

## Good Relations Week provides the OpportUNITY to promote Peace, Justice, and Environmental Care

**Thursday, 19th September** saw the conference "Peace, Justice, and Care for the Earth" at the **Corrymeela** Centre, Ballycastle. As well as Martin Palmer, speakers included freshwater ecologist **Rick Battarbee** and **John Barry**, Professor of Green Political Economy. The discussions explored the urgent need for action to protect the environment and foster a more just and peaceful society. The event was well-attended, with participants engaging in meaningful conversations about climate change, pollution, and social justice.

On **Friday, 20th September**, Queen's University Belfast hosted a youth and politicians forum titled "**Our Voices Matter**". The event was attended by a cross section of Belfast second level schools. Students had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with **Claire Hanna** of the SDLP and **Lesley Veronica** of the Green Party. The importance of including younger generations in discussions about the future was clear.

In the afternoon, a delegation of "Join the Dots Together"\* accompanied Martin Palmer to meet **Bishop Alan McGuckian**, Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor.

That evening, the "**Land and Lough**" forum in Glengormley Methodist Church, ably facilitated by **Louise Cullen**, BBC Agricultural and Environmental Correspondent, brought Martin Palmer and **John McLenaghan**, Deputy President of the **Ulster Farmers' Union** into a fascinating exchange on the relationship between agriculture, land use, faith and environmental sustainability. Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council was represented by Councillor **Roisin Lynch**.

The week culminated in a **Multi-Faith Conference** on **Saturday, 21st September**, entitled "**Faiths Together for Climate Justice and Peace**". Hosted at the Agape Centre (Belfast South Methodist Church), the event was graced by the presence of the **Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Micky Murray**, who commented, *"I am pleased to end a busy Good Relations Week by attending today's conference. Earlier this week, new research undertaken by Belfast City Council highlighted how desegregation and continued work to develop community relations is vital to tackling climate change and achieving our ambition for Belfast to be net zero by 2050. The conversations today were key in identifying and breaking down barriers to opportunities and finding solutions to ensure the impacts of climate change on everyone are recognised and addressed."*

The Conference gathered diverse religious leaders and activists to discuss the moral responsibilities of faith communities in addressing the climate crisis. **Raja Harun**, retired plant scientist and trustee of the **Belfast Islamic Centre** offered a tantalizing insight into the Moslem document "**Al Mizan, A Covenant for the Earth**"; **Xavier de Benaze** shared his journey in establishing a Jesuit Eco-Spirituality Centre in France; **Louise Taylor**, founder of "Love our Lough" was inspirational in her sketching out some of the complexities around the Lough Neagh crisis and Martin Palmer responded to many of the points raised with expertise and wisdom.

Saturday evening brought us to St. Anne's Cathedral, where Corrymeela's "**A Celebration of Difference**" showcased the beauty of diversity in Northern Ireland's religious and cultural landscape.

These events underscored the vital connection between peace, justice, and environmental care, calling for united efforts to build a more inclusive, sustainable, and peaceful world. A representative of "Join the Dots Together" said, "*These days have been the fulfilment of a year's work which has seen the development of interreligious friendships and a new awakening of the common call to care for creation. There's no going back. Faiths must stand together and make the connection between their mind-set (beliefs) and lifestyle, visible*".

\*Join the Dots Together Steering Group:

A Rocha, Belfast Jesuit Centre, Clonard Peace Ministry, Corrymeela, Down & Connor Laudato Si Commission, Ephata Laudato Si Group, Focolare, Irish Council of Churches, Methodist Church (Council on Social Responsibility & Eco.Congregation Reps), Mothers' Union, NI Inter-Faith Forum, Presbyterian Church in Ireland (Stewardship of Creation Agent/Eco-Congregation Rep), Redemptorist Youth Ministry, Trocaire, Ulster University Chaplaincy, Youth Link NI