

## FELLOWSHIP OF GOOD COUNSEL TRUST

### TRUSTEES' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

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The Trustees present their report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2024.

#### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

Our vision and mission statement gives a clear account of what we do and who we are.

##### Our Vision

That all people may find freedom and dignity through Jesus Christ, for the greater glory of God. "I have come that you might have life and have it to the full." John 10:10

##### Our Mission

To joyfully come together as a group of individuals believing and celebrating the power of Jesus Christ for mutual support, and to minister to other people so that all peoples may find freedom and dignity through Christ.

The Trustees have paid due regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit when deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

The strategies employed to achieve the charity's aims and objectives are to:

- promote Christian Celtic spirituality in Our Celtic Prayer Garden and Sanctuary to schools and various other groups on request,
- run directed retreats to any member of the public,
- provide Worship Services with teaching and prayer five days per week for any person who wishes to avail of it at St Anthony's Dundrean, Columba House, Derry, or The Celtic Garden
- offer facilitation in Columba House, Iosas Centre and at St Anthony's different seasonal spiritual experiences for youth, families or individuals e.g. Lenten Prayer Experience / Confirmation Preparation (for schools). School staffs will also be catered for with appropriate courses.
- Follow A Star (Christmas Trail) This was a limited version entitled 'Little Family Christmas' curtailed because of electrical limitations / Quiet Retreats,
- we have produced a selection of CDs on New Life / Christs Healing Touch / Consolation / 3 CDs with music reflecting Celtic Spirituality and other topics, Three in One, In God Alone and The Souls Shelter. These are always available and never go out of date.
- provide 7-week seminars (one night per week) on Life in the Spirit  
provide information, meditation and listening ear for White Oaks Residents once a month on Wednesday evenings.  
Provide weekly therapeutic duties for residents of White Oaks at White Oaks Acorn Project e.g. gardening, tidying the Garden Facilities, and tidying work in the Celtic garden.
- take opportunities to promote publicly and creatively major events in the city e.g., Repentance Services (Good Friday) Columba Pageants (St Columba's Day) We do not feel that the time is right at the moment for public major events in the City. Our presence is constant in the City and our centres in Donegal are well advertised and equally well attended.
- provide a space for meditation, contemplation, or quiet prayer in the Oratory in Queen Street Derry City 5 days per week 10.30 am to 4.30 pm. A similar space is provided at St Anthony's daily Monday to Friday with an hour of prayer and reflection at 12.00 noon. Saint Canice's Oratory in the Celtic Prayer Garden at IOSAS Centre is also open daily Monday to Friday for quiet reflection.

Since March 2020, delivery of our services had been seriously disrupted by Covid 19. Like many other organisations we adapted to the circumstances we found ourselves in, mainly by using technology to maintain connectivity with service users. We continue outreach activities via Facebook in the form of videos, written information music and images. Other social media platforms are also used quite extensively including our website, and distribution of information through local and national publications. During covid restrictions our weekly meetings were usually conducted through Zoom but now we have returned to precovid arrangements for these. The Community also plans and delivers services at St Anthony's on a Monday Night once a month, Columba House on a Thursday Night once a month and on anniversaries etc at the appropriate venue.

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The principal function of The Fellowship of Good Counsel Londonderry is to support the advancement of the Christian Religion, by promoting same through the creation and subsequent ministry of The Columba Community, and being open to, and engaging with society as a whole and offering support to the marginalised and the socially needy, essential to the practical delivery of Gospel Values.

We have established four centres for the advice and counselling of the socially needy community and a Rehabilitation Centre for those suffering from Addiction.

#### The Advancement of Religion

The direct benefits which flow from Purpose 1 include improved spiritual awareness and an increase in faith resulting in more rounded individuals with reduced levels of stress and anxiety contributing more positively to the community at large. These benefits can be evidenced / demonstrated through oral feedback from clients in conversation, personal testimony attendances at services, greater social integration, and a more joyful and confident demeanour and the continuing supporting of Columba Community by the freely giving of time skills and finance over many years by many individuals. We see no possibility of harm emanating from our proclamation of the Christian message but the wider benefit to the public will outweigh any detriment arising in the course of Christian outreach. The charity's beneficiaries are any member of the public who presents for help or spiritual direction at any of our premises or services. Any private benefit arising out of the fulfilment of our Christian ministry or to lay staff is essential to the fulfilment of the purpose of the advancement of religion.

#### The Advancement of Education

The direct benefits which flow from Purpose 2 include improved knowledge in specific areas, a greater experience in many subject areas and an increase in life skills leading to a more confident and productive community. These benefits can be evidenced / demonstrated through feedback from clients on evaluation forms, a greater interest in the particular subject area, the observance of use made of the particular skills and the fact that beneficiaries return to further programmes. We see no possibility of harm emanating from any teaching from experienced teachers but the wider benefit to the public will outweigh any detriment arising in the course of Christian teaching. The charity's beneficiaries are any member of the public who presents for courses or life skills training at any of our premises or services. Any private benefit arising out of the fulfilment of our educational ministry by tutors / teachers / facilitators is essential to the fulfilment of the purpose of the advancement of education.

#### The Relief of Distress

The direct benefits which flow from purpose 3 include the creating of freer more positive and joyful individuals contributing energetically to their families and communities. We see no possibility of harm emanating from any healing ministry or pastoral counselling from very experienced individuals engaged in this ministry. These benefits can be evidenced / demonstrated through greater social integration, and a more joyful and confident demeanour among those who have experienced the removal of stress from their lives. The charity's beneficiaries are any member of the public who presents for relief of distress at any of our centres. Any private benefit arising out of the fulfilment of our healing ministry by community members or Christian ministers is essential to the fulfilment of this purpose.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE**

The trustees gratefully continue to acknowledge the efforts of the Community, our staff and the increasing number of volunteers who have enabled us to progress our vision and mission statement and to continue our work throughout 2023/24.

It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge the sterling work of many of the Community members who worked tirelessly to keep St. Anthony's functioning throughout this difficult time. The Facebook pages of both IOSAS Centre and Columba House were used extensively to take the place of garden tours with articles on individual Celtic Saints, recorded teaching videos from Fr Neal and other members of the community including a series of teachings on Columba and a seven-week course New Life in the Spirit all of which were favourably received.

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Key objectives, outcomes and evaluations from programmes facilitated during the financial year are as follows:

#### **The YARD Project**

We have plans to revamp the Yard Project but at this point and although discussions have been held as to when to make a start, no definite date has been pinpointed. There will be some project activity to maintain our association with other youth groups on social media, email and other platforms.

#### **The Connections Programme**

Building upon the success of the pilot programme delivered previously, the Connections programme has developed into a regular service provided to the local community. With a target age range of 65 yrs+ the programme aims to enhance the lives of older people through lifelong learning opportunities accompanied by health and wellbeing elements such as meditation and exercise.

We acknowledge the support of Derry City and Strabane District Council in providing financial resources to develop and sustain this programme. The Connections programme is delivered weekly to a group of people aged 65-82yrs with an average weekly attendance of 12 people. The impact of the pandemic has meant it has been difficult for this programme to flourish and increase in breadth of activities. However, it is clear that the project provides a vital service with a demand in the community, therefore we will continue service delivery in whatever way we can during this difficult time.

#### **Volunteer Recruitment and Development**

As a volunteer-led organisation we have relied on the support of a broad base of volunteers to enable us to fulfil our mission and provide our services to the local community in 2023/24. A number of volunteer recruitment initiatives were successful in attracting new volunteers to assist with various roles. Our volunteers assist with everyday roles such as reception / administration, housekeeping, workshop facilitation and other duties. Additionally, youth volunteers assist with the design and delivery of youth programmes.

We see the volunteer relationship as reciprocal and mutually beneficial. As an organisation we benefit from the time, talent and skills of volunteers and rely on their commitment to continue our work. In the past year we have developed our volunteer management policy to incorporate regular volunteer / supervisor evaluations. This has enabled us to better recognise and meet the needs of our volunteers. Feedback from these volunteer evaluations has noted benefits for volunteers including improvements to mental health through volunteering, increased self-esteem, better social connections and desire for further training and learning.

#### **FINANCIAL REVIEW**

Total income for the year was £27,786 of which £27,686 was generated from donations and legacies. The balance of income was generated from rent received for room hire and sales of merchandise. Total expenditure by the charity was £30,263, all of which was expended on direct charitable activities. The balance on funds at the year-end was £81,395 of which £42,052 is restricted funding carried forward to 2024/25 and the balance of £39,343 which is unrestricted in nature.

#### **Reserves policy**

It is the policy of the charity that unrestricted funds which have not been designated for a specific use should be maintained at a level equivalent to between three and six month's expenditure. The Trustees consider that reserves at this level will ensure that, in the event of a significant drop in funding, they will be able to continue the charity's current activities while consideration is given to ways in which additional funds may be raised.

The Trustees have assessed the cost of providing a reduced level of services in order to continue operating in the event of a reduction in income and consider this amount to be approximately £20,000 per annum. Therefore, the target level of reserves is £5,000 to £10,000. Free reserves as at 31st March 2024 are £39,343. The Trustees continue to monitor the general level of reserves in accordance with the upper level of the target so that they will be able to continue the current activities of the charity.

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#### PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

In the 2024/25 year we aim to continue to strengthen the spiritual and pastoral work, which is carried out at all our centres, one in Northern Ireland and four in the Republic of Ireland.

We have returned to Columba House for our weekly meetings, and we intend at some time soon to re-run Baptism in the Spirit / Life in the Spirit seminars at one or more of our centres or at the invitation of any parish to us to minister there.

The YARD project has not been operational during this time. A decision on this will have to be taken soon.

The Connections Programme continues to be delivered to accommodate all participants. We will completely revamp the Connections programme for older people and explore opportunities to enhance the range of activities offered to participants. We have ideas on running courses on bookbinding, calligraphy and associated activities but may have to wait to find a possible funder,

We have plans to begin again to offer pastoral support and prayer ministry to residents of White Oaks Rehabilitation Centre at meetings on Wednesday nights monthly.

The residential programme has fully reopened at Whiteoaks and will continue to operate.

We intend to continue our limited collaboration with the Loving Sister Earth Movement to support the National Holy Wells Day in June.

In 2021 Work on establishing a Centre in Letterkenny for people who have completed the residential programme at White oaks but are not yet ready to go back into society was at an advanced stage. This Centre was indeed opened and has been appropriately named Carlin House in honour of our founder and director Fr Neal Carlin. It is managed and run by the Board of Whiteoaks. We wish them every success and hope that during 2024 the Community will be able to go there for an informal visit.

Looking forward to next year at Columba House we will continue to deliver our youth work programme through The Lenten Experience if possible. Work to upgrade the electrics in the Celtic Garden is needed. This will require funding. In the meantime, in December 2023 staff from the IOSAS Centre and Celtic Garden delivered The Follow a Star Christmas event for families, with the assistance of volunteers. This event was on a smaller scale until funding becomes available to upgrade the electrics.

We will seek to further build our volunteer base and develop the skills of existing volunteers through in-house and accredited training programmes when possible.

Throughout the Pandemic we have kept in touch with people and people have kept in touch with us by every means at our disposal. It is clear that people still want and need our services and want to be part of what we do. This gives us hope for the future and so we enter this new year on an optimistic note.

We recently celebrated the 1500th year of Saint Columba's birth and we have already used Facebook and WhatsApp to spread the word to commemorate this event and will continue to explore new avenues to keep the name and message of Colmcille alive in the city. We have available for sale all four of Fr Neal's Books as hard copies and on Kindle and will no doubt continue to go down all avenues to broadcast that news and the Christian Message.

We once again reiterate that, as in previous years, the work of Columba Community will continue, and we will endeavour to implement the leadings of the Holy Spirit to bring new life to society in general.

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#### STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

##### **Governing document**

The Fellowship of Good Counsel Trust is an unincorporated charitable organisation and is governed by its Constitution.

##### **Recruitment and appointment of the Trustees**

All people in the area of benefit, without discrimination, are eligible for appointment as a Trustee. Proposals for application to membership are submitted to the Board of Trustees and individuals may be elected if they are so willing and accepted by the Board, in accordance with the charity's Constitution.

##### **Organisation Structure**

The Trustees who served during the year were:

Ann McCay  
Tommy McCay  
Marguerite Hamilton  
Fr. Shaun Doherty  
Martin McKeever  
Kathleen Devlin

The Trustees are responsible for the strategic direction and policy of the organisation. The Trustees are from a variety of professional backgrounds relevant to the work of the charity.

All members of the Board of Trustees give their time voluntarily and receive no benefits from the charity. Any expenses reclaimed from the charity are set out in the notes to the financial statements.

The trustees work with the management committee known as The Columba Community of which 6 trustees are also members being Marguerite Hamilton, Fr Shaun Doherty, Ann McCay, Tommy McCay, Kathleen Devlin, and Martin McKeever. This management committee oversees the activities of the centres providing staff line management, financial monitoring, programme design and evaluation. The charity's administrator manages the day to day running of the organisation including programme co-ordination and oversees a team of volunteers who provide office cover, answering the telephone and door, assistance to visitors and general duties as required at Columba House and St Anthony's.

Fr Neal Carlin Founder of Columba Community passed away on the 6<sup>th</sup> August 2021. Fr Neal's ministry still continues at all the Centres. Responsibility for the implementation is under the jurisdiction of The Fellowship of Good Counsel with responsibility for its implementation in the hands of the trustees and specifically directed and led by Marguerite Hamilton assisted by Fr. Shaun Doherty. On the ground the work of operating the centres is carried out by The Columba Community previously established over the years by Fr Neal and now continuing to work in Columba House, Derry City, St Anthonys Retreat Centre, Donegal, IOSAS Centre and associated White Oaks Organics, Celtic Garden, Sanctuary Chalets, Visitors Centre and Café/ Restaurant in Donegal and in a limited manner in Whiteoaks Rehabilitation Centre.

#### REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

The reference and administrative details of the charity can be found on page 1.

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#### STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Charity law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under that law the Trustees have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice). Under charity law the Trustees must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that year. In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- Observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- Make judgements and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- State whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the accounts; and
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to assume that the charity will continue in operation.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with applicable law and regulations. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

By order of the Trustees



**Tommy McCay**  
Trustee

**Date:** 31/01/2025