

PROTECT NORTH AND SOUTH.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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ADDRESS BY

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Challenges and Opportunities

in creating inclusive and safer communities.

Good afternoon everyone.

I can confidently assume that this audience knows enough of criminology; knows enough about community and its safety.

I am a former Criminal Justice practitioner whose work now is about helping others to manage conflict or build good relations.

As a mediator my primary interest is in enabling people to meet each other; to encounter each other in a more meaningful way than the norm.

Therefore, I am going to share four reflections with you today and after each one I shall invite you to have a conversation with one or two people around you in the hope that you will truly meet each other now at the start of your conference.

Reflection 1: Care.

I suppose my 'business' is Peace.

I like to define Peace as balance: balance within ourselves; balance between human beings and across communities; balance between all created things.

In the time I have today, I should like to reflect on challenges and opportunities in creating inclusive and safer communities as they relate to the citizen, the community and the public servant.

I'll start with a story.

It was some time towards the end of the 1980s when I was a Probation Officer and, as it happened, I had a run of court reports on men from the local travelling community. And each time I recommended probation the magistrate or judge agreed and onto my caseload they came, in significant numbers. And with each new case, one particular police officer and certain solicitors in the court would make cynical jokes about how naïve I was to believe that some tender loving care from probation would stop their offending.

I knew that the more travellers came on my books, the greater the expectation that I should be effective and no soft pushover with a group of men for whom there was little sympathy from the local, settled community.

Then one day I found myself in the County Court with a travelling man with whom I had been through the thick and thin of courts. And I recommended that the judge send him to gaol. The judge duly obliged with a three month sentence. One of the cynics in the court was amazed to see that I could actually bare teeth and bite people. And the man himself was totally shocked that after all we had been through together, I would actually turn on him.

I said to the man's friend:

'Go down to the site and tell all the men what I did here and that if any of them mess me around like Paddy, I'll do the same on them.'

Next day a nun who worked with the travellers stopped me in traffic.

'You'd better stay away from the site for a while' she said. 'There's war.

The men are all mad with you. They say that's the last time they'll work with you. They want to chase you after what you did in the courthouse.'

I drove straight to the caravan site and went to the caravan of the offender's

father who, as it happened, was a kind of head man in the traveller community. I explained to him that I had to demonstrate that there were consequences if people did not co-operate with Probation and stay on the straight and narrow. The old man agreed and put the word out to the men that I had to do my job. The crisis passed and some of the wavering men on my books seemed suitably chastened and wary of me.

This is just a simple story about Control and I'm sure there are much better Control stories in the audience today. However, back in the eighties it was considered almost unethical to ever recommend custody for a client.

The done thing in the event of not being able to make a case for a community disposal was to make no recommendation to the court.

I believe that it has not been a bad thing for Probation to harden up its act in recent years; to build its muscle tone and flex it on occasion.

However, I actually want to think a bit about the somewhat less fashionable 'Care' side of Criminal Justice.

What drives Care?

Why do we care?

Is it just because it's part of our job?

If so, then that is a soulless kind of caring.

For me, the thing that drives care is compassion.

But what is compassion?

In the Christian tradition, compassion means to have pity and a sympathetic interest in someone.

I actually feel more challenged by the Buddhist definition of compassion as a desire to relieve the suffering of another.

But what makes us compassionate ?

And here is a task for you, though this may bruise the sensitivities of some of you.

I am going to read out a statement. I want you to think about the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement, on a scale of 1 to 10.

Ten means total agreement; one means total disagreement.

Here is the statement: 'There is a God.'

Choose a number that reflects the extent of your agreement or

disagreement with the statement. Think quietly for a few moments about

why you chose that number.

Now share your answer with someone seated near you.

Reflection 2: Creativity.

Of course there is no right or wrong answer to the question of God.

But let me suggest to you that, whether one believes in a God or not, each of us has a 'spirit' within us.

Your spirit is that part of you which you hold sacred because it is the repository of your values; your sense of right and wrong; your sense of justice. Your spirit contains your highest hopes and your deepest fears. It is the inner sanctum of your integrity; of your identity as a human being.

I would suggest to you that spirituality is a way of describing either your sense of connection with a higher power or, for non-believers, your connection with a deeper place within you - a place beneath your sensory appetites, moods or desires.

Spirituality, whether God- inspired or devoid of a God, is the creative life within you; the part of you which manufactures inspiration. Spirituality is the outworking of the spirit of you, whether religious or atheist. It is that part of you from which your creativity flows.

My dictionary defines 'creative' as:

'relating to or involving *the use of imagination* or original ideas in order to create something.'

- the use of imagination.

The American Mennonite sociologist, John Paul Lederach, writes of the importance of what he calls a 'moral imagination' within people who would build peace. He defines the moral imagination as follows:

'To imagine responses and initiatives that, while rooted in the challenges of the real world, are by their nature capable of rising above destructive patterns and giving birth to that which does not yet exist.'

In reference to peacebuilding, this is the capacity to imagine and generate constructive responses and initiatives that, while rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violent settings, transcend and ultimately break the grips of those destructive patterns and cycles.'

Lederach argues that peace gets built or created in society when enough people in enough places come to share a moral imagination and he suggests that such peacebuilders have four essential things in common.

First of all, a capacity to form **relationships** across divides. Relationships which reach sufficient depth and attain sufficient quality that withstand those forces which would otherwise pull them apart.

Lederach's second essential feature for peacebuilders is '**transcendence**'.

By this he means a capacity to think inclusively. While retaining credibility with your own group or community, having an ability to think from the perspective of the opponent or the other.

The third essential feature is **Creativity**: if a network of strong relationships grows, within which people are able to transcend normal divisions and spend enough time together, then they are more likely to be creative about developing responses to conflict or division.

Lederach's fourth feature of peacebuilding is **Risk**. If relationships grow strong enough, if people are thinking inclusively and being creative together they will be prepared to take risks for peace.

Another story:

Over the past number of years I have been involved in a project that has brought me into friendship with a particular republican ex-prisoner who has become a writer. One day he asked me if I remembered the first time we had met. My memory went back just a few years to the start of the project but he brought me back to the mid 1980s. He recalled being at a Magistrate's court for a remand hearing. He remembered me coming into the cell as a probation officer and introducing myself. He remembered telling me to Eff off. He remembered me leaving the cell in response to his dismissal. Now we both laughed at the shared memory.

And here he was, years later, with me introducing him to a retired senior RUC officer in relation to his writing and facilitating their meeting over a number of hours.

The irony struck me. I remembered the vaguely hostile reaction that

republican prisoners used to give me when I went to see them in the cells underneath the courthouse.

As far as I was concerned, intuition told me that as the duty social worker at the court I had a duty of care to them and that I should at least offer them whatever help I could give while they were there, even though, in all likelihood, they would refuse it as a service for criminals, not prisoners of war.

This particular man was not interested in my help then but years later he would be in a different place and so would I. Back in the eighties there was no statistical advantage, no performance measurement for my cell visitations. The system did not expect me to stretch out a hand like that and the intended beneficiaries did not want my help. Lost somewhere between the indifference or caution of the system and the rejection of the prisoners, instinct drove me to do it anyway. I was trying to form relationships across divisions of enmity.

I should add that I was no different to many of my colleagues in that endeavour.

Now, of course, we are in different times. The nature of the prison population in Northern Ireland, while retaining a paramilitary element, is much more normal.

But I wonder, what relationship challenges would present themselves to me now as a probation officer.

It seems to me that in these harsher times, when the primary, official expectation of the Probation Officer's involvement with the offender has shifted from 'befriending' to protecting the community, that a central challenge concerns the need to demonstrate the continuing importance of 'care' in Probation practice, as an integral part of the criminal justice system. I am suggesting to you that the best kind of care is driven by compassion. I am encouraging you to believe that our capacity to have compassion is due, in large measure, to the spirituality that is at the heart of our Social Work and that spirituality – or the spirit within each of us as human beings – when properly accessed, is the source of our creativity. I am suggesting that creativity feeds imagination.

John Paul Lederach draws our attention to the importance of a 'moral imagination' among critical groups of people who, together, make peace; make a society more peaceful.

He says that the existence of a moral imagination among critical groups of people enables them to imagine responses and initiatives that, 'while rooted in the challenges of the real world, 'are capable of rising above destructive patterns' and 'ultimately break the grips of those destructive patterns and cycles.'

For Lederach, this is the very heart of peace-building: the need for us to make relationships which, while deeply in touch with reality, are of such a quality that new responses and initiatives can be imagined.

Surely, the Probation service's capacity to meet its targets for offenders, to deliver on the expectations of government – north and south – depends on the extent to which Probation personnel remain capable of forming productive relationships with offenders and their families. And the most productive relationships will be characterised by Care as well as Control; will be underpinned by compassion; will be driven by Probation personnel working in tune with their 'spirit' and imagination. And where such imagination, while not losing touch with hard reality, is shared with the offender the most creative possibilities can be developed which can break the destructive patterns of crime.

And so I put it to you that Care is not a concept that should play second fiddle to the more fashionable concept of Control; Care remains at the heart of good practice.

So this is my challenge to you, practitioners, executives and Policymakers - statutory or voluntary - within criminal justice in Ireland: Thinking of the 'spirituality' within you, does your imagination accompany you to work?

Are you building networks with unlikely people, being creative and taking risks with them?

And this is my question for your conversations with each other now:

What can you say about the extent to which you are building a shared

moral imagination with people from various interest groups relevant to criminal justice but not easily accessible to you ?

Reflection 3: Community.

I should like to share some observations about the Peace Process in Northern Ireland at this time and consider their relevance to criminal justice.

I would argue that the Peace Process effectively involves four 'deals' at this stage in its development.

The first deal is the political deal, concerning shared governance.

The second deal is the security deal, on policing, demilitarisation, decommissioning of weapons and the end of paramilitarism.

Both of these deals are the subject of most comment and endeavour.

However, there are two other important deals to be reckoned with.

The third deal is the economic deal. It is a fact that, in many ways, Northern Ireland is living beyond its means. We are still dependent on a level of state subvention by far in excess of that which is enjoyed in other parts of the United Kingdom. But the signs of change are there to be seen: the eagerness of Westminster to have Northern Ireland pay its way and generate more of its own budget - for example, the Government's eagerness to introduce water charges as in Great Britain; the end of large scale European aid for the community and voluntary sector and an expectation that innovative work which has been funded in the voluntary sector should be adopted and incorporated within statutory

services, thereby ending such voluntary sector programmes and the extra financial burden they represent.

The fourth deal is the social deal, involving housing, education, health and community cohesion. In this respect, the Government's newly published policy for the development of Community Relations, entitled 'A Shared Future', is of fundamental importance

The Shared Future policy makes clear the British Government's view that the only future for all sides in Northern Ireland is a shared one; that, like any normal society, Northern Ireland can only function on –

- an assurance, enshrined in law, of **equity** between all citizens;
- a commitment to respect and value **diversity** and
- an acknowledgement of the beneficial reality of **interdependence** between citizens and communities.

At present, politicians are at loggerheads over the first two deals. But, politicians have a healthy instinct for the acquisition of power and, like homing pigeons, they shall eventually find their way to the shared loft of governance.

However, the political dimension of the Peace Process is likely to take several more years. My concern is for the conditions for the social deal – the shared future- in the meantime. It is quite possible that by the time the political deal matures, the conditions for the social deal will have deteriorated and that our future may be inhibited by a society which is

more entrenched and distrustful; where old enmities have found new form in a younger generation that comes of age during these crucial years of political limbo, at a time when across Northern Ireland, the main traditions become hardened by disillusionment with each other in the light of our collective failure, since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, to turn its promise of peace into reality.

It should be noted that the work of probation personnel is primarily concentrated among the marginalized and less hopeful sections of society; along the sharp edges of our respective divisions where the idea of a shared future can be more easily dismissed as a middle class pipe dream. If the social cohesion of Northern society becomes weakened by a sustained political stalemate, the consequences are likely to be more immediately felt in the work of Probation.

To counteract this negative possibility, Probation must make a contribution to the development of a citizenship curriculum for schools and youth work and support a process of wider civic envisioning around values which communities can identify with, in spite of their divisions.

At this point, let me pause once more and invite you to engage with each other in twos and threes, exchanging your reactions to what you have just heard.

Reflection 4: Change.

My final remarks about creating inclusive and safer communities concern the challenge of change and I should like to address five aspects of change.

1. Community Relations Policy – I have already referred to the British Government's new Shared Future policy which sets out a strategy for the promotion of Good Relations in Northern Ireland. Let me briefly highlight two points. Firstly, the Share Future policy calls on public bodies, as employers and as service providers to lead by example and set the pace on movement towards a shared society. In this context, supporting Good Relations has implications for the organisational culture of the Probation service and for the development of Probation practice.

Secondly, the Shared Future policy states an expectation that 'the police and the criminal justice system will deal firmly with behaviour that is not consistent with what is expected in a normal society.' Surely this places an onus on Probation to develop its programmes for the management and rehabilitation of offenders who have been convicted of offences associated with sectarianism, homophobia and racism.

2. Policing – quite naturally, almost all of the focus on the implementation of the reforms recommended by the Patten commission on policing in Northern Ireland has been on the police. However, another important focus needs to be brought to bear on the community.

Patten recommended that Community Policing be central to the work of the new police service. Community Policing, as a philosophy which is practised across the world, emphasises partnership between police officers and communities; the kind of partnership in which the professional competence of the police officer is matched by the personal competence of citizens with local knowledge and insight and both engage in problem –solving strategies on issues which they agree together as priorities in their locality. Although, District Policing Partnerships have been established across Northern Ireland to provide a framework for community policing the signs are that there is little conceptual awareness of the philosophy involved and the shift in mindsets which community policing requires of police officer and the average citizen. The development of community policing will of course impact on the work of the Probation service and will entail a similar cultural shift in Probation practice. And with developments in Garda reform it is reasonable to expect that Northern trends will

influence policing practice and, indeed, probation practice in the Irish Republic.

Of course, the absence of Sinn Fein and the republican constituency from the new structures of policing in Northern Ireland remains a huge inhibition to the development of the Patten vision of policing. Furthermore, when republicans do come on board we can expect their arrival to occasion a kind of convulsion within the northern policing world which will present huge challenges for all concerned.

3. Community Safety – the establishment of Community Safety Partnerships at virtually the same time as District Policing Partnerships creates the danger of duplication and of over-stretching civic leadership at the local level in Northern Ireland.

Of course the concept of Community Safety is valid and timely but there is a danger of idealising the community; of expecting a level of community participation in civic structures which the bulk of our citizens may not be inclined to give. After all, many citizens comfortably expect the professionals to deliver public services. They want to be left alone while Home Helps support the elderly, social workers care for people with personal problems and police look after crime. There is a need to renew the citizen's sense of responsibility for problems associated with crime.

4. Restorative Justice – a phenomenon which has grown in Northern Ireland in recent years is the development of community-based Restorative Justice schemes. In the main these schemes operate in areas where paramilitaries have traditionally exercised control and a number of ex-prisoners hold leadership roles in R.J. projects. It is a well known fact that an uneasy relationship exists between Government and the Community Restorative Justice field, principally over the question of the role of the police in Restorative Justice programmes. It will be a welcome development when a consensus is ironed out between statutory authorities and the Community Restorative Justice sector. While human rights standards and Good Practice guidelines need to be more firmly assured, the Restorative Justice field has the potential to make an important contribution to the kind of civic activism and citizen participation which is dreamed of in a range of Government policies, from Community Cohesion to Good Relations, from Community Safety to Community Policing.

5. Diversity – the last area of change to which I would draw your attention relates to the growing levels of immigration to Ireland, north and south. High levels of immigration are a sign of a healthy economy. They are a sign of Ireland making a transition from being an economic backwater on the western fringe of the European Union to

one of its best performing economic units.

However, the growing diversification of society brings new challenges to communities which have been comfortably mono-cultural and homogeneous for generations. In Northern Ireland there is the added danger that unresolved traumas and prejudices from the Troubles will be visited upon our new and emergent minorities. It is interesting to note that the latest crime figures report a 7.7% drop in overall crime in the past year in Northern Ireland while the number of racially motivated incidents increased by around 80%.

The diversification of our society is one of the surest signs that we are normalising and in the words of Duncan Morrow of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, that we are moving from being a land which exports her children to being one which welcomes the children of others.

However, the integration of migrant workers into society inevitably involves social and economic strain and the growth in racially motivated offending. The Probation service must be to the fore in ensuring that the criminal justice system does more than simply censor racially motivated offenders; it must effectively mediate between such offenders and the perceived threats and insecurities of their changing world.

