By David McKittrick, Ireland Correspondent
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In the fraught, terrible hours after the Omagh bombing, a temporary mortuary was set up in the Lisanelly army barracks just a few hundred yards from the centre of the blast.

The Army provided curtains, flowers and comfortable chairs for those waiting for the news they dreaded. The death toll was so high that some had to queue to identify their loved ones. Lisanelly was where some had their last glimpses of their loved ones, sometimes seeing sights which have never left them.

"She had a face full of shrapnel," a father said of his teenage daughter. Another parent would later say: "That's what I see every night, that makeshift mortuary."

Ten years on, Lisanelly is now empty – rendered redundant by the peace process – but there are plans for rebuilding it, this time as a beacon of

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hope for the future.

Far from being pushed apart by violence, the Protestant and Catholic Churches have launched an unprecedented effort to create a shared future for the children of the town.

More than 90 per cent of Northern Ireland's children are educated in segregated schools: that's the way it has always been. But the Churches now want to bring together half a dozen existing schools, Catholic and Protestant, secondary and primary, in new premises on the Lisanelly site.

Nothing as ambitious and far-reaching as this has ever been seen before in Northern Ireland. It is an unmistakable sign that the prevailing mood is anything but bitter, and that the town where 29 died has not allowed itself to be brutalised by the bombers.

So the dissident republicans who blew it up did not wreck community relations nor wreck the peace process as they had hoped. Instead, those involved in the process redoubled their efforts, eventually delivering today's peace.

Omagh and district has managed to maintain harmonious community relations instead of splitting into divisive factions and mutual recrimination. It is a unity of shared grief: the bomb killed Protestants and Catholics alike, so that the pain and the loss was collective.

As the Rev Robert Herron, the local Presbyterian minister, described it: "The response was very much a human response, not so much a sectarian one."

A Catholic parish priest, Monsignor Joe Donnelly, agreed: "Omagh was always distinctive in that there was very little rank sectarianism here, and it didn't allow itself to be divided. There is a good respect for each other's traditions, and an acceptance that we should work together on common projects."

In education, segregation has always been the order of the day. But Monsignor Donnelly and the Rev Herron jointly head a campaign to gather local schools together.

While the schools would remain separate entities, they would become part of an "educational village", sharing the land and its facilities. Pupils of different religions would mix socially and in many activities.

The Rev Herron said: "The words we're using is that the schools would co-operate, collaborate and be inter-dependent. This is a positive and creative vision." Monsignor Donnelly added: "There would be cross-community sharing between all the different schools. The beauty of it is that there is a surge of interest and a quiet excitement about the possibilities."

A senior Unionist has called it "a magnificent opportunity", while Sinn Fein described it as "an inspirational beacon to the world in respect of conflict transformation". Much will depend, however, on whether the Ministry of Defence is prepared to hand over the ground.

It seems almost beyond belief that Northern Ireland's most deeply wounded town should be actively working towards a common future, and thinking of co-existence rather than separation. Yet many talk of the town's strong sense of hope.

David Bolton, whose counselling service has helped more than 100 people cope with the effects of the bomb, said: "There's optimism around. Young people are positive and forward-looking."

The organisation the world knows best is the Omagh Support and Self Help Group, which represents some victims' families and which maintains a vocal public campaign. Its speciality is the use of legal action.

Unfortunately, the group has recently become involved in disagreements on exactly how to mark the 10th anniversary of the attack. This means that this year there will be two separate commemoration ceremonies.

But right from the start, immediately after the bomb, there were signs that the town would not let its hurt turn into acrimony.

At one of the funerals, a Catholic bishop told townspeople: "If it could become a model for the type of Northern Ireland we want to build, something good will have come of this." Remarkably, his words were applauded by the congregation.

Since then, sorrow has gone hand in hand with determined efforts by the community and by individuals to move on. A girl who lost a leg will shortly be married; another amputee has become a teacher.

Another teenager was so badly injured that she begged her father to help her die: today she is an occupational therapist and the mother of two sons.

A young woman who lost her eyesight works as a counsellor for the Royal National Institute for the Blind. "I've tried to make the most of my life," she explained. "Everybody has their way of coping, and my way of coping is to get on with it." Wesley Atchison, editor of the Tyrone Constitution newspaper, illustrates how the bomb's effects cannot be escaped. "There has rarely been a week when there hasn't been some development relating to the bomb. So it's very much an ongoing atrocity – it's not going to disappear in this generation. But above all we have amazingly resilient people."

One of the most resilient of them all is Mick Grimes, now 83, whose family suffered terribly in the bombing.

Mick and his wife, Mary, had 12 children together. Mary was 66 on the day she died: she went into Omagh with her daughter, Avril, and her little grand-daughter.

Avril's last words to Mick as they drove off from their farmyard were "We are away now, bye."

Mick has said little publicly over the past decade but has now produced a book, launched a few days ago in Omagh, of his prose and poems.

This quiet country poet who has had to endure so much grief has – in common with many in Omagh – succeeded in reaching what another Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, described as "the far side of revenge".

Like most of Omagh, he displays no bitterness. Instead, he focuses on the day when, in another world, the lost members of his family will be restored to him.

That is why he called his book Till We Meet Again, and why he writes in it:

"Though our hearts are still breaking, we must try to smile:

"They are waiting to greet us at the end of the mile."

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