

Causeway Coast Peace Group
Annual Report April 2024-March 2025

The Causeway Coast Peace Group has had a full programme of meetings and activities this year which have been well attended by members and visitors. We are very grateful to have received grants from both APEX Housing and the National Lottery 'Awards for All' without which we would struggle to finance our programme.

We celebrated our 22nd Thanksgiving Service last June in Ballintoy Parish Church. The address entitled, 'Peace be with you' was given by the Rev Dr John Murdock and music was provided by the McFall family as members lit candles and renewed their commitment to peace. The retiring collection raised £518 for the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice.

Our new programme, 'Fortitude and Resilience' was launched at our September meeting when we welcomed Mr Derek Moore from the North-West Cultural Partnership, as our speaker. In his talk Derek spoke about the cultural diversity in Derry and the challenges of integrating the community. The use of different musical and dance traditions, including the marching bands, have helped people appreciate and respect each other, bringing greater unity to the City.

The September meeting and our educational visit to the NW Islamic Centre in Derry last October, were kindly funded by APEX Housing. We travelled by train and coach to the Islamic Centre, where we were made most welcome by their leader, Sameh Hassan. Sameh gave us a very informative, illustrated PowerPoint presentation about Islam: the history, beliefs, the role of women and family life. We then had the opportunity to talk with him, several women and children as they showed us around the Islamic Centre. It was a very happy visit, which helped us to better understand and appreciate our Islamic neighbours.

Mr Dougie Tyler was the speaker at our November meeting. In his illustrated talk titled, 'Refugees: A Side Effect of Conflict' Dougie explained how he spent a month helping refugees fleeing from Ukraine into Romania after the Russian incursion. His account of their plight, how they were processed and moved to more permanent places of safety, was very moving.

Our Christmas lunch was again held at the Royal Court Hotel, Portrush where we enjoyed lively conversation and had an excellent meal.

Rev Norman Hamilton spoke about 'Revisiting Peace in NI?' at our January meeting. Norman highlighted the fact that none of the governments or churches have a descriptor of peace! One point that he made was about the increasing number of immigrants and levels of poverty in NI which have brought new community tensions. It

was thought that perhaps there is a need to have peace conversations to understand and deal with current issues which divide people. Being kind to everyone, regardless of their backgrounds, was suggested as one way we can connect our faith in Jesus to greater community harmony.

The speaker at our March meeting was Fr Kevin McGuckien who said in his talk titled 'Embracing Grace' that peace is a gift and it's our duty to cherish and nurture it. He encouraged us that instead of anger, hatred and despair, we can seek God's grace to reflect, guide our actions and give inner peace. Fr Kevin gave a personal testimony about how the power of communal prayers for peace in a difficult community situation was for him, just as important as the peace negotiations. This reinforced the importance of ending each Peace Group meeting with our prayers for peace.

I'd like to thank you for your continued support attending the Causeway Coast Peace Group meetings and activities this year. The verbal feedback I have received from many of you has been very encouraging to both the committee and me. On your behalf, I would like to thank the committee for their hard work and commitment this year in planning and delivering the programme. I am personally very grateful to have such a dedicated team. This concludes my report for 2024-2025.

Mary Taylor

Chair CCPG

May 2025