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GALLAGHER OFFERS TO MEET CHURCH OF IRELAND LEADERS FOLLOWING BORDER PROTESTANT STUDY

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SDLP Fermanagh and South Tyrone MLA Tommy Gallagher has offered to hold a meeting with local Church of Ireland leaders after a study revealed that the 1981 election of IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands remained a sore point for Protestants in the area.

The Church of Ireland report interviewed 40 people from the Diocese of Clogher and Mr Gallagher said he would be interested in meeting representatives to discuss the issue further.

He said: “The conflict left many in this constituency, both Catholic and Protestant, bereaved, injured and traumatised.

“While there is no hierarchy of victims the fears and concerns expressed in this report are very valid and should be acknowledged.

“The early eighties were a particularly dark period in our history where atrocities were committed on both sides.

“However, it is important this legacy of pain be addressed on a basis of reconciliation and mutual understanding.

“The IRA’s campaign of violence, where thousands of innocent people lost their lives, was opposed by the majority of both sections of the community and the election of Bobby Sands took place against a backdrop of fear right through the entire community.

“The entire circumstances surrounding his death were handled in a most insensitive way by the British Government.

“It is important that a forum be created to resolve all outstanding issues relating to this difficult period of our past for without it we cannot face our future.

“I plan to write to Church of Ireland clergy in the area to request a meeting in order to examine ways in which this approach can be facilitated.

“It is important we move on for the sake and interests of all victims, which is why the work of the victims’ commission must continue unhindered.

“Furthermore, this report underpins the need to reconvene the Civic Forum and the all-Ireland consultative

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forum, both key elements of the Good Friday Agreement as a way of supporting power-sharing, partnership and improving relations not only in the wider community throughout the whole of Ireland.”

ENDS

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