Culture Night was fantastic. Everyone was relaxed; there was no tension. That's the way it should be; that's the way it *could* be. I sometimes feel that there are two parallel worlds in Northern Ireland. One world has all these loyalists, republicans, Orangemen, protesters – not forgetting our assorted politicians – all assuming that what they are about is the most important thing in the world – for everyone. But it is only really so important to *them* – the rest of us are living a different life, hoping to reach a different place. One man standing next to me said: "Isn't it great – not a Union Jack or Tricolour in sight." That's the irony: the way some people use flags, the way they flaunt them, is actually turning people away from the legitimate heritage these flags represent. Whatever cultural values are associated with them are being lost behind all the in-your-face tribalism that seems so out of step with the needs of a modern society.

***That's the irony: the way people use flags, the way they flaunt them, is actually turning people away from the legitimate heritage these flags represent.***

• I am just back from the States, and one of the questions I am always asked is about 'these parades', and I often contrast my experience as a kid growing up in South Belfast. Now, my father was never in the Orange, and I was never in the Orange, but the Twelfth was a big day. We used to get new clothes and go with my mum and dad to a spot on the Lisburn Road... It was a big day for us, it was a carnival day. I don't know what the Catholic community thought about it back then, that wouldn't have been in our frame of reference. Now I know there is a danger when looking back fifty years that you maybe saw things with rose-coloured glasses, but there seems to be a totally different tenor to parades now. I actually had a close-up look this year for the first time, when I drove the minibus which led the Twelfth parade! I was there to chaperone a group of children, who were in costume dress leading the parade. It was also my first time going to 'the Field', and, to be honest, I found it depressing. Admittedly the weather wasn't great but I didn't find it a positive experience at all. I was asking myself: what is this all about? It wasn't how I imagined it to be. I don't think it does anything from the point of view of 'Protestant culture'. But, more importantly, from a *faith* point of view, I really, really don't get it. What does this say about the Reformed faith, if that's how we need to express it? One of the turning points in my ministry was being in Portadown when Drumcree kicked off in '93, '94. One parishioner told me he was prepared to fight 'for the faith' at Drumcree – and yet he only appeared in church on Harvest Sunday and maybe at Christmas.

- My view on the whole thing would be a very simple one. Parades were once something which you considered going to as a civic entertainment. When it became apparent, especially in recent years, that there wasn't any great civic entertainment to be had at them, I didn't want to be anywhere near them, especially with young children. I see them now as an inconvenience, depending on where the parade is. There is just a complete and utter lack of courteousness from many of those about... drunken behaviour and the absolute mess that's left; people being anti-social, many of them uncivil, staggering around the streets and leaving their litter. The whole thing is becoming a 'yahoo' experience... which isn't civic entertainment for any age, never mind for my children.

- I'm a Catholic who grew up near Antrim; my next-door neighbour was and is a member of the Orange Order. In growing up, I had no interest in parading at all, no sense that it had anything to do with me, other than: 'try to keep your head down over the Twelfth, don't be around at that time of the year, it is a dangerous time'. I spent four years in Rome then came back again around the time Drumcree was kicking off. I lived in North Belfast, and had a genuine fear that the fall-out from Drumcree would spread. I wondered whether all Catholic churches would be targeted. At one stage I even started checking under my car. So anything associated with parading was in those days negative and frightening.

Then over the past number of years I have become involved in peace and reconciliation efforts. I have had some very interesting conversations with some members of loyalist bands. I also have had opportunities to build up relationships with a couple of bandsmen from a band in East Belfast: that was a real educational experience for me. I used to think that on the Twelfth parade the bands and Orangemen were one amorphous mass and all the same. But it was a different experience after some of these conversations. They started to open up my mind to the whole world of bands, for example the regimental history behind some of them. Just on that point: the issue of bands is actually one that now fascinates me, I often wonder about the militarisation of parading; what are they are trying to defend, what is going on there?

***I also have had opportunities to build up relationships with bandsmen from East Belfast: that was a real educational experience for me.***

I ended up going to watch a parade. I wrote about the experience for a newspaper. And the headline they picked up on was that it wasn't sufficiently 'Protestant' for me. And it wasn't. I had a very clear sense of what the Reformed faith means, and I had huge difficulty with some of the things that were being presented as Protestant. I remember getting annoyed when I went to the Orange Order website and saw a title proclaiming: 'Bonfires

are part of our Protestant culture'. What! Imagine anyone reducing the Reformed faith to something like bonfires! I found that deeply offensive.

Anyway, as to my experience of the Twelfth. There was the family end of things, I liked that. Some of the music was really good. I enjoyed some of the pageantry. But going past a Catholic church is a golden opportunity to show respect. Playing the wrong sort of music is really counter-productive, a real missed opportunity. We would not be in the mess we are in, over certain parades, had such opportunities been grasped. So I'm saying there's a mixture of things. On the one hand there is the musical ability, the sense of discipline, the camaraderie... I have shifted my position from when I was growing up, so what I am saying is that I would love to be a 'critical friend', if I felt that these guys would really listen to a Catholic priest. There *is* something which is worth working with in this culture, but there are definitely aspects which really need to be looked at.

***There is something which is worth working with in this culture, but there are definitely aspects which really need to be looked at.***

One other thing: I am a teetotaller, a lifelong Pioneer, so the idea of seeing large quantities of alcohol being consumed/abused in the middle of the day doesn't go down well with me. I think it takes away from the whole thing. I suppose I lament the loss of many of the temperance lodges. So, in terms of the parading issue, part of me is curious, definitely.

And on Culture Night I knew exactly where I wanted to be – there was only one item I specifically wanted to see: I was there to see and hear the Shankill Road Defenders Flute Band and the efforts that they're making with some of the guys from other parts of the world. There was somebody from Jamaica playing along with this particular band. And they were fabulous, absolutely fabulous! And I went with one of my Protestant colleagues to see Darren Ferguson from 'Beyond Skin', to see if our next 'Four Corners Festival' could in some way incorporate the Shankill Road Defenders.

• I think as soon as you unpack what is happening, and try to find some sort of Biblical explanation, there is a total mismatch. I spoke at the dedication of a banner for the Apprentice Boys on the Lower Shankill several years ago, and I used Micah 6:8: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." *To walk humbly*. And any time I have had a conversation with any of them I ask: what impression does your parade *leave*, particularly in areas where it is contested? I mean, my own organisation revisits our strategic plan on a regular basis, and our mission statement, and our values. Do the Loyal Orders engage in this? Do they reflect on their ethos and values, how they are being acted out? I was once engaged in

an inter-church conversation about how we distil Christianity to its basics. And it was: ‘How do I be a good neighbour?’ And perhaps we should ask the Orange leadership: “Is what you do, in your most visible expressions of your faith, is that what it means for you to be a good neighbour?”

- I think *all* our traditions and cultures must be protected. But, by the same token, we must be able to ask searching questions about culture. Such as: why should we spend a small fortune translating everything into Irish when our health and education sectors are in dire need of funding? Or, speaking as a Protestant: why is Orange culture promoted to the extent of overkill? I am not knocking Unionist or Orange culture, but often I can’t see the rationale for having so many parades. In Rio they look forward all year to one massive carnival; the same in Notting Hill. Yet we seem to need them *week in, week out*. Why? Are we really that insecure in our identity that we have to remind ourselves of it daily? We are suffocating ourselves.

- That fence around the ‘Civil Rights Camp’ [at Twaddell Avenue] is festooned with Union flags. All it is proclaiming is: ‘behind this fence sit a group of besieged Ulster Protestants’. I say: Get rid of all the flags! Ask school-children – and not just from local schools – to write essays, poems, or produce artwork, on the theme: ‘The Northern Ireland I would like to see.’ Get the best examples laminated and attach them to the fence in place of all the loyalist regalia. You would get stacks of people over reading them. Also – why not forgo the return march for a few years. Organise a cross-community children’s mini-festival at the time of the return march. Build up trust within the Catholic community; undermine the dissidents not by confrontation but by imagination.

- We keep complaining about everything we see as wrong with the situation here. Maybe the first step would be to look at just *what* is wrong, and then design a three- or five-year plan of how we might get to a place that is *right*. Like being able to march down the road through a mixed community, and with people standing there applauding: now that would be some vision. But that’s what we might have to do: set down our vision, and then begin an in-depth discussion of just *how* we might begin to realise it.

***Like being able to march down the road through a mixed community, and with people standing there applauding: now that would be some vision.***

- Can I be optimistic here. If you had told me years ago that I would be sitting down with Protestant clergy, and building new relationships, I would not have believed it. This city *is* changing for the better in many different ways.

## Some concluding thoughts

The participants in the various discussions ranged widely in their attitude towards parading and protesting – from eager acceptance, through ambivalence, to hostility. Although a majority believed that there was something positive about expressing culture, many agreed that the manner in which it was often expressed in Northern Ireland remained highly problematic. A number of individuals, it must be noted, had little time for parading and protesting, feeling that it was inherently divisive.

The feeling that parading and protesting was divisive begs the question: can it be made less divisive, and more inclusive? In relation to the Twelfth, one young Protestant noted that you cannot simply transform a serious commemoration of a battle into an event with fun and games. Indeed, and using that same argument, can you really turn events which originate in diametrically-opposing historical narratives into events which are all-inclusive? Furthermore, as was pointed out by one participant in the youth group, continued celebration of a divisive past can hardly be expected to help heal a divided society.

And yet, despite such negativity, there was an acknowledgment that things *were* changing. Not only were some people trying to celebrate culture in a shared way – such as the young republican and loyalist bandsmen being brought together – but even traditional events such as the Twelfth were endeavouring to become more festive and family-friendly. Can that process be encouraged, can it be advanced? Are there things we can change about the way we ‘do’ culture in Northern Ireland?

Throughout the discussions there was widespread agreement that bonfires, especially those which are lit on the eve of the Twelfth parades, posed a major problem. Not just their size, and the pollutants they released into the local environment, but the behaviour associated with them, of which excessive drinking was cited as the most lamentable. So let us take bonfires as an example.

When William III’s expeditionary force sailed to Ireland in June 1690 a series of beacons were lit along the coast to assist the passage and eventual disembarkment of the Williamite army. Now these beacons – and they were beacons rather than bonfires – were nothing like the massive pyres we are accustomed to today, each one vying with its neighbour to be the biggest or the tallest.

In an effort to counter the numerous health and safety problems associated with these so-called ‘traditional’ bonfires – not to mention the environmental damage – as well as with a nod to historical accuracy, a few years ago Belfast City Council developed beacon-type structures, made from metal. Following a period of discussions with organisations in working-class Protestant areas, the new approach found a receptive ear, some individuals even going so far as to say: “That’s us back

to our historical roots, that's the way it should be – because this is what they were doing back in William's time.”

And if communities erect beacons, rather than bonfires, it becomes easier to create a more family-friendly atmosphere around it, which can then develop the whole experience into a festival. And as this approach minimizes the potential for trouble, it becomes an attractive event, rather than something which people do not want to attend. And if organisers go one step further and say: let's knock the alcohol on the head, then parents will feel safe to let their children attend, with the result that yet more people will want to be part of it. The benefit of all this to unionist/loyalist communities is that such an approach will actually preserve this aspect of cultural expression into the future, which might not be the case if they continue to produce massive, dangerous and toxic pyres which increasing numbers of people now oppose. Loyalists can serve their own cultural heritage better by reverting to the more historically accurate concept of beacons.

The most unexpected opinions were those voiced in the group representing new communities. Some of the participants had actually been advised to stay away from parades, but curiosity had got the better of them and they had taken their children to watch – and thoroughly enjoyed the experience: the colours, the music, the pageantry. As one Nigerian woman commented, she didn't know whether she was watching a 'Protestant' event or a 'Catholic' event, *and didn't care*: she just took it for what it was. With none of the historical baggage the citizens of Northern Ireland are so sadly encumbered with, those from new communities had been able to view parades simply as colourful spectacles.

Indeed, in relation to the colours, they had seen our 'Orange' and 'Green' through fresh eyes. The Indian women commented positively on the Orange sashes, for Orange [saffron] is an important colour in Indian culture. Likewise, the Sudanese women welcomed the sea of green in the St Patrick's Day parade, green being the most significant colour in Islam. They were able to view these two colours *as colours*, shorn of the divisive associations they hold within their host communities.

A number of them also expressed the wish that at some stage in the future they – or, more specifically, their children – could take part in all these events, including the Twelfth. Is such an idea really all that far-fetched? Perhaps, after 325 years, it might be opportune to consider moving the focus of the Twelfth away from its current *commemoration of a battle*, to a *celebration of its aftermath*: the consolidation of the 'Glorious Revolution'. Some historians feel that modern British parliamentary democracy was ushered in by the Glorious Revolution; The Bill of Rights of 1689 has become one of the most important documents in the political history of Britain, and never since has the monarch held absolute power.

William himself treated his defeated Irish adversaries with a generosity and tolerance unusual for the period, and during his reign the National Debt was

commenced, the Bank of England established, the modern system of finance introduced, ministerial responsibility recognised, the standing army transferred to the control of parliament, a wider liberty of the press gained and the British constitution established on a firm basis.

And although the road to full civil and religious liberty was to be long and hard-fought – Catholic emancipation would be delayed for a further 140 years – the events set in motion back then would lead inexorably to today’s modern democratic society, where people of all religious and ethnic backgrounds have the freedom to celebrate their differences. So why not make *the legacy of the Glorious Revolution* the new focus of these commemorations? And do so in as inclusive a way as is possible?

Most importantly, that inclusivity should embrace Northern Ireland’s Catholic community. The precedent has already been set. As historian A.T.Q. Stewart noted†, an early nineteenth-century history of the Siege of Derry/Londonderry also provided a fascinating account of the centenary commemoration held in the city in 1788. That account describes how, at the culmination of the day’s events,

the mayor and corporation, the clergy, the officers of the navy and army, the clergy of the Church of Rome, the gentlemen of the country, volunteers, citizens, scholars and apprentices set down to a plain but plentiful dinner in the Town Hall. Religious dissensions, in particular, seemed to be buried in oblivion, and Roman Catholics vied with Protestants in expressing, by every possible mark, their sense of the blessings secured to them by the event which they were commemorating...

As ATQ Stewart commented, this “enables us to see how the celebration of the historic event might have developed in a more ‘natural’ way, allowing the townsfolk of both creeds to take civic pride in it.”

Can cultural expression be developed and delivered by looking to the common good, for *all* of the people of Northern Ireland? Defining ‘the common good’ may be difficult, but commenting on American society columnist Robert J Samuelson wrote: “We face a choice between a society where people accept modest sacrifices for a common good, or a more contentious society where groups selfishly protect their own benefits.” The common good in our own society will embrace how we go about promoting our different cultural traditions.

Probably the best way of defining cultural expression in Northern Ireland is one of *multi-culturalism* – different cultures living side by side in relative co-existence – where each has its own significant days in the calendar. But could we progress to the development of an *inter-cultural* society, where different cultures engage in

---

† *The Narrow Ground: patterns of Ulster history*, A.T.Q. Stewart, Pretani Press, 1986, p71

positive interaction? By engaging in a ‘common good’ strategy, all organisations and ideologies, by acknowledging the rights of *other* cultures and ideologies to freedom of expression, will simultaneously be safeguarding expression of their *own* cultural heritage.

It *can* be done. Of the 4000-plus parades which occur every year only a handful are contentious. However, for many people parades – for a variety of reasons – are events which they do not feel safe to attend. How can parades get wide buy-in from all communities – and take the lead from our newest communities? If the largely unheard opinions and personal stories expressed in this pamphlet can be given serious consideration by the organisers of parades and protests, perhaps they might find ways of making such events more attractive to the wider community. Cultural expression – reflecting *all* our different traditions – can only be enhanced if this was to happen.

In summary, what we believe ordinary citizens are saying about parading, as a form of cultural expression, can be summarised in the following points:

- 1 Everyone has the right to express their cultural, religious and political heritage
- 2 Expressions of cultural heritage should be done in ways which are:
  - Positive
  - Celebratory (and, if the occasion warrants it, fun)
  - Open
  - Respectful to one’s own community’s integrity
  - Respectful to other communities
- 3 Expressions of cultural heritage should not be carried out in a triumphalist manner
- 4 Events and activities which are designed to mark a particular cultural, political or religious heritage should be undertaken in a spirit of inclusion, sharing and openness
- 5 Political, cultural and religious events and activities should be educational, participative, creative, and – where possible – colourful and enjoyable
- 6 Where political, cultural and religious events and activities are planned on being held within, or in proximity to, communities who hold a different political, cultural and religious viewpoint, local community engagement should be undertaken by all concerned, to ensure that such events can be delivered in a way which is safe, welcoming and non-threatening
- 7 Respect should underpin all political, cultural and religious events and activities.