

CCPG Annual Report April 2023 – March 2024

The Causeway Coast Peace Group has had a full programme of meetings and activities this year which have been well attended by members. We are very fortunate to have received the 'Awards for All' grant which has helped with the costs of running our programme and offering activities at a reduced or no cost. It is encouraging that we now have 60 members which is an increase on our pre-pandemic membership, and all our meetings have attracted a number of friends and visitors.

On a lovely sunny day in June 2023, we visited the Moravian Village at Gracehill and had a guided walking tour. We learnt about the Moravian way of community life and were able to see inside the Store, the Meeting House and a former accommodation house which is now a museum and restaurant. We had an excellent meal in the restaurant before travelling to Cloughmills to visit their Community Environment Project. It was encouraging to see how the project was sustainable and that they grew food which was offered free to the local community. Members agreed that it was a most enjoyable, interesting and informative day out.

Later in June we had our annual Service of Thanksgiving which was held in St Mary's and St Joseph's Church, Ballintoy. Music was provided by Celtic Psalms and the address entitled 'Acorns of Justice' was given by Rev Cheryl Meban. Rev Meban said, that even small acts of kindness can have significant impact on others and can bring about change for the better in our communities. Members lit candles and renewed their commitment to peace. The retiring collection raised £320 for the work of the Corrymeela. Refreshments were provided by the committee after the service in St Joseph's Hall where we enjoyed the opportunity to socialise with guests and friends.

Our new programme, 'Signs of Hope' was launched at the September meeting when we welcomed Dr Alex Wimberly, Leader of the Corrymeela Community, as our speaker. His talk titled, 'Lost Swans: Finding our Internal Compass', challenged us to have a communal Spirit, and to learn to share and trust one another as we travel together, bringing hope and light for the future.

Professor Gladys Ganiel from QUB, and Professor Darren Kew from Boston, USA were our speakers at the November meeting. They spoke on the theme, 'Signs of Hope in Faith-Based Peacebuilding in NI'. Professor Ganiel talked about the many groups in Belfast who have formed to try to bring healing and safety to their communities. One sign of hope is that the younger generations are more socially engaged across the divide, and youth programmes, like one at Clonard, are doing good work. She also challenged us, that for a sustainable peace everyone would need to go beyond their comfort zone which may involve forgiveness. Professor Kew is doing some research at QUB and was interested in grass roots stories which are effective in leading the way to a better, shared future. Several members met with him in January and shared their stories

about their motivation for joining the Peace Group, and some of the influences we've had as a group over local sectarian and racist issues.

Our Christmas lunch was held at the Royal Court Hotel, Portrush and attracted more members than we've ever had previously. Before lunch we were entertained by Katy Bustard and the Dunseverick Harpers which was truly delightful. It set the tone for the occasion and there followed a happy buzz of conversation whilst having our meal.

Captain Tim Cook from the Salvation Army spoke about 'Faith in Action' at our January meeting. He gave us a very interesting talk about the history of the Salvation Army, and the work that they continue to do today. He told us about the sort of problems they are dealing with locally and identified some of the signs that would help us recognise people who may have been trafficked. Tim said that the Salvation Army seeks not to treat people as problems but as humans with needs, which was a helpful thought.

In February, 20 members went on a visit to the Belfast Synagogue. Michael Black, one of the Synagogue leaders, gave us a comprehensive tour, and a very informative talk about the Belfast Jewish community, their worship and culture. Following the tour, we had a delicious lunch at the NI Hospice café.

The speaker at our March meeting was Rev Shona Bell who talked about her experiences of working with groups of young people from different backgrounds. This has involved discussing the issues which affect them today and exploring ways to keep them safe from exploitation by paramilitaries, which can trap them into drugs and crime. Rev Bell also spoke about the work of the charity 'Prevent' who, through persistence and neighbourhood initiatives are seeing real signs of change which gives hope for a better future for the younger generation.

I hope you have all enjoyed the Causeway Coast Peace Group programme 'Signs of Hope' this year and feel encouraged that even the small things you do can make a positive difference in our community. I'd like to thank you all for your continued support this year attending meetings and events. To finish, I would particularly like to thank the committee for their hard work this year in planning and delivering the programme. They have all shown such dedication and commitment to the task which has made my job as your Chair much easier. This concludes my report for 2023-2024. Thank you.

Mary Taylor

Chair CCPG