

**Causeway Coast Peace Group**  
**Annual Report April 2022 - March 2023**

It has been so good to be able to meet this year after the global pandemic lockdowns, and to resume our Peace Group meetings and events once again. Whilst we have sadly lost several members due to death and changes in circumstances, it is encouraging that we have been able to welcome 8 new members, bringing our membership this year to 58.

2022 was the year of the Peace Group's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and we celebrated the event in May with a meal at the Royal Court Hotel, Portrush. We were delighted that Mr Richard Holmes, the Mayor of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, was able to join us as well as guests from Ballycastle Church Action and Portstewart Churches Friendship Group. There was a very interesting display of photographs and some of the significant Peace Group press coverage reports, which served to remind everyone of the journey of friendship and peace building we have made together over the last 20 years.

In June we held a special Service of Thanksgiving in Ballintoy Parish Church for the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Peace Group. We were delighted to welcome The Route Singers with their artistic and uplifting music. It was a privilege to welcome the Very Rev. Martin Magill who took as the theme of his inspirational address, 'Beyond peace-making to peace building'. As reported in the Coleraine Chronicle, he gave us three principles: "The first principle: don't contrive - build a friendship, and when the time comes and God wants a response to something new, respond from the foundation of the friendship. The second principle: look beyond those you perceive to be your own - we must, as people of faith, work in the spirit of tolerance, peace and reconciliation. The third principle: develop a contemplative spirit – we must develop our skills to listen and to reflect before we act and take time to process and to discern what God is calling us to be and to do." Mr Ivor Wallace, the new Mayor of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, joined many members and friends at the service and afterwards for tea and biscuits in the Fullerton Arms. From the retiring collection we were able to send £405 to support the work of Good Morning Ballycastle.

Following suggestions from a discussion of members at the meeting in March 2019, we launched our new programme on the theme of 'Justice and Peace-making' at our September meeting. Members also expressed a desire to have more opportunities for social time and discussion. To this end, the committee decided to have refreshments at the beginning of the meeting with seating around tables, rather than in rows. Speakers were asked to provide a few questions for us to discuss after their talk. Our speaker at the September meeting was Jean Horstman who talked about 'Nurturing Hope'. She encouraged us to seek out ways to initiate change within our communities, crossing from fear and anxiety to a place of peace and hope. Jean posed us the question 'How do we spread and share hope?' which resulted in searching and interesting discussions.

Roisin O'Hara from Trocaire was the speaker at our November meeting. She gave an excellent presentation on the theme, 'Environmental Justice and Ecological Conversion' which was both disturbing and challenging. She highlighted how global warming and exploitation of indigenous people's habitats and minerals was having a severe impact on the

poorest nations in Africa and the southern hemisphere. Roisin gave us hope for the future if we embraced Ecological Conversion- working for the common good with an attitude of 'what is mine is yours'. During the discussion which followed the talk, some practical ideas were suggested about what we could do locally to reduce carbon emissions, food waste and increase recycling.

The Peace Group met for the first time in 1<sup>st</sup> Ballymoney Presbyterian Church Hall for our January meeting. Nigel Handforth and Sheila Jackson came from Portstewart Community Association to speak on the theme, 'Justice for Refugees'. They brought with them two Syrian refugees who have settled with their families in Portstewart. It was a very informative presentation about the realities for refugees and asylum seekers, and the challenges they face. Learning English and integrating into our society are big issues for refugees, who often feel vulnerable and isolated. It was good to be able to hear about the experiences of the two Syrian men, who joined in with the discussion following the talk. The issues raised at the meeting highlighted the need to have greater understanding of each other's cultures and faiths, and how important it is to treat everyone with dignity and kindness.

In March our theme was 'Criminal Justice and Victim Support'. Sergeant Wendy McConnell addressed the first issue informing us about the different levels of reporting a crime and the challenges to bring cases to court. She highlighted various issues and pressures faced by the local Neighbourhood Team which include staffing shortages and lack of resources. Inspector David Cleland outlined how the PSNI tries to provide a joined-up service of support for victims of crime. Victims need to consent to support, most of which is provided by the voluntary sector.

On behalf of the Peace Group, the committee has responded to a couple of local issues this year. A letter of support for Mr James Nesbitt was sent following a sectarian graffiti attack on his Portrush home. We have also written to the Policing and Community Safety Partnership, and had dialogue with two of North Antrim's MLAs, about getting the anti-PSNI posters in Bushmills removed. We live in hope but are realistic about the difficulties.

In conclusion, I hope you have all enjoyed the Causeway Coast Peace Group programme this year and as a result feel motivated to work for justice and peace in some new way. I would like to thank you all for attending meetings and events. I would particularly like to thank all the committee for their hard work, support and encouragement during this, my first year as your chairperson.

Mary Taylor  
Chair of CCPG  
May 2023