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WILLIAM CRAWLEY

Now 8 days ago the latest loyalist feud came to an end. In a space of about a week it had claimed one life and resulted in a series of attacks on homes in and around East Belfast which left 30 families homeless. One of the 2 mediators who brokered a peace deal between the UVF and LVF is Presbyterian Minister Mervyn Gibson who's also chairman of the Loyalist Commission. He joins me now in the studio for his first interview I think Mervyn since the feud was declared over. Good Morning. I bet you're taking a bit of a break now after a fairly busy time?

REVEREND MERVYN GIBSON

I wish I could but you've still all the parish duties to keep up with and catch up with those that were neglected over that week.

WILLIAM CRAWLEY

A very, very busy time, give us a sense of the scale of the feud itself.

REVEREND MERVYN GIBSON

I think the feud itself had a major impact on the community of East Belfast. We'd the Army back in the streets. We had vigilantes at the corners and of course then rumours took over and we'd children talking about curfews. Indeed I remember coming out of one particular meeting and a 9 year old on a bike came up and he said Mister is the curfew on tonight at 9 o'clock? So it was having a major impact on people. People weren't going out to socialise. The

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streets were empty in the evening. So it was disastrous for the people involved.

WILLIAM CRAWLEY

It was just a shadow across East Belfast particularly for some time now.

REVEREND MERVYN GIBSON

That's a very good way to describe it, yes.

WILLIAM CRAWLEY

How do you begin to broker something like a peace agreement, a peace deal or just peace of some kind in the midst of all of that?

REVEREND MERVYN GIBSON

I think the starting point is to make yourself available to be involved in talks, negotiations or mediations or whatever the groups agree on and I think the hard bit was to sit back and wait until someone contacted me which was actually what happened. Someone contacted me and said they would like to try and end this thing from one of the organisations. Then, that's when all the activity takes place. We had meetings every day, 2 or 3 meetings with both sides. There were certain difficulties in that one group wouldn't recognise the other group and didn't want to enter direct negotiations. It all has to be managed but I think the first thing is to establish that both sides wanted an end to it and I think that come about pretty quickly.

WILLIAM CRAWLEY

And that means that one side has to say it stops with me?

REVEREND MERVYN GIBSON

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I think that's maybe not always the case, there really has to be sometimes joint blame, but in this case one side said yes we were at fault for starting this particular feud and we're prepared to admit that and I think that was a good foundation on which to build. The other fear was from the other organisation that they didn't want this to re-occur in 3 months, in 6 months time and there were other parameters about what could be said and what couldn't be said.

WILLIAM CRAWLEY

To those outside of these conversations and these dynamics it seems awfully confusing, it seems like there's like a mafia ground war going on and that it's inevitable that it's going to happen again for whatever reason. Is that just cynicism or is there is an air of dark realism to that perspective?

REVEREND MERVYN GIBSON

Well I can see where people are coming from in that and even within it. Sometimes it's confusing for those in the middle of it but I think ultimately on both sides on this occasion there was genuinely no desire to keep this going and I think they wanted it to come to an end, feuding once and for all. Now of course something could be happening in 6 months time, a year happen, it could start another feud but I think there's a sense amongst all loyalist paramilitaries that they realise they're not only damaging their own organisations but they're damaging the communities they claim to represent. And I think there is a willingness to try and put feuds behind them.

WILLIAM CRAWLEY

Some politicians of course like Peter Robinson and Nigel Dodds have called for calm and that's been echoed by Gerry Adams and others. Are we likely to see a calm summer?

REVEREND MERVYN GIBSON

I would hope we'd see a calm summer. Having worked with the loyalist paramilitaries through the Commission over this last 3 years certainly there's

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never been an appetite on their part for violence over the summer. The summertime's a celebration within the Protestant communities and they want to see that continue. I think that the gift of a quiet summer is dependent on 2 things. It's dependent on those who have been involved in keeping the peace, at the interface this last couple of years continuing to do that and also I think the willingness of republicans not to engage in violence and not to wind things up after the June elections, the European elections.

WILLIAM CRAWLEY

And the heat of course and the free time may be a challenge?

REVEREND MERVYN GIBSON

Well yes I think that's where the difficulty arose for the loyalist paramilitaries and that's in that the IMC recommendations said that no-one should work with them or talk with them and the difficulty is they have been helping to keep the peace through mediation networks and others over these last 2 summers and if that's happened then who was going to do this work, because that work is essentially about stopping an incident that a drunk causes or a child causes from escalating which can turn into full scale violence.

WILLIAM CRAWLEY

Yes, yes, Mervyn, thank you very much for coming here. Mervyn Gibson from the Loyalist Commission.