



DHM
Divine Healing
MINISTRIES

The Peacemakers

**Article about the story of how James Tate
and Tom Kelly became ambassadors of
reconciliation**

Born into prejudice

James grew up in Belfast in the staunchly Loyalist Sandy Row area. He didn't go to church, but his family identified with the Orange movement. As a matter of course he joined the junior Orange Lodge in his area. In the mid—to late 1960's there was much unrest as the two communities fought to establish their civil rights. Riots, protests, marches and violence were commonplace. The Protestant community felt intimidated and scared. They didn't know what was happening.

Belfast was a divided city. James didn't know any Roman Catholics. All he knew was that he hated them. His hatred was rooted in fear. His reasons were not sophisticated; basically their traditions were different from his. He wanted to defend his community from the violence that was beginning to escalate.

His confidence in the security forces was low so he and others decided to band together to defend their community. *“The IRA began to bomb public houses and bars in the area where I lived and people were badly injured and killed. This pushed me over the edge and made me get involved in forming the UVF in Sandy Row”.*

James was convinced that a civil war was about to break out. The fledgling UVF was in a state of high alert. *“We were really scared. We used to stand on the corners all night long waiting for the IRA to come”.* At first they armed themselves with sticks and bottles and fought in the streets, protected by barricades. It wasn't long before they

started to find out more about guns – how to get them and how to use them.

Prison life

Eventually James was arrested at 8 am on an Easter Sunday morning. The RUC searched his house where they found guns and several thousand rounds of ammunition. He was charged with armed possession and given a five-year sentence. *“My first and lasting impression of prison life was during my first night in the Crumlin Road. I shall never forget seeing a dead young man being wheeled past me on a gurney. He’d been murdered for informing—he was a Loyalist himself. They had actually poisoned him by forcing tablets down his throat”*.

Another significant moment was in 1974 during internment when the IRA organised a mass break-out. The prison was virtually razed to the ground. At that time there were 2,000 to 3,000 Loyalist prisoners and 1,500 or so Republican prisoners in Long Kesh. Complete anarchy reigned—it was the first time James had actually feared for his life. *“It came as a complete surprise. We had no idea something like this was going to happen. We settled down in our prison cells and then we heard screaming and shouting. We opened the windows and saw the fire starting at the lower end of the camp. We realized that there were no prison officers and that it might develop into an outright riot”*.

A peace was eventually brokered and things calmed down.

When the army were rounding up the prisoners James noticed that one young Republican lad was surrounded by soldiers who were picking on him. *“They ordered him back to the huts but insisted first that he run up and down on the spot with a breeze block above his head—they then beat him with batons. My heart went out to him.*

It was the first time in my life that I had compassion for a Roman Catholic. He was only about 17. I had a young son myself. After the soldiers had finished beating him one of them turned to me and said: “Watch it, Paddy, or I’ll do the same to you”.

New Life

James was released after serving three and a half years. He was disillusioned and bitter but determined to have nothing more to do with violence. *“The UVF came to my door and asked me to be a commander again but I refused. They threatened to kill me. Eventually they let me get on with my life. I tried to live a normal life but it wasn’t easy. I found it hard to get a job; I had two kids to support. I eventually got work at the East Belfast Mission. I was doing maintenance on the church. I had no intention of getting involved in religion or anything like that. I just wanted a job.*

However, I started seeing for myself the good this little church was trying to do. I couldn’t have been in a better place. The pastor had a heart for alcoholics and down-and-outs. I saw basic Christianity being lived out. I saw a goodness in the people which I found very attractive. I

saw Christian love in action. It was really lovely to see the work the church was doing.

Two guys witnessed to me. One had been involved in the paramilitary and he shared how Jesus had changed his life. I was shocked to discover he was a Catholic. He told me his life story. I was amazed that he was a Catholic and he was working in an East Belfast Protestant church. His witness really touched me and I sat down and told him my story. Up to that moment I'd never told anybody about my past. I actually cried for the first time in a very long time.

Shortly after this Pauline and I started going along just to see what church was all about. Around this time there was a crusade on and a man called Nicky Cruz was giving a talk. He spoke about his life in New York. Like me he'd been a bad boy—he was involved in all sorts, including drugs and prostitution. He started to tell us about Jesus and how Jesus forgave him—when I heard that I pricked up my ears. More than anything else I wanted to be forgiven. It felt as if nothing could shift the burden I carried. I heard about how Christ forgave me and took away my sins. I went forward to an altar call—I wanted to do that and Pauline did it as well. That night we made a commitment to Christ. Our lives changed—we walked out as two different people.

We stopped old bad habits that we had. We started going to another little church in East Belfast. I really learnt about Christ there. There were teachings from the older men—it was a lovely five years learning about Christ and the Bible. During this time a desire came over me to go

and meet the Catholic community. I was so sorry for the things I had done to that community and for the things that had been done to them which I had supported. I wanted to tell them how sorry I was. I wanted to say to one person: "I'm sorry".

Pauline had heard about a group called Maranatha who were organizing a meeting in the Republican part of Belfast. I was scared of going up to that area. Pauline came home and a meeting was arranged through Dennis Wrigley, the leader of Maranatha. I told him my story and he said: "I've someone you should meet". He arranged for me to meet Tom".

Early years

Tom grew up in the Turf Lodge area of Belfast, a Republican stronghold. He had a normal and happy childhood. He excelled at sport (especially Gaelic football). He loved school and in many ways had an idyllic childhood. He describes his childhood as *'lovely and happy'*. He left school at 15. His first job was as a barman. One night the IRA planted a bomb in a bakery next door to the pub he was working in. The following day he walked into the backlash of angry and hostile customers. He had no option but to leave. He found it hard to get work and signed on the dole. Work was scarce so he and his friend hung around street corners. The civil rights protests were hotting up. Tom joined in with the stone and bottle throwing.

Membership of the IRA

Tom went on to join the junior wing of the IRA. He was treated like any army conscript. *“I was trained to strip down weapons and put them back together again. I received a very thorough training in all aspects of dealing with land mines, bombs and all kinds of weaponry”*. Tom found himself drawn more deeply into terrorism and crime. *“The first thing I was given to do was fire a .303 rifle. I’d never fired a weapon in my life. When I did I got such a sense of power. My first shot was at an armoured vehicle”*.

His superiors thought he showed potential so he was sent away to a special camp to train as a sniper. *“I was shown how to respond under interrogation and how to keep my mouth shut if I was arrested. I was convinced I was fighting for my country. I was wanted by the RUC and MI5”*.

Long Kesh

Tom was interned in Long Kesh in 1973. He was only 17. During his internment he was involved in the mass break-out. *“We were waiting for it for some time but it came as a bit of a surprise. We noticed that the top end of the camp had started to burn so we broke out down our end. We burst out of our cages, set our wing on fire. We had the full run of the camp for a long time. The British Army eventually came in—they saturated the whole place with CS gas to reclaim the camp”*.

Tom was released in 1975. He was bitter, confused and angry. *“I went straight back into active service. I was full of rage. I trained young recruits to use weapons and explosives. I wouldn’t send them in to do something that I wouldn’t do myself. My work for the IRA was full time. I had a score to settle—it completely took over my life”.*

He was arrested again in August 1976 for the attempted murder of a British soldier. He was 21. In Long Kesh his OC (Operating Commander) was Bobby Sands. Tom was involved in the protests (dirty and blanket) for political status. He saw many of his comrades’ die on hunger strike.

Life on the outside

Tom left prison in 1982 a bitter and deeply unhappy man. He was confused and disorientated. He had become disenchanted with violence and the cause. Many of his friends had died on hunger strike. He received a hero’s welcome from his community but found life difficult. He retreated inside himself and became a virtual recluse. He broke from the IRA in 1985.

A major turning point came when he met Catherine, his future wife. She was working as a waitress and he was the barman in a local club. *“I was immediately very attracted to her. She had a lovely, jovial personality, a warm-hearted sort of person. She seemed to like me but I wasn’t sure if it was just out of pity for me. She had great faith in God which really attracted me. She used to go to Mass even when I was dating her. People talk—so she knew all*

about me and my past. Through her influence my eyes began to open to God.

She used to go on pilgrimage. I went with her on one, really just to keep her happy. I hated myself and what I had become, and the people were talking about prayers being answered and miracles happening and situations which seemed hopeless being turned around. It occurred to me that these people had faith and I didn't. That's why they were able to cope and I wasn't. I began to ask: "What have I to do to become like them?"

To be honest I didn't know where to start. I was in fear of God. If He was real and I accepted Him He couldn't but hate me because of what I had done. I remember pondering this and these words came into my head: "Tom, give Me your heart". This little phrase just stuck with me, I couldn't get rid of it. Catherine saw I was getting very agitated: "What's wrong with you, you're very quiet? I know there's something wrong".

I thought I was going crackers. I told her that these words wouldn't leave me. What could I ever give God or do for God? Why me? I felt dirty, used, abused, evil—I felt all those things. Catherine said: "Why don't you respond, why don't you just answer Him?" I remember saying, "Lord, I give you my heart". I made that conscious response and I felt a bit lighter.

In answer to prayer

A few weeks later God responded to my prayer. An American priest, Fr Ed Wade, was visiting Belfast. Fr Ed had been in the US Marines. He was giving a talk on the Holy Spirit. It was based on scripture and he also gave his testimony. As he spoke about God my heart responded to what he was saying. One of my in-laws told him all about me and he wanted to meet me.

Fr Ed opened me like a book over a period of months. He spent time with me and he helped me deal with a lot of negative feelings. He also told me why Jesus had died and risen from the dead. He focused on the cross and said it was for people like me that Jesus died and no matter how screwed up or how crimson your sins are He will make them as white as snow. My heart lifted: I began to see hope. I was having these awful flashbacks about some of the terrible things I had done. I began to experience great sorrow not for myself but for what I had inflicted on the community. I knew I needed some sort of healing.

I remember going to a meeting with Fr Ed and he began to call upon the Holy Spirit. A lot of people in the hall were being touched by God's Spirit. One gift I received was the gift of joy. I know it sounds strange, but I laughed and laughed and laughed—I even fell on the floor and my ribs were that sore from laughing. The Holy Spirit had touched me very deeply because that evening I was full of negative feelings but by the end of it I had great joy. That was the first time I'd ever experienced anything like that. It totally blew my mind.

One guy beside me got the gift of tongues: I'd never heard anything like it before. Catherine was wonderful to me. She didn't impose herself, she didn't preach or intimidate or threaten. She just prayed a lot .Fr Ed told them all about me and a lot of people came over to me and found it in their hearts to say that God loved me and forgave me and that they forgave me and loved me, so I had the first visible sign of God's love. I could hardly hold back the tears. I have cried a lot since then as I've become more humbled. That was my first step. I realised that I had to face the truth within myself of the life I had been living and where I was at the moment and where I wanted to go”.

Tom and Catherine married and have five children. The birth of his children had a profound effect on Tom. “I never thought I'd be a father. When I saw the children being born it opened something in my heart. I welled up inside. Here were five children given to me by God. I began to see the sacredness of what life really means and what it is. I had a sense of loss too. For the first time I felt what it would be like to lose a child. I sensed the pain and the hurt of what it would be like. I had been so involved in dreaming up ideas of how to take life; it really shifted me seeing my own children born”.

A powerful meeting

One evening Tom gave his witness at a meeting hosted by Maranatha. “Pauline (James' wife) came over to me and said “I'd love you to meet my husband”. I said: “Oh yes,

why?” She said: “He has a very similar background to you”. I said: “Oh, what was it?” She said: “He was in prison as well; but was in the UVF—but he’s completely changed now”. They decided to meet up. “During the week we were trying to imagine what each other looked like. I got down there as quickly as I could, but Jim got down there before me. I was looking for him and Pauline saw me and said, “come and meet my husband”. I had this picture in my head of what a UVF man would look like. He was completely the opposite of what I thought. I was introduced to him and we shook hands and sat down and began to talk to one another. We just talked. We began to talk about issues, about paramilitary life. We realized we had a lot in common. We said we were sorry and we forgave each other. We talked about how we should accept and love each other. Our first meeting was very powerful—it was really the beginning of the healing, just being able to say we were sorry to each other was tremendous”.

Ambassadors of reconciliation

For James, meeting Tom has been one of the most significant things in his life. He has a great sense of their mutual calling. *“Our walk together couldn’t have been planned. Amazing doors have opened for us. We are basically proclaiming a message of reconciliation. People actually want to come just to see us standing together, just because they’re inquisitive that two men who once would have shot each other dead and who were sworn enemies are standing on the same platform together is actually bringing the Bible alive. Our hope is that*

through repentance, a change of attitude and heart, lives will change and peace will come.

I would love God to use this opportunity to tell others about His love. I love the kids we work with. They are so inquisitive and they're so innocent. Of course there are some who are genuinely mixed up. We're meeting people from all different churches and denominations. It's a great healing to hear people like Tom and myself saying we're sorry for things that we have done. There's hope in that healing. It's a healing for them to be able to forgive people like Tom and myself for things we have done. People need to have that opportunity. We're going into schools and we see thousands of children, and we do assemblies. We're not trying to promote a particular church or anything; we're promoting Christ's love. It's amazing, it's a miracle”.

Work of reconciliation

Tom and James live in Belfast and are now involved in the work of reconciliation. They have witnessed in the House of Lords and have been to Jordan to share their message with others involved in the work of reconciliation around the world. Their prophetic ministry involves them visiting schools where they share how Christ's power breaks the stronghold of division and how through repentance bitter enemies can be reconciled.

*“If My people, who are called by My name,
will humble themselves and pray and seek*

*My face and turn from their wicked ways,
then I will hear from heaven and will
forgive their sin and heal their land.”*

(2 Chronicles 7 v. 14)

*“How good and pleasant
it is when brothers live
together in unity!”*

(Psalm 133 v. 1)

*“Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God”*

(Matthew 5 v. 9)

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