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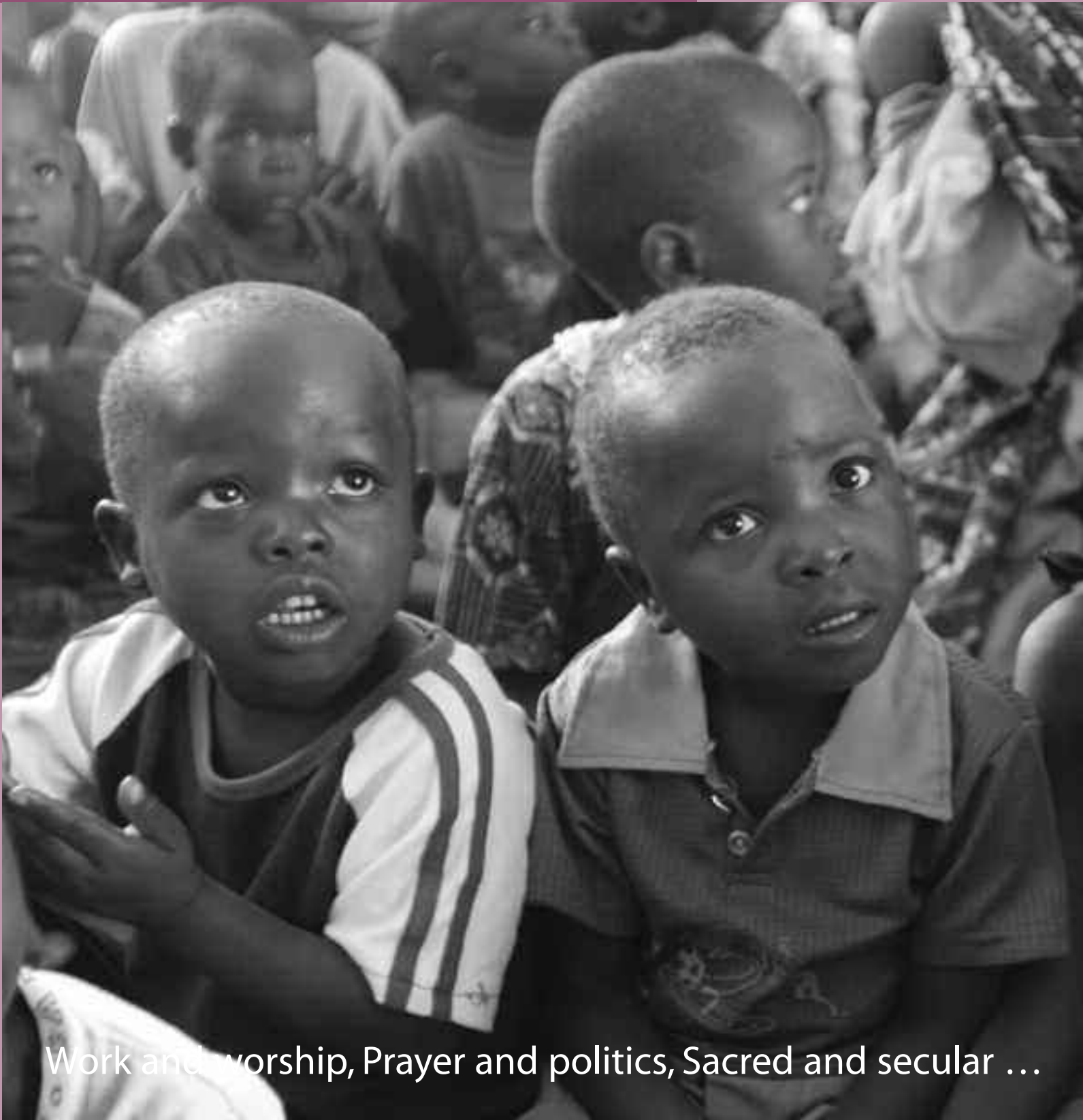
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the magazine of the iona community

# coracle



Work and worship, Prayer and politics, Sacred and secular ...

**The Iona Community is:**

- An ecumenical community of men and women from different walks of life and different traditions in the Christian church
- Committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to following where that leads, even into the unknown
- Engaged together, and with people of goodwill across the world, in acting, reflecting and praying for justice, peace and the integrity of creation
- Convinced that the inclusive community we seek must be embodied in the community we practise

**So we share a common discipline of:**

- Daily prayer and bible study
- Mutual accountability for our use of time and money
- Spending time together
- Action for justice and peace

**And are, together with our staff, responsible for:**

- Our islands residential centres of Iona Abbey, the MacLeod Centre on Iona, and Camas Adventure Centre on the Ross of Mull. And in Glasgow
- The administration of the Community
- Our work with young people
- Our publishing house, Wild Goose Publications
- Our association in the revitalising of worship with the Wild Goose Resource Group

The Iona Community was founded in Glasgow in 1938 by George MacLeod, minister, visionary and prophetic witness for peace, in the context of the poverty and despair of the Depression. Its original task of rebuilding the monastic ruins of Iona Abbey became a sign of hopeful rebuilding of community in Scotland and beyond. Today, we are almost 250 Members, mostly in Britain, and 1500 Associate Members, with 1400 Friends worldwide. Together and apart, 'we follow the light we have, and pray for more light.'

**Coracle** is the quarterly magazine of the Iona Community. Views expressed in it are not necessarily the policy of the Iona Community, but the Community seeks the exchange of thoughts and ideas as a basis for finding common ground.

**Letters** are welcome, but may be edited because of space restrictions. For **advertising** or **photography** specifications, please contact the editor. **Unsolicited material** is welcome (by email or on disk) but cannot always be included.

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THE MOVEMENT IS A WORK OF FAITH.  
It will continue just so long as God requires it.

Peter Macdonald

# From the holy city: marking the boundary

Where did you get to this summer? In July I was on Iona for Community Week and for my hallowing as Leader. The next week was spent on Tiree recovering from the nervous tension of the week before. I also spent time in Victorian England, Sweden and Afghanistan, transported by the power of the written word and human imagination.

Summer holidays allow us time and space to lose ourselves in a good book or three. I greatly enjoyed the time spent with Inspector Whicher, Lisbeth Salander and the Taliban. Perhaps it was the encounter with the latter that got me thinking about liberty of expression and belief, and the lengths some people will go to deny that freedom.

One of the joys of reading is that the text unlocks our imagination and our act of reading enhances the meaning of the text. Alberto Manguel in *A History of Reading* explains:

*Faced with a text, the reader can transform the words into a message that deciphers for him or her a question historically unrelated to the text itself or to its author. This transmigration of meaning can enlarge or impoverish the text itself; invariably it imbues the text with the circumstances of the reader. Through ignorance, through faith, through intelligence, through trickery and cunning, through illumination, the reader rewrites the text with the same words of the original but under another heading, re-creating it, as it were, in the very act of bringing it into being.* (p. 211)

What holds true for prose and poetry certainly applies to the reading of scripture, the interpretation of which has inspired faith, acts of compassion and works of art, but has also justified persecution, violence and schism.

The interpretation of Christian scripture divides the Church today across a spectrum of opinion from those who insist upon one, fixed, true for all time meaning to those for whom the Word of God comes alive when life experience, acquired knowledge and creative imagination build layers of meaning and even subvert the text.

Within many denominations this divide is most apparent in differing attitudes to biblical sources on human sexuality and male homosexuality in particular. In the Church of Scotland this has resulted in a group of 'confessing' churches declaring:

*... it is time to publicly mark the boundary between orthodox Christianity and spurious forms which claim the same ... and (which) publicly sanctify what the Bible calls sin.*

But why mark the boundary here? I am with Giles Fraser, Canon Chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral, who writes:

*Despite the churches' pathetic obsession with what people do with their willies, we ought to be a lot more concerned with what people do with their wallets.* (*The Guardian*, 17/7/09)

The Rule of the Iona Community states that for us the commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation is 'a point of departure'. If there is a boundary to be marked then surely this is where it lies.

We are called as Christians to mark the boundary

- between the moneymen who continue to grow fat on obscene bonuses and the poor vilified for their poverty;
  - between the warmongers in nation states and terrorist groups and those who are terrorised by death and destruction;
  - between global big business and the world's poorest communities whose human rights are denied and whose environment is damaged
- and to declare with whom we stand, so bearing witness to our faith and to the Gospel.

If this were the boundary, if this was the mark of being a Christian, we would all stand together. But no, premarital or gay sex seems to be a greater offence against God than all the world's suffering. And all those biblical passages about wealth and power, poverty and injustice are clearly not to be taken too literally.

This autumn leaders of the G20, the world's wealthiest nations, have agreed neither to overhaul the financial system nor to cap the bonuses paid to financiers and they have done so against a background of steeply rising unemployment and the prospect of severe cuts in public spending. The poorest and most vulnerable will pay the price for the follies of the rich and powerful. It was ever thus.

During previous recessions the Iona Community as an organisation and as a movement responded compassionately and imaginatively to address in small ways the hardships endured particularly by those living in the inner city. Will we rise to the challenge again? What changes are required of us personally and as an organisation? How do we engage with wealth and power? How do we challenge our churches' obsession with sex and engage with biblical teaching on the morality of wealth?

Perhaps it is time publicly to mark that boundary. More wallets, fewer willies indeed. Or is that 'spurious' Christianity?

### Note

Peter's summer reading included:

*The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*, Kate Summerscale

*The Girl Who Played with Fire*, Stieg Larsson

*The Wasted Vigil*, Nadeem Aslam

This autumn Peter will be reading *The Wee Yellow Butterfly* by Cathy McCormack; *Poverty, Inequality and Human Rights* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)); and Luke 6:20–26.

**Peter Macdonald** is the new Leader of the Iona Community.

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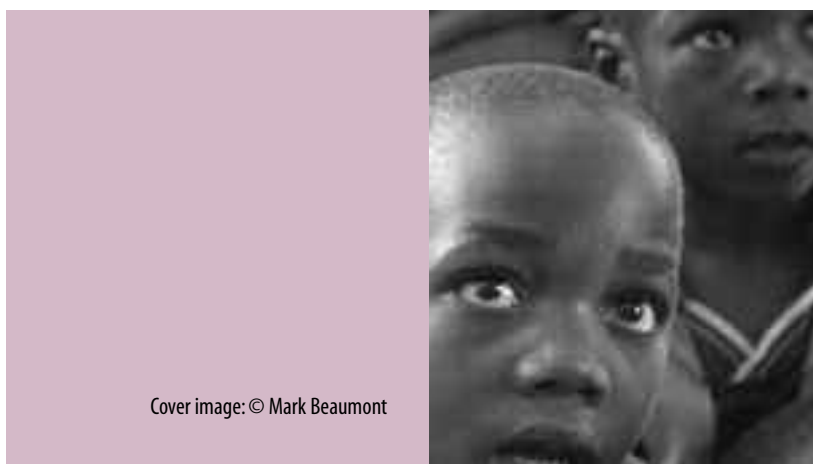
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Cover image: © Mark Beaumont

# SCOTLAND'S FIRST POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

Scotland's first Poverty Truth Commission took place on 21 March, 2009 at Glasgow City Chambers. A major aim of the Commission, which was inspired by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was to give people struggling against poverty an opportunity to have their voices heard. Associate Rev Martin Johnstone from the Church of Scotland Ministries Council, one of the organisers of the event, said: 'The question is how do you overcome poverty? The answer is to ask those who experience it, rather than those who only know it in their heads. Poverty can be overcome ... but only if we are prepared to take seriously the wisdom of those who really know about it.'

*The Commission began with a number of testimonies. Listening to these stories was an audience of 400 people, including leaders from politics, the media, academia and several faith traditions. Paul Chapman, the Coordinator of the Poverty Truth Commission, reported on the day's events in a blog. Following is an extract:*

'Three people from Ruchazie presented the first of nine testimonies, beginning with a graceful modern dance by 16-year-old Jamie-Lee Smart, demonstrating that life in Ruchazie is not just about struggle, but includes the creativity and joyful expression of life lived to the fullest. No one mentioned that shortly before her compelling performance a young man from Ruchazie had held a knife to her throat because she was walking in 'his territory'. The issue of territorialism was spelled out later in a conversation between Darren McGarvey and William Barrowcliffe, who said, 'There is a kid I know who wants to go to university and is smart enough, but it's too dangerous in Ruchazie for him to walk from his house to Smithycroft Secondary to get the preparation he needs. So he stays at home wasting his life because the neighbourhood is so dangerous.' He further said that it was a trip to Malawi, sponsored by 'Together for a Change', that opened his eyes. He could freely walk anywhere and wherever he went people greeted him warmly and with head held high, despite their destitution. So different from Ruchazie where people often don't dare look each other in the eye, and where certain areas are off-limits.

This was followed by Donna Barrowcliffe from Ruchazie, in conversation with Jamie Lee, talking about the immense stress afflicting people in her neighbourhood, often leading to depression and a lack of self-confidence. She strongly objected to people being judged by the postcode they came from rather than by their character and ability. Supporting each other in the struggle gives strength and hope ...'

*At the end of the Commission, participants issued this very powerful statement:*

**Our central request is a simple one:**

We want to be part of the solution, not constantly identified as part of the problem. We call on people to respect us as people and to learn from our wisdom and experience.

**In addition:**

We know that our neighbourhoods are good places to live and that media portrayals of them are unjust and damaging. We call for the media to share the good news as well as the bad.

In our experience, it is small, local community groups that make the

biggest difference. We call for a greater recognition of their contribution as well as long-term funding.

We ask for greater assistance with childcare costs, and for this not to be a short-term measure.

Gang violence is destroying lives and communities. We seek greater resources to support young people. We know this investment will help young people to fulfil their potential, encourage community and develop leaders.

In our opinion the current Welfare Reform legislation will not work. People really want to work and we call on our governments to work with the unemployed to make it happen.

Parents and carers are doing a job. We call on people in power to work with us as we try to make life as good as possible for the people we look after and love.

We know that it is wrong that where you live determines how much support you get. We call for the introduction of a uniform policy of distributing money across local authorities.

We know that children are best cared for by their own families. We call upon the UK Government to provide *kinship carers* with the same support and resources as they currently offer to foster carers.

We know that people often choose to live with abuse because they are too afraid to do anything

else. We plead for adequate support services so that when people are brave enough to speak out they know they'll be safe and supported.

We congratulate our governments for their commitment to end child poverty. We call on them to put as much energy into this task as they have into the current banking crisis.

Powerful people sit around tables and make policies about us. We ask for the right to be around those tables and to help to make the best possible decisions.

We know the crippling impact debt has on people's lives. We call on all who can to take tougher action to outlaw predatory lending to low-income consumers.

We congratulate Glasgow City Council on its decision to commit to paying all employees a *Living Wage* of at least £7 per hour and call on other employers to follow suit.

**To read Paul Chapman's blog:**

<http://povertytruthcommission.blogspot.com/2009/05/put-yourself-in-my-shoes.html>

### LIVING ON NOTHING

*Living on nothing  
is trying not to see  
the wretchedness and the despair.  
Living on nothing  
is trying not to feel  
the loss of hope.*

*Living on nothing  
is trying not to taste  
the anger and disappointment.  
Living on nothing  
is trying not to smell the fear.*

*Living on nothing  
is trying not to hear  
the intellectual arguments  
and lofty ideals  
about living on nothing  
put forward by those who  
are not living on nothing.*

*Living on nothing is dying.*

ATD Fourth World Family member,  
from *Out of the Shadows: A  
Collection of Poems from the Fourth  
World*, ATD Fourth World

# PRESS RELEASE

## 'Climate change is great news!' says Anna Falees ...

Warnings of climate change, bringing increased global warming and widespread flooding, have been welcomed by one of the world's most powerful pressure groups.

After recent attacks on their traditional way of life, a spokesperson for the mosquito community expressed hopes that climate change would produce a big rise in housing and job opportunities for their members around the world.

Many mosquitoes will now begin to take their vacations in Mediterranean resorts and across northern Europe. Mosquito population levels are expected to triple in the next few years as the increasing number of humans on the planet and an expanding mosquito tourist industry signal a surge in the already buoyant food supply.

There are also likely to be further benefits across Africa and the Indian subcontinent where climate change is already causing significant increases in human poverty and hunger.

Ms Anna Falees, of the International Mosquito, Tsetse Fly and Other Nasty Bugs Federation, said: 'Climate Change is great news for my members. Despite the efforts of environmental groups and aid agencies, temperatures are set to rise worldwide. And the fortunes of our 35 trillion members are going to rise with them. This is when the bugs bite back. It's the Malaria Millennium.

'Our advice to humans is: keep the carbon coming. You think you are a higher life form? Well, heating up the planet seems a strange way of guaranteeing your own survival. But go ahead. Lots of us are looking forward to coming to live in a puddle, ditch and flood plain near you.'

Meanwhile, there seems little likelihood of the international human community meeting their declared carbon emission targets, which scientists are already warning are too low.

*\* Financial news: Shares in mosquito netting rose sharply on the Stock Exchange yesterday – as did trading in companies offering funeral services.*

*(by David Rhodes)*

### TAKE ACTION!

*From December 7–18, 2009, the most important climate change talks in history take place in Copenhagen. Decisions made here will impact all of our lives – but especially those of the world's poorest.*

**WRITE GORDON BROWN:** Christian Aid is urging the PM to push for at least 40% cuts by EU governments in domestic carbon emissions by 2020. To email Gordon Brown, go to [www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk)

**TAKE TO THE STREETS:** On Saturday, 5 December 2009 tens of thousands of people from all walks of life will flow through the streets of London and Glasgow to demonstrate their support for a safe climate future for all. 'The Wave' is organised by Stop Climate Chaos: [www.stopclimatechaos.org](http://www.stopclimatechaos.org)

# Is there anybody there?

Graeme Brown

There are few things more disconcerting than engaging in conversation with a friend, only to be met with silence – the turning of a back – a calculated closure of communication – the stopper of a solid wall.

This is what it sometimes seems like when we engage with God in prayer. He has turned his back. Is that it? Is there anybody there at all?

I have assumed for years that, since I am a human being, at the pinnacle of creation of course, I deserve nothing less than that God should be available to me on all occasions to converse with me, speaking and listening at my beck and call, as is appropriate for me, a human being. That, anyway, had been how it was when, as I firmly believe, God had come close to us in Jesus Christ, conversing with us human beings as with friends.

What I had never asked myself was how God might converse with others of his creation in a way appropriate to them. Just because they did not claim to be made in the image of their creator, as we human beings have done, in my arrogance I had rather assumed that we human beings were the only creatures with whom God might wish to relate and converse – a very anthropocentric view of God's ways with the universe.

A Greek philosopher, Xenophanes, had something interesting to say about this: *If cattle, horses and lions had hands, and were able to write with their hands, and portray things, just as human beings do, horses, for their part, would portray their gods in the form of horses, with the body of a horse, cattle theirs in the form of cattle. They would suppose such things and each would have such a body.*

Xenophanes was, of course, offering an ironic comment on the belief of the people of the ancient world that their gods were to be known in human form – anthropomorphic – the same as themselves, but I have often wondered whether Xenophanes might not after all be on to something. Was there no way in which God might relate with each and every part of creation, which he has brought into being out of love, in a way which was appropriate to it? Was it not possible that each and every part of creation might, each in their own way and within their own capacities, converse with God, and He with them?

Hilary McDowell has raised this same question in her book *Around the World on Eighty Prayers*. Reflecting on the migration of birds, she asks, *Where was he going, that duck? ... I so wanted to converse with him ... Would he be too busy to delight me with tales of the journey from the Arctic? ... Did he know how beautiful were his feathers then, illuminated in the light, unaware of the envy of eagles as he flew? Maybe he did understand. Who are we, pompous humanity, to assume that only intelligence arranged in human mode can comprehend the whisperings of scenic grandeur, the*

*invisible miracle of divine guidance, the depth-charge nature of unconditional love?*

Perhaps indeed, then, all of creation, each part in its own way, has some sense of the presence of God and perhaps the cosmos is so ordered that it can reveal to all the love of God, the loving kindness at its heart. The sun does, after all, at different times, in different ways, rejoice the hearts of every living creature and draw out the best in plants as well as living beings.

And so may God, who chooses to relate with all creation. God may not relate with human beings all the time in the way that we desire, our way. But when we sense that he is relating with the cosmos, with our smaller world in ways appropriate to these, we can withdraw from the competition for attention and take delight in the glimpse that we do have of him in Jesus Christ. Perhaps we may discern within the silence of the universe not the stopper of a solid wall but yet another means of conversation of our God with all that is, and not just with ourselves.

**Graeme Brown** is a minister of the Church of Scotland and a Member of the Iona Community living in Orkney.

Quotation from Xenophanes, translated by Graeme Brown. Extract from 'Around the World on Eighty Prayers', from the Preface, page ix and x, SPCK Triangle, 1997.



# Learning from the poor

Peter Millar

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feature

*Lord, you are the God of all Europeans, all Americans, all Asians ...  
you are also my God – me, an African – me, a Beninois.*

*Lord, I want to sing, dance and look radiant with happiness.*

*But alas the wars on my continent,  
AIDS, poverty and malaria  
are destroying my brothers and my sisters.*

*Instead of joy, there is sadness, fear, sorrow and anxiety.*

*Lord, I am confused but not downtrodden  
because for me, an African, a Beninois,  
you are my God and Jesus your Son,  
who died and rose for me,  
is my Saviour.*

*He is my eternal hope.*

*Pastor Raphael Houessou*

For me this is both the miracle and mystery of the Christian faith: Raphael comes from Benin, one of the poorest countries within a desperately poor continent; daily, in his pastoral work, he witnesses the ravages of disease and mind-blowing poverty. Would not such a situation destroy a person's faith in God?

Cynics might say that Raphael was a 'simple man with a simple faith'. I don't believe that for a moment, and believe it even less having myself lived alongside communities burdened with poverty. In Raphael, and many others around the world, we see clear evidence of a confidence in God which has largely been lost within the bland dimensions of Christianity in affluent societies. For Raphael, faith in Christ is not an additional extra within the pluralities of life. It is life. Or perhaps more accurately, it is both life and death.

Raphael has much to teach us about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Yet we are reluctant students! We, who belong to the rich and powerful global club, have little time, even in our churches, to listen to the oppressed of the earth. We forget that, in terms of understanding the miracle and mystery of Christianity, they may be much more knowledgeable. A truth expressed beautifully in this letter by Neil Paynter, from the time he was living in Cotonou, Benin:

*... It's amazing the way people here dress in such beautiful, bright colours! Market women in kerchiefs and colourful pagnés (long wrap-around skirts) selling piles of ripe mangos, oranges, bananas, red onions, tomatoes ...*

*Beautiful, ebony women swathed in such deep, rich, infinite colour – indigo, turquoise, ultramarine, French blue, ruby, wine, crimson, copper, coral, terra cotta, rust, lemon, canary, amber, ochre, saffron ...*

*A woman in a vibrant-green pagné: Green as the pyramid of unripe oranges she balances on a tray on her head; green as the sound of a family of parrots sharing a rattan-wicker cage; green as piles of corn husks on the red-brown earth; green as the puddles of truck effluent the woman steps around, head held high.*

*Men sometimes wear a 'costume' called a 'grand boubou', which is a robe-like garment with pants and a shirt underneath – some patterns geometric; others kaleidoscopic; some all flowery or leafy; others covered in whorls and spirals; others swimming all over with stylised fish, coral, wavy sea plants ...*

*Some grand boubous intricately and richly embroidered with gold thread around the neck and big sleeves.*

*Some simply one, solid colour – it depends on the occasion. A man in a solid blue grand boubou. Like the ocean on a motorbike.*

*Amazing! All of this colour and design against the background of a grim, ugly city – rotting piles of garbage, malarial mud, rusty tin shacks, hoardings for undertakers, thick black clouds of carbon monoxide choking everyone, dulling everything.*

*The infinite colours and patterns: the reflection of a rich culture, a fertile imagination, a deeply rooted connection to the land and sea; a land that, by the minute, is being cleared of trees (palms, acacias, baobabs) to supply people with some charcoal to cook over; a spot of warmth against the (surprisingly) cold night. You can smell the bush fires when the wind is blowing a certain way – like the acrid, smoky breath of an apocalyptic beast who brings desert, lumbering closer and closer.*

*The infinite colours and design: the reflection of the spirit of a people who cannot be crushed – not by slavery, not by colonialism, not by the brutal structural 'adjustment' programmes of the World Bank and IMF ... There is an incredible resilience to people here. An irrepressible sense of fun and humour in the ways the children and gossiping market women tease me. An aristocratic dignity, and fierce proudness, in the high-boned faces of burdened women stepping elegantly around raw sewage and truck effluent.*

*I am a white man – white as enriched, imported French flour; I am respected for my money, knowledge, experience ... I am not rich. I am not wise. I am not developed: secure in my first-world privilege, locked in my Landrover, protected by my mefloquine, bottled water, credit card, open ticket ...*

*What experience do I possess of living with death every day, of creative survival, of incredible good-humoured patience, of real hope, of dazzling resurrection? I feel like a child here. What do I have to teach these people? I have the world to learn from them!*

From Our Hearts Still Sing: Daily Readings, Peter Millar, Wild Goose Publications [www.ionabooks.com](http://www.ionabooks.com)

Linda and Ian Fraser and Anna Macdonald

# 'Orphans are our children' Lusubilo Community, Malawi

**Associates Linda and Ian Fraser tell the truly inspirational story of the Lusubilo Orphan Project in Karonga, Malawi, which helps thousands of children orphaned by AIDS. Sister Beatrice and Brother Peter Daino, who started the project, visited Glasgow and Iona in the summer to meet with the Resident group and with Members of the Glasgow and Iona Family Groups, who have been helping to support their work ...**

In June the Glasgow Central Family Group and Iona Family Group, with the support of the Xavarian Brothers from St Alphonsus, Calton and St Columba Gaelic Church, hosted a visit from Malawi by Sister Beatrice Chipeta and Brother Peter Daino. People who had supported the Lusubilo Orphan Project had waited a long time to hear first-hand about its work. It turned out to be a wonderful visit and gave our visitors the opportunity to describe the project to many in the Central Belt and on Iona.

Sister Beatrice explained that, by 1995, the HIV/AIDS problem in Malawi was becoming enormous and thousands of children were being orphaned. She observed that many of the children who had been born in the cities of Blantyre and Lilonge but whose parents had died were being sent back to their grandparents' villages. The sudden change from city to village life impacted badly on the children and, knowing they were becoming a burden on the household, many ran away and ended up as street children in Mzuzu and Karonga. Sister Beatrice witnessed children who were starving, grabbing rice, stealing money, being rude and disrespectful to elders.

No one appeared to be helping the children, and the government was making no effort to deal with the ever-increasing problem. There had been no rain in Karonga for two years and food was only available to those who had money. The village headmen were helpless in the face of such enormous problems, and so in 1995 Sister Beatrice made the decision to retire from teaching, and to devote her life to helping the children. However, at this time she struggled with what she could do: 'My hands are empty ... what can I give?'

As she had no money, she mobilised the community using her leadership of conscience, and played a prophetic role by giving them courage to deal with the challenges they faced. She specifically asked the adults to set aside time in the week to spend with the children in recreational activities, teaching them basic skills and giving lessons on their various cultures. Results could be seen after only a month when the children started calling the adults 'mother' and 'father'.

During 1997, Anna Macdonald, a retired teacher and part of the Glasgow Central Family Group, was living in Karonga. Hearing of Sister Beatrice's work, Anna decided to seek her out, and so began visiting the villages and meeting the children. Many were living in orphan-headed households or were being cared for by very old grandmothers. Anna

wrote to John Harvey, then chair of the Glasgow Central Family Group, to describe how difficult life was in Karonga, and during Christmas of that year she received £1,300 from the Iona Community to be used for the project. Since then the group and St Columba Gaelic Church have continued to fundraise to support Sister Beatrice.

Sister Beatrice believed it was important that orphans should remain in their own villages, where possible with their extended family. She came up with the phrase 'Orphans are our children' (*'Wana walanda mba wana withu'*), and by using this phrase was able to make the adults understand that they had to unite and work together. As a result Sister Beatrice worked with the local people in sixteen villages to set up Community Feeding Centres. Each centre was given a small amount of money and encouraged to develop income-generating activities, and meantime she began contacting many potential funders until the current substantial donations started to arrive.

Since then she and Brother Peter have set up 52 Village Orphan Care Committees, Community-Based Child Centres, Village Nutrition Centres and two training schools.

Brother Peter described the sense of community solidarity which underpins the whole community response as being like a herd of wildebeest he once saw: One hundred wildebeest were being stalked by a lion; each time the lion approached from any direction the whole herd kept together – shoulder to shoulder, 200 eyeballs staring down the lion. The lion was unable to pick off any young or elderly wildebeest and eventually gave up the hunt and went to look elsewhere.

Lusubilo now feeds nine thousand orphans and vulnerable children in the Karonga district by supplying maize, *lukuni pala* and infant formula to the villages fortnightly, distributed by trusted volunteers. Amazingly, out of 9000 orphans, there are only about 65 children who have absolutely no relatives and have to live at the Children's Village in Karonga.

Sister Beatrice became an orphan when she was very young and was encouraged to continue studying by two Scottish women who took a great interest in her, one of whom was the mother of Dr Irene Wilkie of Edinburgh, and while in Scotland Sister Beatrice had the great pleasure of meeting with Irene. Brother Peter, an American who spent many years working in Kenya before being called as a lay brother to the Marianist Community in Karonga, came to Malawi on the advice of his dying mother, who said that miracles would happen there. Together, with the local village communities, they have made a future for so many children; and with the money raised during their visit to Scotland they are now building a dormitory and classroom for the older boys.

There is still much to do as the AIDS pandemic in Central Africa continues – but the story of the Lusubilo Orphan Project is truly inspirational.

Malawi is one of Africa's most beautiful countries and her people are renowned for their welcoming friendliness. Unfortunately, Malawi is also one of the world's poorest countries: annual income per head is \$160, life expectancy is 36 years old. The country has suffered droughts in recent years, leading to poor harvests and widespread famine. HIV/AIDS prevalence is one of the highest in the world. In a country with a population of around 13.6 million, an estimated 840,000 people (nearly 60% of them female) live with HIV/AIDS. Around 90,000 children are believed to be infected, and there were 68,000 AIDS-related deaths in 2007. Malawian children are being orphaned at a rate far beyond the capacity of extended families and other traditional networks of care to cope.

**Anyone wishing to support the Lusubilo Orphan Project, should contact Anna Macdonald: [anna@annamac.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:anna@annamac.fsnet.co.uk)**

*Jesu, Jesu,  
fill us with your love,  
show us how to serve  
the neighbours we have from You.*

From the hymn 'Fill Us with Your Love', in *Free to Serve: Hymns from Africa*, collected by Tom Colvin (a Member of the Iona Community who died in 2000).



# PRAYER AND ACTION: HIV/AIDS

'So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.'

James 2:17

*I have always found the following prayer/psalm, from Peter Millar's Gugulethu Journal, incredibly powerful and moving: a prayer of hope that rises out of an experience of crucifixion. When I read this prayer, I am always reminded that I am a rich, white Western man of such spiritual poverty. (Ed.)*

## From 'A Gugulethu Journal':

... Last week at one of the HIV/AIDS support group meetings, a local woman called Noma-lady, who is facing many hurdles rooted in poverty and weakness of body, wrote this prayer in her own language, Xhosa. Spiwo Xapile, the minister here, has translated it for me. I invite you to read Noma-lady's words slowly, and to walk with her and many others as a sister or brother. We belong together ...

## Prayer by Noma-lady

God is love to me, and God is amazing even though I am not strong physically in terms of my health. Even though things are difficult I continue to go down on my knees and pray, and from time to time I see God responding to my prayer. I don't know how I could praise God's name in a way that is befitting God's greatness. I do not have the instruments appropriate enough to make the music that would truly express how I feel about God. There are times when I have sleepless nights and watch TV till morning, but I always feel comfort when I go on my knees and pray. I am sometimes up at 3am trying to sleep on that side or the other. There are times when the pain is so heavy; my hand with cramps: my fingers twisting. Had I not been connected with God I would be accusing people of causing this pain, but earlier in my life I chose a close relationship with God, though I am poor. God is with me in the morning when I wake up: God is around during sleep, and is with me as I try to walk around. I just cry knowing that God has heard my prayer. I live with great hope. Amen

## Push the Pool: The Stop AIDS Campaign

Over 33 million people in the world are living with HIV and only one in three has access to the drug treatment they need to stay alive. This is often because the cost of treatment is unaffordable for poor people and the governments of developing countries. 6000 people die of HIV-related illnesses every day. In sub-Saharan Africa, a staggering 12 million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. This is stark proof that governments are falling seriously short of their commitment to provide universal access to treatment for HIV and AIDS by 2010 (Millennium Development Goal 6).

The Stop AIDS campaign believe that barriers to providing universal access to HIV and AIDS treatment can be broken down if pharmaceutical companies bring their patents on medicines into a 'patent pool'. This would facilitate research into improved treatments, whilst also helping companies to produce cheaper, more accessible medication for millions of children and adults living with HIV. This will help people around the world access the medicines they need to stay alive.

**To take action and to find out more:**  
[www.unicef.org.uk/campaigns/stop\\_aids/petition.asp](http://www.unicef.org.uk/campaigns/stop_aids/petition.asp)

**December 1st is World Aids Day.**



# Reconnecting with the roots – a future for Celtic spirituality?

Rosemary Power

coracle 10  
autumn 2009  
feature

Many view the 'Celtic' movement as increasingly tired and derivative. Has it fulfilled its purpose as a movement? Rosemary Power asks ... Or are there aspects that can speak to us in new ways? If we root and ground the movement, perhaps at some cost to our expectations.

**Rosemary Power works in pioneer ministry in County Clare, Ireland, and also writes academically on Gaelic-Scandinavian studies.**

'Celtic spirituality' has been so popular for the last twenty-five years that it is widely accepted as a branch of Christian expression which developed in ancient times in these islands and lingered in remote places. It is often regarded both as factually true and as having a great deal to say to us about contemporary spiritual concerns, including the need to reintegrate faith with the rest of life, and to respond holistically to the environmental crisis.

'Celtic spirituality' was developed largely by evangelical Christians in England as a tool for mission in the 1980s but is also claimed by Catholics and by those who feel they are falling off the edge of church life. It has been effectual in helping people develop their spiritual life, and in some cases has led to the growth of dispersed communities, supporting members to undertake valued work. The current Celtic movement is not the first, and, like the previous movements, it seems to be a means by which people can address contemporary concerns in a prayerful and powerful way.

Yet, in spite of music and liturgy 'in the Celtic tradition' which are now part of the mainstream of church life, the movement is increasingly tired, less dependent on the rediscovery of ancient prayers that gave it its original sparkle, and more dependent on the derivative material, in translation and often at third-hand; or on poetry and prayers from all periods in Western culture that suit the selected themes and concerns of individual authors. Has it fulfilled its purpose as a movement, or are there aspects that could speak to us in new ways as the 'Celtic' spoke to people like George MacLeod in the 1930s and, a generation before him, to writers and artists of the Celtic Revival?

Modern Celtic Christianity has little in common with what is normally taught in a university department of Celtic Studies, but, at its best, while it may be historically wrong it can in some sense be theologically right, a path to deepening life with God, a response to modern concerns that finds its expression in ancient prayers and practices. While its attraction is limited, mainly to white educated Christians, it has helped churches to recapture a sense of freshness, creativity and delight in Christian worship and personal prayer.

Since many of the books of the movement include prayers from all periods and cultures, it can be hard to define what Celtic Christianity is. However, in spite of its all-encompassing tendencies, there are certain key elements, and while these are found in many other spiritualities, when combined with the use of ancient poems or folk prayers from the Celtic-speaking countries, they provide a common core.

One element is a sense that God is present in all aspects of life. Celtic spirituality is seen as holistic, all-encompassing and capable of unifying apparently disparate aspects of daily life and work. There is an emphasis

on the Trinity in the prayers used, whether folk prayers from the Hebrides or modern poetry that seeks to emulate them.

Another element is a belief in the spontaneity of the ancient Celts, who are viewed as having only the simplest church organisation. There is plentiful poetic evidence for another element: delight in the natural world and acute observation of it. Modern writers attribute to the Celtic peoples a sense of the divine as immanent as well as transcendent, and as living in harmony with the natural world, and, more controversially,



with each other.

Storytelling is a vital part of the movement. Anecdotes about early saints are recounted, taken not only from writings from the Celtic countries, but from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Many of the anecdotes selected are about women saints and reflect a desire to believe in the equality of women in the early 'Celtic' Church. The saints are presented as models for us today, and their stories means by which deep truths can be expressed, a form of narrative theology.

A sense of place is another element, and there is an emphasis on ancient holy places which are seen as spiritually and in our view geographically on the edge, which provide meeting ground for Christians who feel on the edge, spiritually and organisationally. Through pilgrimage to these places they can meet with like-minded people, ideally to form community.

There is much here that most Christians would value and would want to incorporate into their own prayer and public worship. But some of the assumptions contain interpretations that have diverged so far from fact that they are of little help in developing a robust spirituality. Sometimes too, the term Celtic is used when another spirituality is in question, and most of the founder books on modern Celtic spirituality place England in the Celtic world, though very little use is made of English tradition. Because the 'Celtic' is known at several removes, it can become what J.R.R. Tolkien once described as a ragbag from which anything can be pulled. It also means that much that did belong to the Celtic-speaking countries hardly gets touched on at all, including most of ancient poetry; religious and secular writings; the artistry and theology of the great Gospel books and church metalwork; the physical remains of churches, wells and monastic settlements; and the folk tradition.

Celtic spirituality developed in Ireland rather later than in England and always used folk prayers. The most popular books were written by the poet and hermit John O'Donohue (1954–2008), who combined philosophical reflections with commentary on the native traditions and practices of the west of Ireland. At a time of rapid social and religious change his books gave a sense of connectiveness to Irish spiritual tradition. The extent to which his writings

**We try to move away from congratulating ourselves for being on the margins, to focus on the people we have put on margins, the stranger, the economic migrant, the people who have remained poor through the time of wealth ...**

can be considered 'Celtic' may be disputed, but they touched people across the English-speaking world, while also appealing to those familiar with the vernacular religion with its visits to holy wells, the annual pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick, the penitential journeys to Lough Derg, and other practices which use formal church rituals but are not dependent on them.

O'Donohue's approach may indicate one way in which what is good in Celtic spirituality can be drawn upon, by dropping the blander accretions, and seeking to root it in its origins. The same is true of the writings of Irish academics who have studied the ancient sources and tried to connect them to what concerns us today, in particular Thomas O'Loughlin and John Carey. There will be much that we cannot accept, but by exploring what is there and what has supported people down the centuries, we may discover something of how we can be stretched in our own spiritual journey with unlikely fellow pilgrims.

To do this, we need to give time to study the original sources and their languages, or at the least to learn more from those who do, using their knowledge as we use the knowledge of biblical scholars to more fully understand the scriptures. This may draw us closer to the writers who left us prayers of power and beauty, but who provided this spontaneity by living to strict monastic rules that gave time to prayer and study. Through study we can understand more fully what gave them their vision, in all its complexity, how it related to the ways in which they lived, and what we can take from it today, leaving markers concerning what we cannot digest, in case future cultures might find richness in the parts we discard.

We may also find much is not, and need not be called 'Celtic'. The Northumbrian missionaries of the 1980s modelled themselves on the missionaries of the sixth century, Irish or English. They took what was beautiful, publicised it and adapted it for the needs of mission as they saw it. This form of Celtic spirituality, largely book-based, might grow through rediscovering the great Anglo-Saxon religious tradition, the joyful freedom of medieval English spirituality, and the remaining vernacular religious practices.

As well as study of the past, we may need to ground the movement by looking more at what people actually do and express in the places in which we are called to work and worship, or have done until recently. We might find we can develop the 'sense of place' by asking people about their remaining traditions and practices, about what has bound them together down the generations, about the prayers they have learnt, and in doing so learn from their wisdom as well as that of the past.

Where else do we take this interest in the Celtic? If the derivative aspects outbalance use

of the sources, its attractiveness will pall and limit its chances of enabling people to move towards the centre of Christian spirituality, the relationship with Christ which our ancestors saw as the purpose of their writing, copying, building and developing community.

Those who have worked with the Celtic have explored ways in which we might find resonances for contemporary lives. Among many other possibilities, we have chosen to explore in this part of the west of Ireland how we can combine using the prayers of the past in conjunction with the physical remains and the traditions of the inhabitants down the Christian centuries. We are seeking to relate more deeply to the place in which we find ourselves, and are developing a pattern of prayer walks, following old routes over old boundaries, between high crosses, round towers and ruined churches where local people still bury their dead, and exploring also the beauty of the land which has been farmed for millennia. This involves our returning to sources and relearning from scholarship, and also seeking ways in which to break open the fruit of this study to serve our world. Walking involves meeting, and talking to, people who walk with us and those we meet on the way. It also provides for everyone to offer their skills and knowledge, and their music. As we grow in this practice, we tell the stories that inspired us in our faith, and we learn new stories, of how others have lived out their lives in faith, in their time. We pause at places made holy in ancient times, which have retained their holiness through the visits of praying people down the centuries, and we seek to respond to God with us today. We stop at places honoured by local people, to pause, and, if our tradition accepts, pray. We seek to connect through the stories and through the scriptures which were known to those who prayed in these places before us.

In a time of modern turbulence we try to connect also to the needs of our own time. We pray as the recession bites, revisiting some of the parables of Jesus that remind us that human relationships are the true focus when we handle money. We pray for the survivors of institutions where children were beaten and broken, for the priests and the lawyers who at best passed by, for the occasional Samaritan who protested to find that for these children of God there was no room at the inn. We pray for those who sit in the sun until the eleventh hour because there is no work, and that those in work may be generous in supporting those who do not. We pray that the roads that unite us will not be the source of death. We pray for farmers harvesting late after another wet summer, and, in a land whose national catastrophe was the Great Famine, for the places in the world where the harvest has failed. In a landscape full of the ruins not only of monasteries but of castles we pray for peace in a world racked by war. As we relish the plants, butterflies, birds and the poetry that delight in the world God gives us, we pray that we will learn again to tread the earth lightly and work against catastrophic climate change. We try to move away from congratulating ourselves for being on the margins, to focus on the people we have put on margins, the stranger, the economic migrant, the people who have remained poor through the time of wealth, and the people who centred their lives on work, homes and holidays, and have lost them.

Whether this approach is 'Celtic' or not, it is only one way to seek to honour the heritage in stone and writings, in farming and faith, in storytelling and silent prayer, in travelling to holy places, and to use what we have received for our common journey. There are many other ways, and each country and each culture will have its own variety. But it seems to me that the best heritage of the 'Celtic' is to reconnect us to the place and culture in which God has designed we find ourselves, to honour the past by discovering it again, perhaps at some cost to our expectations,

and to honour the present by using it to break open the Christian story in ways to enrich our relationships to each other and to the wider world today. It is not particular to any culture or time, though the prayers we use may be, and in doing this we rediscover the core of faith in all its wonder and delight.

### **AN PHAIDIR GHEAL – THE BRIGHT PRAYER**

The blessing of God on you, Bright Prayer.  
The blessing of God and Mary.  
Where were you last night?  
At the feet of Jesus.  
Where are you tonight?  
At the feet of the poor.  
Where are you tomorrow?  
At the feet of Saint Patrick ...

Bridget with her cloak,  
Michael with his shield,  
the two shining hands of the Son of God  
protect this house  
and bring us safe to morning.

From an Aran islands' folk prayer printed in *Béaloidéas* vii, 189  
and Diarmuid ÓLaoghaire, *Ár bPáidreacha Dúchais*, Dublin,  
1982, 220, translated by Rosemary Power.

**Rosemary Power** is presently completing a book on modern Celtic Christianity. She is a Member of the Iona Community.

'Shadow of St John's Cross' © David Coleman



**A TRIBUTE TO MEMBER  
LINESAY HENRY ROBERTSON,  
by Stanley Hood**

Lindesay Robertson, who died in Lynn of Lorne Nursing Home in Benderloch on 23rd June, was born in New Zealand, where his father was working as an engineer. He was the second of three sons, one of whom died tragically early by drowning. The family came home in 1930 when Lindesay's father inherited Bragleenmore, Kilninver, in Argyll.

Lindesay was educated at Charterhouse School, and, after joining the regular army in 1945, at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge and Sandhurst. Following in his father's footsteps he served in the Royal Engineers. A keen sportsman at school and university, he won a running Blue at Cambridge, as well as graduating in engineering. He had a passion for mountaineering. However, in 1952, a serious climbing accident, in which an ankle was shattered, put an end to both his mountaineering and his career in the army. Fortunately, after recuperation, he was able to resume hill-walking, a pastime which he enjoyed until near the end of his life.

The accident was providential in directing both his private and public life. The young invalid, who was on crutches for three years, met and married his doctor, Kate Cameron, and the army's loss proved to be a great gain for Malawi. Lindesay and Kate were married in 1954. They had two daughters, Fiona and Catherine. Lindesay felt called to the ministry, and studied at Trinity College, Glasgow.

Lindesay first met Rev. George MacLeod when the latter visited Charterhouse. He joined the Iona Community in 1956 and was a Member for the rest of his life. He was assistant to Rev. Uist Macdonald, a founding Member of the Iona Community, who was guide and mentor to many young

ministers in Wallacetown, Dundee. Unlike today, at that time the Community was completely male and overwhelmingly ministerial in membership and many of its members served in Church Extension and City Centre Parishes at home and in Partner Churches abroad. Lindesay followed the latter course.

In 1959 he and Kate went to Nyasaland (now Malawi). Lindesay was based at Mulanje Mission where he served as a minister of the Synod of Blantyre of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian (CCAP). The Protectorate of Nyasaland was at that time in the throes of great upheaval because of African opposition to Nyasaland's enforced participation in the white dominated Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The Federation's white politicians proclaimed their belief in inter-racial partnership, but one of their leaders defined that partnership as being like that of a rider and horse!

Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda had returned to Nyasaland in 1958. The Governor had declared a State of Emergency in the Protectorate in 1959. The Church of Scotland was to play a notable role in supporting the right of Nyasas to secede from the Federation and form an independent state. Expatriate opinion in Nyasaland mainly supported the Federation. The Robertsons were living in Mulanje Mission, where Kate was working as a doctor, and Lindesay was visiting villages on his cycle and conducting services in Chinyanja. The Robertsons' support of African political aspirations resulted in disagreement with the majority of expatriates, nearly all of whom were working on local tea estates. Happily, after Nyasaland became the independent state of Malawi in 1964, these wounds were healed not least because Lindesay and Kate always believed that it was important to have friendly contact with people of different

religious beliefs and political opinions.

As a District Missionary, Lindesay often gave advice to Malawians on agricultural methods, and, as an engineer, he had an eye for possibilities in rural development. He helped to establish village cooperatives and improved water supply. A difference of opinion about whether or not a minister should be so deeply involved in community development issues, such as provision of rural water supplies, led to a parting of the ways between the Synod of Blantyre and Lindesay. After eight years he left the Synod's service to work with the Government of Malawi in rural development.

Many Malawian women and children were accustomed to walking long distances in order to obtain water, and if water is essential for life, clean water is crucial for health. Lindesay saw that the force of gravity could bring water from the mountains to make it accessible to many villages. Shrewdly he started his first project not in Mulanje but in Zomba, then the capital of Malawi, directing water from Zomba Plateau to villages. So political leaders, civil servants and aid agency representatives were able to see the possibilities and became supportive.

Then Lindesay began to work on a water project on Mulanje Mountain. Lindesay was a fine example of self-discipline, hard work, punctuality and inspiration. He was a great enabler. Community involvement was the key aspect of his work. He realised the importance of involving local people in the process. They were encouraged to ask questions and discuss problems. Villagers themselves voluntarily dug trenches in which pipes were laid and so owned the projects instead of just receiving their benefits.

As the work expanded, Lindesay directed the projects from headquarters in Lilongwe but still

regularly visited the villages. After 18 years of work, piped water had been made accessible to about two million Malawians. Lindsay always had an eye to the future and, although he was assisted and succeeded by qualified expatriates, he also ensured that Malawians were trained to continue the work. Two of the ablest were sent for training in India. One of these continues to work on water projects to this day.

In 1986 the Robertsons decided to return to the family home at Bragleenmore, Kilninver. A striking tribute to Lindsay and Kate's contributions to Malawi was made by a senior chief in Dedza District, who, on hearing that Lindsay and Kate were planning to leave Malawi, offered them land for their use, saying, 'Your home is Malawi. We want you to stay.' However, on being assured by Lindsay that he had land in Scotland, the chief reluctantly agreed that he must depart, saying, 'You must go where your land is.'

Back in Scotland, Lindsay was deeply involved in his local kirk and community, played an active part in what is now the Argyll Family Group, worked on the local

farm, walked in the hills, played golf and sailed occasionally with friends. He was involved in the Argyll Highland Games, acting as Senior Steward in 1994. He was an elder and, for a time, Session Clerk and occasional preacher, at Kilmelford and Kilninver congregation.

Lindsay's achievements in Malawi and his knowledge of community development influenced the policies of governments and development agencies such as the UK's Overseas Development Agency, USAID, Denmark's DANIDA, UNICEF and the World Bank, and provided examples for development projects in many developing countries. His experience was put to good use in an advisory capacity.

In 1987 he was invited to become a voluntary adviser to Water Aid, which deals with supply of water and health education in Africa and Asia. This led to a fruitful association with Ghana. Lindsay worked from home, attended monthly meetings in London and visited projects in Ghana three times per year. The visits decreased as he trained Ghanaian staff to take over. He made two

return visits to Malawi and advised on repair and maintenance of projects. He retired from Water Aid in 2002. His work was recognised in the awards of the MBE in 1971 and the President's Award for Outstanding Voluntary Contribution to Water Aid in 2002, the President being the Prince of Wales.

In the last eight years Lindsay's health had been increasingly impaired with developing blindness in his right eye, deafness and dementia. He died peacefully on 23rd June, 2009 and is survived by Kate and by their daughters, Fiona and Catherine. Lindsay was a kind, compassionate, generous and humorous man, who, beneath an unassuming exterior, had a steely determination to do good in this world. Millions of people in many countries who never knew his name have benefited from his work. Many have special cause to bless his name and cherish his memory in Malawi, the land he served so faithfully and loved so well.

*Stanley Hood*



# Water: some resources

## OPENING RESPONSES

Creator Spirit, wellspring of our lives,  
as the refreshing rain falls on the just and unjust alike  
REFRESH US WITH YOUR MERCY,  
WHO KNOW OUR OWN INJUSTICE.

As a stream flows steadily on,  
defying all the odds of stone and water  
FLOW OVER EVERY BOUNDARY AND BORDER  
THAT SEPARATES US FROM EACH OTHER.

As the waters of our baptism washed us and welcomed us  
RENEW US NOW IN NEWNESS OF LIFE  
AND UNITY OF LOVE.

As we were once held  
in the waters of our mother's womb  
HOLD US IN THE POWER AND PEACE  
OF YOUR ABIDING PRESENCE.

*Kathy Galloway, from The Pattern of Our Days (Wild Goose)*

## PRAYER

When will the rains come?  
Lord, I am so comfortable,  
the water is running out of our tap,  
and so near us, just a short bus journey away,  
there are thousands of families  
who don't even have a single drop.

When will the rains come?  
Lord, try to open my eyes  
to these basic needs of my brothers and sisters.  
Keep me from being complacent:  
let me not just turn on our tap  
and forget their desperate need.

When will the rains come?  
Lord, you do not see us as rich and poor,  
but as one family,  
involved with one another,  
bearing each other's burdens,  
going the extra mile,  
being concerned.

When will the rains come?  
I don't know when they will come,  
nor do the villagers,  
but I do know that I could care more,  
and maybe that by caring more  
my brothers and sisters  
will find new strength  
even when the wells are dry.

*Peter and Dorothy Millar, from Letters from Madras*

## REFLECTION

Water, water everywhere! The opposite to my home country.

The pilgrimage leader asked me at Loch Stonaig on Iona if I would say something to the gathering about the water situation in the country which I came from and was returning to, Uganda.

As we stood on a small island near a clean-water loch which had supplied Iona for years with fresh water, I was pleased to share something of the contrasts between home and Iona:

Uganda is a landlocked country. Mains-piped water is only available in the major urban areas. 80% of the population of Uganda live in rural areas which lack adequate water supplies for domestic, animal and plant use. People have to collect water from wells, springs, boreholes or rivers. Some of these sources have been used by both animals and humans, creating a hygiene problem. In the end, this causes waterborne diseases like diarrhoea, bilharzia, typhoid and cholera.

Long distances are often walked to access the water sources. Water collection is mainly done by small children and women using containers. A lot of time is spent at water points due to large numbers of people waiting their turn. There are no big water storage tanks in rural areas, hence water has to be used sparingly, which is a huge problem in the dry season.

Shortage of water has created the existence of a nomadic group of cattle-keepers commonly known as *Balaalo*. The nomads move with large herds of cattle in search of water and pasture, disrupting the traffic on roads, destroying people's gardens. Land conflict between cattle-keepers and farmers has become rampant due to water shortage. Crops die or wither away during the dry season. We rarely have irrigation facilities. Crops can be grown during rainy season only. There is a big problem with global warming: the dry season has become longer, hence creating famine.

Water is life, no matter which angle one views it from and the memories of that day at Loch Stonaig remain with me as I continue my life in Uganda, longing to return one day to Iona, if it is God's will.

*Patrick Obiga, Masindi, Uganda*  
*Former volunteer with the Iona Community*

## SOME BIBLE READINGS

Genesis 21:14–19; Exodus 15: 22–27, 17:1–6; 1Kings 17:10; Psalm 107:4–9, 33, 35; Matthew 10:42; John 4:7–9

## PRAYER

O God, pour out on us the water of life that we may quench our thirst and draw our strength from you. Help us to stand alongside those who struggle daily for clean water so that all may be refreshed and renewed by your love.

*Christian Aid*

## AFFIRMATION

God who created heaven and earth,  
AND FOUNDED THE LAND ON DEEP WATERS.

God who flooded the earth  
AND GAVE US A PROMISE.

God who divided the water  
AND SET THE PEOPLE FREE.

God who leads us beside still waters  
AND GIVES US NEW STRENGTH:  
WE AFFIRM OUR FAITH IN YOU.

Jesus who walked on water  
AND CALMED THE RAGING SEA.

Jesus who turned water into wine  
AND BAPTISES US WITH WATER, SPIRIT, LOVE.

Jesus who washed his disciples' feet  
AND WASHES OUR SOULS CLEAN:  
WE AFFIRM OUR FAITH IN YOU.

Holy Spirit who is poured out  
AND COMES TO US AS WATER AND FIRE.

Holy Spirit who is strength and power  
AND FILLS US WITH YOUR LIVING WATER.

Holy Spirit who is gentleness and love  
AND IS GOD'S GIFT TO EACH OF US:  
WE AFFIRM OUR FAITH IN YOU.

*Author unknown, from Holy Ground (Wild Goose)*

## BLESSING

May clean, clear water bless us,  
wellspring or waterfall,  
life in abundance  
flowing, cleansing, refreshing.

May we use wisely  
God's gift of water  
and cherish each drop;  
bring life to earth's deserts.

Jesus, pour your water,  
greening and satisfying,  
on the dry dustiness  
of the deserts within us.

Holy Spirit, flow through us;  
revive our faithfulness,  
cleanse our sinfulness,  
fill us with prayerfulness.

*Chris Polhill, from Eggs & Ashes (Wild Goose)*

## CLOSING RESPONSES

A blessing on you who are poor  
YOURS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A blessing on you who mourn  
YOU SHALL BE COMFORTED

A blessing on you who thirst for justice  
YOU SHALL BE SATISFIED

A blessing on you who make peace  
YOU SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD

## TO TAKE ACTION

[www.wateraid.org/uk/](http://www.wateraid.org/uk/)  
[www.wellsforindia.org](http://www.wellsforindia.org)  
[www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk)



# Long live the Rule

Ronald Speirs

I have been looking up the Rule of the Iona Community, Section 4, about justice and peace. It's strong stuff: *'We believe that work for justice, peace and an equitable society is a matter of extreme urgency ... We believe that creation can provide for the needs of all, but not for the greed which leads to injustice and inequality ... Everyone should have the quality and dignity of a full life ... without the oppression of poverty ... Social and political action ... is a vital work of the Church at all levels.'*

It makes me feel daunted, and yet, perhaps strangely, it is that part of the Rule which most appeals to me and which I try most to fulfil.

I was ordained in 1954 as assistant minister in Paisley Abbey after 7 years of conventional academic preparation. Working in the Paisley/Glasgow area was lonely and I had not been prepared for the poverty and gross inequality around me. In theological training I had been critical of George MacLeod and the Iona enthusiasts. Then suddenly I saw that they were right. Political commitment suddenly became important and Iona was screaming it from the rooftops. I was enormously impressed by folk like Geoff Shaw (see *Geoff*, Ron Ferguson's biography of him) who worked in the Gorbals House-church Project and took his political witness so seriously that he became Leader of the Labour Party on the Strathclyde Council and wore himself out to an untimely death. So when I became chaplain at St Andrews University in 1958 I took parties of students on reading parties to Iona and in the peace and remoteness of the island exposed them to the painful political questions of the time. One of these was the unscrambling of the racist Central African Federation. I joined the Labour Party in Fife and agitated for Malawi to be freed from the domination of Southern Rhodesia. And I believed that students at university should be made fully aware of political issues of equality and encouraged to engage with them when they graduated.

We moved to Cambridge in 1961 when I became minister of St Columba's and chaplain to Presbyterian students. I continued to believe that the Christian faith required application to political questions. Jim Wallace, later MP for Orkney, was one of our students and he testifies to the impact of the Church then on his future career.

I joined the Cambridge Labour Party and remain a member until today. As a minister I was careful not to 'preach politics' but that did not stop me drawing attention to deprivation and oppression and how they could be relieved. In particular I worked for better conditions for the many mentally ill people who had been shut up in horrible institutions for years and who were now being discharged into the community. In 1981 I left the ministry for employment by Cambridgeshire County Council in developing day centres, sheltered work and sheltered housing for those who had been segregated, and I discovered just how influential political people of all levels can be in financing improved facilities. There is plenty of need for single-issue pressure groups like Mind, but no substitute for having the ear of those who hold the purse strings. I shall never know how much as a minister I influenced towards political witness members of my congregation (I suspect it was not great), but I can see in specific projects what I achieved from inside the county council system.

As a county council employee I could not be too outspoken about my socialism, but when I retired I could become a blatant member of the Cambridge City Labour Party. I put great hope in the new Labour Government's policy forums whereby the voice of the Party is supposed to be heard. I read many of the policy documents and with local comrades we conscientiously sent in comments and amendments. Our

ward meetings were and are intelligent and informed, and we have been regular in sending resolutions to the constituency general executive, which like our ward tends to be radical and left-wing. The agony now is how little we achieved; and yet I see no alternative to going on making our voice heard. At the beginning of the Blair Government we had hope and optimism; for the last 5 or 6 years it has been a dutiful slog against a slovenly, timorous Government. I am often helped by recalling the Rule of the Community – I can see no other way forward except by patient diligent political involvement.

There are two issues which matter greatly to me, and both are in the Iona Rule; one is the green agenda to prevent 'the endangering of life on earth'; the other is the pursuit of an equitable society. To work for them I ask myself often if I should stay in the Labour Party when so many devoted comrades have had enough of Blair and Brown's city capitalism and vague moderation. The Green Party has an exciting programme of conservation and redistribution, but it has little chance of forming a Government. I know well one of Brown's key green advisors and he has persuaded me that the Labour Party has a strong programme of making legally enforceable targets for CO2 emissions and I have hopes of strong Government initiatives at Copenhagen. So I wait in hope for a dramatic Green lead when we so much need new technology, low emission, social housing and so on ...

The increasing inequality in our society I find agonisingly disappointing after 12 years of Labour, but I see no refuge in any other major party. It is hard to get a balanced view of what has been achieved and what has not – Sure Start is excellent but redistributive taxation has come much too late. I

recommend *Towards a More Equal Society* by Hills, Sefton and Stewart for an overview. They say: *The problem is that the scale of action since 1997 was often small in relation to the underlying inequalities, and the momentum gained by the middle of the period had often been lost by the end of it;* and they give warnings about the greater difficulties in contesting inequality in the present period of recession. Quite a lot has been done for child poverty through family credits, etc, but I am ashamed that we are still among the worst of European countries in the poor condition of our children. So I remain wearily inside the Labour Party to draw every attention I can to the terrible inequalities around us. Where are the passion and simplicity of living of the early socialists?

If I lived in Scotland, would I join the Nationalists as those more likely to achieve a more equal society? I am given pause by a survey in *Towards a More Equal Society*. It concludes: *There is no evidence that the rhetorics of social justice and inclusion that have accompanied devolution and the rise of nationalists parties in Scotland and Wales have been translated into a significant shift of resources to the worst off or even towards the categories of public spending like health and education that tend to be pro-poor.* But of course Iona Members and Associates in Scotland can work for greater power for Edinburgh over how taxes are levied and spent. My basic point is that, whether we are members of the SNP, the Liberal Democrats or the Labour Party, there is a dauntingly vast amount to do. Yet one hopeful sign these days is that surveys of voters show huge impatience with the growing gap between rich and poor and increasing anxiety about the polluted world we are leaving to our children. Long live the Rule, especially Section 4 with its emphasis on social and political action.

## We are all sparks of Light ...

**At a couple of recent Iona Community plenaries, Members got together in small groups to share thoughts on the Rule and on peace and peacemaking. Here are some of the things they spoke about, and some voices:**

The bully is made in God's image too.

Look into their eyes.

Peace with justice will provide Shalom (life in all its abundance), but peace without justice will only deliver *eirene ymene* (absence of war).

Loving the hell out of your enemy will bring real peace.

Everyday 'quiet' peace witness beside campaigning in public

Peace has been taken over by the military!

Need to hear from the military

Prayer changes everything.

Naming violence (Faslane, Aldermaston ...) and imaging/showing alternatives

Action coming out of a place of well-being, rather than from a place of guilt or fear

You can't make peace while you are being unpeaceful.

How to translate your anger into passion for action?

Sometimes I feel overwhelmed. There is so much to do! ... But then I remember what St Paul said in Corinthians: We all have gifts. Some folk are good on the barricades, others are good at writing letters ... We can't do everything: We are all pieces of the jigsaw ... We are all sparks of Light ...



# Part of something Good

George D. Wilkie

Interviewed on the BBC Today programme a while back, was the leader of the American pop/rock group the Eagles, who topped the charts regularly a generation ago. He explained why, after many years apart, the group had come together again to produce a new album, *A Long Road Out of Eden*. He was asked about its contents, and described one or two of the tracks. But again and again he emphasised that the most important words on the whole album were

*'Be part of something good, leave something good behind ...'*

Two thoughts occurred to me about this statement.

The first was the contrast between the sentiment and the encouragement to self-assertion in much of the pop music of the '60s and '70s.

Is this album of the Eagles signalling the end of that era? Could it be that these older and wiser men want to encourage the younger generation of today to give up the cult of individualism, 'to be part of something good' and 'leave something good behind'?

The second thought was that while an encouragement to 'be part of something good' is all right as far as it goes, it seems a long way short of the Gospel of redemption and salvation through Jesus Christ! And on the face of it, it may seem to fall foul of Paul's dictum that we are justified by faith and not by works. Maybe one has to ask if it would be strong enough motivation to challenge the entrenched evil in the real world which anyone seeking the 'good' is bound to encounter? Or does it rather smack of the hopeful idealism of 'do-gooders' everywhere?

Well ... Yes ... But ... in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke does not hesitate to report that 'Jesus went about doing good'. And how often in the parables it was the good deed that Jesus commended, rather than the correct belief. And in the great judgement parable of the sheep and the goats, the reward of the sheep was the result of good deeds towards the poor, the sick and the needy. So encouraging young people (and all of us) to be part of something good is not to lead them away from the Christian God. It may be the way they discover the God of Jesus – in spite of all the doctrinal hurdles.

John Baillie, a leading Scottish theologian of the 20th century, says, 'We look for God nowhere else than in Goodness.' And I'm sure he wasn't just referring to good personal behaviour or polite little acts of kindness, however important these are. The goodness he was pointing to was a strong force actively engaged in the eternal struggle between Good and Evil. 'That's where God is to be found,' he says. And those who take 'part in something good' will find themselves working alongside God whether they know it or not.

Indeed Jesus's whole life can be seen as a part, a central part, of the eternal struggle between Good and Evil, and he knew in his own person the full force of evil in its power and venom. He knew also that the only force to resist evil and to banish it from the lives of men and women was the power of sacrificial Love.

So, who is on the Lord's side? Surely all those who, whatever their stated belief, are 'part of something good'.

## Postscripts

1. Simone Weil, no orthodox Christian, said: 'There is something mysterious in the universe which is complicit with those who love nothing but the Good.'

2. The 'be part of something good' is not the same as 'being good'. The latter has its focus on good behaviour, and therefore it is subject to pride and self-congratulation – all the dangers Jesus saw in the Pharisees.

3. Everyone understands Goodness. If a man jumps into a raging torrent and rescues a child, that is good in any part of the world. If someone has a loaf of bread and meets a starving fellow human being, and gives that person half of it, that is good everywhere. If a man has a reputation for honesty, his word is his bond, that is good in any society. Is this not therefore a simple unifying point for Christians, Muslims and Jews – for people of all religions and none? ...

The words of the song are from 'It's Your World Now', track 9 on the second disc of *A Long Road Out of Eden*. They seem to be the words of an older man who recognises his time in this world is nearly over and who is speaking to the next generation:

*It's your world now.*

*Use well your time.*

*Be part of something good.*

*Leave something good behind.*

*The curtain falls, I take my bow.*

*That's how it's meant to be.*

*It's your world now ...*

**George Wilkie** is a former Member of the Iona Community. He joined the Community in 1945.

# The Growing Hope Appeal home stretch: Do you have any unwanted or broken jewellery to donate?

Maybe an odd cuff link or earring, a broken watch, a damaged necklace or a ring that doesn't fit – any gold, silver or costume jewellery you haven't worn for years? Please donate these items to the Growing Hope Appeal.

With nearly £1M in funds raised, the Iona Community has now completed the first two stages of its Growing Hope Appeal. Following the 2007 redevelopment of its Camas Centre on Mull, 2009 saw the transformation of the shop-building opposite the Abbey into a Welcome and Interpretation Centre for guests and visitors to the island. Now, on the home stretch of the appeal, we want to underpin this investment by developing and improving accommodation for our staff members, providing new living space for 5 people within Dunsmeorach. This landmark house of the Community's Founder, the late George MacLeod, is situated on the roadside leading to the Abbey.

Welcome and hospitality are central to the ministry of the Iona Community. Key to this are our staff members who together share a common life and each week form a living community with guests from all over the world, bringing together work and worship, prayer and politics, the sacred and the secular.

To donate, please contact the Iona Community's Glasgow office:  
**0141-332-6343, [admin@iona.org.uk](mailto:admin@iona.org.uk)**

## CHANGES IN THE 2010 MEMBERSHIP BOOKS

Significant changes will be noticed by Members and Associates in next year's books, which are currently in preparation. Members will already know of the decision taken by Council last December to include only the Member's name and that of any spouse or partner. Fuller biographical, family and professional details, along with a note of personal interests and concerns, are to be included in a 100-word submission to feature in the 'Rogues Gallery' and on the Members' section of the Community's website.

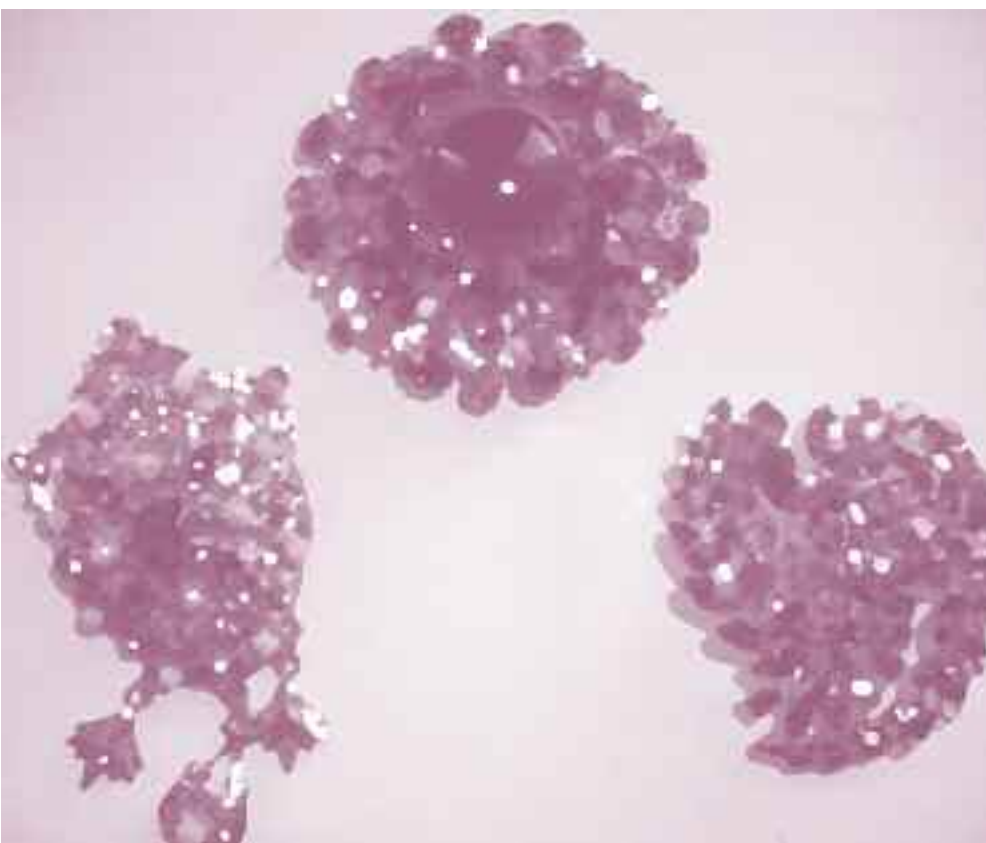
The most significant change to the Members' and Associates' books, however, is that there will no longer be separate books for each category of membership. Current books will be replaced by:

**The Iona Community Act of Prayer Book** – for use in worship and personal devotions. Contents will include the Rule (for Members and Associates), the concerns of the Community, and the names of Members, Associates and Youth Associates to be remembered in prayer. These will be listed according to Family Group and in geographical regions.

**The Iona Community Year Book** – will contain information about the Rule and the concerns of the Community, contact details for Members, Associates, Youth Associates and key members of staff, dates of Council meetings, plenaries and Community Weeks, and information about the current theme, committees and working groups.

All of these changes are the result of the growth and geographical expansion of the Community and the inclusion of additional contact information such as email addresses. The format of the Act of Prayer Book will, it is hoped, emphasise the 'unity' in our Community and the format of the Year Book make the addresses easier to read. Oh, and we are also sourcing better staples!

*Peter Macdonald*



# reviews

**Down to Earth**, by Neil Paynter,  
illustrations by Iain Campbell, Wild Goose  
Publications, 2009 www.ionabooks.com

It's interesting that in his teaching, Jesus of Nazareth never really preached long sermons. He preferred to tell stories. Even the Sermon on the Mount is regarded by biblical scholars as a compendium of teaching given at a variety of times in a variety of situations.

Christ's stories stay in the mind. Who could possibly forget the Prodigal Son, or the Good Samaritan? They are subversive visual events, told with economy of words. Yet these two parables alone encapsulate the core of the gospel message.

We need good storytellers, and Neil Paynter is one such person. His tales are vivid and compelling, thankfully without the anxious need to tack on moralistic endings.

The stories come from Neil's experience of life, as well as from reflection on scripture. The author has been a farm labourer, a fruit-picker, a teacher, a security guard, a bookseller, a hospital cleaner, a stand-up comedian, a musician and an editor.

Apart from that, he's lived a fairly boring life.

The stories in this book come out of Neil's experience of working in homeless shelters in North America and Britain, as a nurse's aide with the elderly and as a mental health worker.

'I don't want to romanticise people, but so many of the folk I met in my work, so many of the discarded people, were to me the most prophetic and Christ-like. It was a privilege to know them.

'I wanted to live in a world where heart matters, not money. Where richness is measured in stories. Where people are valued for their life experience. That was naive, I guess. Still, we move further and

further away from that human world, don't we?'

Neil explains that he didn't think of himself as a Christian when he started this work. That's the reason, he says, why some of the stories are more 'religious' than others. 'Some of the stories ... don't seem 'Christian' at all. But I don't believe Jesus lives in a church, or is very dogmatic about the language he wants us to use – I think of him as very down to earth, open and understanding. I think he cares that we use language well though – he was a poet. I think he wants us to tell good stories.'

There are plenty of good stories in this powerful book. Some of them are sagas, others are dialogues, and others again are fragments. Take this short piece called Hairpins:

*'What 'cha doin', Katherine?' She sits in the living room with a box of hairpins on her lap. She keeps sticking hairpins in her hair.*

*'I'm putting hairpins in my hair,' she answers, irritated, like I'm stupid. 'If I keep on doing this ... it will be all right,' she says.*

*'Oh,' I answer ... and I stand and watch her trying to keep herself together. Trying to keep time from unravelling and her life from falling apart.*

Like Jean Vanier, Neil finds his Christ in the poor, the dispossessed and the vulnerable. He concludes by asking: 'Why do we spend £53 billion a year on armaments and death (UK statistic) and segregate elderly people in boring, sterile, impersonal surroundings? Why not instead use the money to help create and support communities where the elderly and children and young people and others can all live together and share a life and journey?'

This rich book, with its prayers and meditations as well as stories, could be used in public worship or private devotion. It is a resource

for a living church, in which the teachers are vulnerable and sometimes bewildered people – and also Neil himself, whose craftsmanship is never obtrusive. And Iain Campbell's illustrations are very powerful.

Ron Ferguson

## Passion and Power: Conflict and Change in Seventh-Century Britain

Warren R. Bardsley,  
Church in the Market Place Publications, 2009. To  
order: wbardsley39@btinternet.com

An aggressive, short-sighted ruler, intent on making pre-emptive strikes against foreign powers to maintain his own position, is replaced, at last, by a wise, scholarly and thoughtful successor, to the immense relief of all and sundry.

Sounds familiar?

Warren Bardsley's latest little book is about what happened in the Saxon Kingdom of Northumbria in the 7th century, when the disastrous reign of Ecgfrith (one of the infamous 'Egg-Kings' of 1066 And All That!) was replaced, after his death in battle, by the reign of his half-brother, Aldfrith.

Aldfrith was an Iona-educated scholar, a pupil of St Aidan's. He ruled wisely and well for nearly twenty years (685–704). He was a contemporary of the saintly Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, and the more controversial Bishop Wilfrid, of Synod of Whitby fame. In his account of Aldfrith's life and times, Warren finds 'a number of resonances with the life of the Church today'. He mentions the tension between conflicting theological traditions, often cutting across denominational boundaries, and the often difficult relationship between church and state.

Warren serves up this lively story with his own passion and power. He writes it as a fast-moving contemporary account of events, in the present tense, and with much imagined, but scholarly-based, dialogue. Reading it, I kept thinking

not so much of the issues troubling the church today, as of the deeper issues troubling many reflective souls in our aggressively secular society. How to live as a person of faith in a world more interested in status and power. How to 'speak truth to power', as the martyred Latin American Bishop Oscar Romero, of the last century, told us to do. How to be 'as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves', as the Gospel commands us. And how to hold on to the practice of the presence of God in daily life, in the midst of the immense pressures, and compromises, of the world around us.

Not easy. And Warren is not offering easy answers. But we all need role models, and in this book, a successor to his earlier book about Adomnán, Warren offers us yet another – this time a poet, a scholar, a politician, and someone who was willing to struggle to live a life of faith in tumultuous and demanding times. Plus ça change!

John Harvey

**You Are Mine: Reflections on Who We Are**, Alison Webster, SPCK, 2009  
www.spck.org.uk

*You Are Mine* is as beautiful and mysterious as the unique human beings it's about and its appearance amid the celebrations of 200 years of Darwin's 'Big Idea' is interesting, to say the least. Like most people, the book looks fairly ordinary, its beauty is quiet: so many connections – none left unexplored; many hidden questions – no attempt to answer them but every attempt to show how we live with them. We are encouraged to learn to live without destructive longings for certainty. Doctrine is probably the only alternative to uncertainty and, Alison pointedly reminds us, is always somebody's doctrine. It disregards the miracle of human uniqueness. How good it is to read her plea for more agnosticism about where Truth lies and her developing uneasy sense that

ideology was getting in the way of humanity. She opens the chapter 'Faith' with the words: 'The house of God is cold', and ends with the story of the flesh-and-blood person who shows us who God is. I'll leave you to think about that!

Alison seeks to stimulate our wonder at our own uniqueness and how this matters. The book is a perceptive exploration of identity: my identity, your identity and, perhaps above all, the essential nature of the interaction between us: how do I, as one unique and irreplaceable human being, step beyond myself and into an encounter with another unique and irreplaceable human being – you? That's one of the book's big questions. It's about what makes community.

Courage, emotional imagination and humility are at the heart of *You Are Mine* along with becoming and relating, compassion and connection. It's decidedly not a book to encourage navel-gazing! There are the stories we live by, micro stories, our own experiences as we tell them, and there are macro stories, some shared, many invisible, that may dominate or shape who we are. Personal and political identities are not separate. Alison's concern is always relationship and connection – how we live together: our demanding common task and that for which we're more than likely to be remembered. She explores interdependence as the essence of our humanity, that there are those without whom I could not be who I am, and there are those who could not be who they are without me. This, Alison tells us without compromise, matters.

We are led away from the promotion of the individual, the temptation to equate our identity with our achievements which 'are, at best, transient and relative' or imagining that we are born with, or at any point in our lives acquire, a fixed identity. The gift, the work of art that is a human life grows, changes and develops within

relationship. Essential to this book is the search for a sense of ourselves that is strong and deep enough to enable us to change, but not so strong that it becomes rigid, restricting the directions in which we can grow, and an understanding of the landscape that lurks between the personal and the political, the individual and the corporate. In understanding identity, these two must be held together in our minds at all times.

There's an especially poignant and revealing little story on page 4:

*A friend told me recently of her experience of sitting through an unsatisfactory theological conference session. The theme was 'otherness/alterity'. After an hour or so of abstract theological reasoning about the nature of 'the other' one of the participants – a Latin American woman from a liberation theology tradition – could bear it no longer. 'We don't call them "others"', she said. 'We call people "neighbours".'*

'What makes me feel alive?' is the big identity question. A human being fully alive is always in the process of becoming ... with others ... so *You Are Mine* becomes in itself a book about life as flowing, changing process. I like the way Alison explores fluidity and movement and uses the uniting image of breathing – we breathe, we grow, we flourish – as energy integral to this process of becoming: Insofar as it can ever be fixed, our identity is located in that pause between inhaling and exhaling – between receiving giftedness from God, the world and others, and passing it on: exhaling, bestowing, creating.

So I encourage you to read *You Are Mine*. You probably won't discover the reason for your being but you may realise your becoming ... in communion and community.

Joy Mead

## THE IONA COMMUNITY'S 2010 ISLANDS PROGRAMME

You will have found a 2010 programme enclosed in this edition of Coracle. Should you need the outer colour brochure, please contact the Glasgow office: admin@iona.org.uk, 0141-332-6343. Thank you.

## HARVESTING THE WORLD: A LITURGY FOR HARVEST FESTIVALS

### THE WILD GOOSE RESOURCE GROUP

Harvesting the World is the tenth in the series of WGRG Liturgy Booklets. It contains a full liturgy which is ideal for Harvest, celebrating the gifts of the earth and its people. Additionally, it includes elements specifically designed in collaboration with The Balmore Trust and Just Trading (Scotland), who together have initiated a project to aid the education of the children of rice farmers in Malawi: the 90kg Of Rice Project. Material specific to the project can be found at the end of the booklet. However, the liturgical material stands on its own independent of whether or not a local church is involved in the 90kg Of Rice Project and provides an excellent resource for reflection on the interdependent nature of our contemporary world, raising awareness of the implications of our lifestyles and the demands of justice. To order (£4.50 plus post and packing):

**WILD GOOSE RESOURCE GROUP,**  
Iona Community, 4th Floor, Savoy House,  
140 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3DH  
Tel: 0141-332-6343/Fax: 0141-332-1090  
wgrg@iona.org.uk  
www.wgrg.co.uk

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Give a friend an Iona Community Friend membership as a Christmas gift and they will receive Coracle four times a year, plus the new Iona Community e-bulletin 12 times a year!

Friend membership: £31.00pa,  
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**For details, contact  
Lynn Harper-Baldwin,  
Membership Secretary:  
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## WILD GOOSE PUBLICATIONS

### NEW TITLES

#### **Light of the World: Daily Readings for Advent, Peter Millar & Neil Paynter, £9.99 (plus post and packing)**

Readings from Iona Community Members, Associates and friends – Peter Millar, Ruth Burgess, Kathy Galloway, John Harvey, Jan Sutch Pickard, David Rhodes and others. Advent is a special time in the Christian year. In our troubled world, which is also a world of extraordinary possibility and creativity, we need such times more than ever. Times to renew our soul so that our lives may express a deeper compassion and a more joy-filled awareness. Traditionally in the days of Advent there has been an emphasis on the coming of Light – that Light which illumines all our journeys and brings healing to the nations. May these readings enlarge your hope, and bring you to Christmas morning with Christ's light steadily illumining your path.

#### **Iona: God's Energy: The Vision and Spirituality of the Iona Community, Norman Shanks, £10.99 (plus post and packing)**

This new edition of Norman Shanks' book (previously published by Hodder & Stoughton) is an outstanding introduction and guide to the spirituality, concerns and activities of the Iona Community, by a former Leader of the Community. A new chapter has been added to bring the book up to date.

#### **50 Great Prayers from the Iona Community, Neil Paynter (Ed.), £8.99 (plus post and packing)**

Fifty of the best-loved prayers of the Iona Community in a portable edition. Prayers by Kathy Galloway, Ruth Burgess, the Wild Goose Resource Group, George MacLeod, Kate McIlhagga, Jan Sutch Pickard, Peter Millar, Joy Mead, Ali Newell, Chris Polhill ...

### SOME ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS BOOKS

#### **Advent Readings from Iona, Jan Sutch Pickard and Brian Woodcock, £8.99 (plus post and packing)**

#### **Cloth for the Cradle: Worship Resources and Readings for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, Wild Goose Resource Group, £12.99 (plus post and packing)**

#### **Candles & Conifers: Resources for All Saints' and Advent, Ruth Burgess, £14.99 (plus post and packing)**

#### **Hay & Stardust: Resources for Christmas to Candlemas, Ruth Burgess, £14.99 (plus post and packing)**

#### **Hear My Cry: A Daily Prayer Book for Advent, Ruth Burgess, £8.99 (plus post and packing)**

#### **Going Home Another Way: Daily Readings and Resources for Christmastide, Neil Paynter, £10.99 (plus post and packing)**

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Glasgow G2 3DH**

# A touching place: news and letters

Coracle welcomes letters relating to contents of the magazine. Contact details on p.1

## KNIFE CRIME

I have to admit, I am easily confused. The Government is trying to clamp down on knife crime. Politicians are united in their condemnation of young men who get a buzz out of carrying lethal weapons.

News bulletins carry extensive coverage of knife deaths. Partly because such deaths are important, but also because there is something fascinating about the idea of one human being stabbing another human being to death.

Young people carry weapons to demand respect from others on the streets. A knife is a symbol of status and power. It says 'I am dangerous: do not mess with me.'

Perhaps for some young men, pumped up with testosterone, there is a temptation to attack for the thrill of it – or, maybe because of the fear that they could be in danger from another person with a knife.

Naturally, politicians condemn such behaviour as anti-social. 'We will not tolerate it,' they say. 'We will come down hard on these hooligans who are a danger to others.'

But, reading Brian Quail's excellent article on Trident in the last issue of *Coracle* ('Time up for Trident – and for the Union?'), it struck me that you could substitute the words 'nuclear weapons' for 'knives'.

And that's where I get confused. If it is wrong to carry a deadly weapon on Britain's streets to ensure the respect of others and to be a deterrent against attack from some other knife-wielding hoodlum, how can it be right for nations to swagger around with a pocket full of nuclear weapons?

Unless it is to earn respect from

other world leaders: to be seen to be a 'hard' man. To be seen as virile and to be feared. Or maybe to compensate for being on the wrong side of the male menopause?

If we abandoned our nuclear weapons, we might be in a stronger position to lecture young people about knife crime.

*David Rhodes, Associate*

## NEWS OF THE RECENT SWEDISH IONA-INSPIRED GATHERING IN KUVARP

From July 3–11, the Swedish Iona-inspired Network gathered at Kuvarp in southern Sweden. The first weekend was a smaller gathering for members, where we, with Peter Millar as enabler, worked at an expression of the core values and commitments of our network, which is still in its initial stages. We were then joined by a crowd of some 30 members and non-members, aged 2–80. The week included 'lectures' on peace, healing, reconciliation and interfaith dialogue, a pilgrimage, workshops on everything from ventriloquism to smithwork, and services in the beautiful chapel.

*Helene Egnell*

## VISIT MALAWI AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE GROWING HOPE APPEAL!

June Walker, an Associate member living and working in Malawi, is willing to offer hospitality, on a self-catering basis, at her cottage on the shores of Lake Malawi, in exchange for a donation to Growing Hope. If you are interested, June's contact details are in the Associates' Book. In Malawi June is considered 'the Mother of permaculture'.

## NEWS FROM EURIG SCANDRETT ABOUT THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BHOPAL DISASTER

I have just returned from the UK headquarters of Dow in Staines with Sathyu Sarangi from Bhopal, the Yes Men\* and a crowd of activists from the International

Campaign for Justice in Bhopal. A stunt had been devised by the Yes Men, to offer to Dow executives a taste of a 'new product' bottled water by the name of 'B'EAU PAL'. Water had been brought from a hand pump close to the site of the old Union Carbide factory. The water from this pump is used by Bhopalis for their daily needs and has been found to contain dichloromethane, carbon tetrachloride and chloroform considerably above levels considered to be safe. Our 'B'EAU PAL' water was bottled and appropriately designer-labelled, naming these three ingredients. The label said:

*The unique qualities of our water come from 25 years of slow-leaching toxins at the site of the world's largest industrial accident. To this day, Dow Chemical (who bought Union Carbide) and the Indian government have refused to clean up and whole new generations are being poisoned.*

In fact, the stunt never took place. Dow, presumably tipped off by the press release, closed its office early and only security staff were present for the cameras. Still, we closed down Dow for a few hours at least.

This year is the 25th anniversary of the gas leak in Bhopal, which killed 8,000 people within days. The injustice of the gas poisoning on those killed, maimed and their children with congenital defects is compounded by the ongoing injustice of the water contamination. Union Carbide consistently fought and appealed against attempts at legal justice and settled with the Government of India for \$470 million, a small fraction of the amount required for medical care and rehabilitation, let alone compensation. Despite absorbing Union Carbide in 2001, Dow denies that it has any liability. Sathyu Sarangi has worked with survivors, providing health care, and was in the UK to receive an honorary doctorate for his work.

India, with its steeply rising growth rate, is at the forefront of neo-liberal expansion even whilst the collapse of the banks has exposed the fallacy of neo-liberalism. India's economic miracle is reaching only a tiny percentage of the people. The poor who are being displaced and poisoned, however, are rising up, and people's movements are taking on the corporations and state collusion. Due to the actions of protest groups, Dow has been unable to expand its investments in India.

For the past three years, I have been part of a research project documenting the experiences of the Bhopal survivors, who have been campaigning for justice over the 25 years. This remarkable movement, made up of a number of different campaign groups, is overwhelmingly made up of poor women with little formal education who have taken on the powerful American multinational and their government which supports them. There are equal numbers of Hindus and Muslims in the affected part of Bhopal and many of the women in the movement have talked about their relationship with their religion. Many unhelpful religious practices have been abandoned by survivor-activists: Hindus and Muslims regularly eat together, Hindus have challenged many caste discriminations and some Muslims have stopped wearing burqa. But they are not becoming secular. Despite the lack of support from religious leaders, the women express strong religious devotion, but are redefining religion from within the practice of a struggle for justice.

*Eurig Scandrett, Member*

*\* The Yes Men are a group of activists who practise 'identity correction' by impersonating big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them. Targets are leaders and big corporations who put profits ahead of everything else.*

## LESSLIE NEWBIGIN CENTENARY: CELEBRATIONS IN EDINBURGH

Bishop James Edward Lesslie Newbigin was born on 8th December 1909 and died on 30th January 1998. He was an outstanding figure in the twentieth-century ecumenical movement. As a Church of Scotland missionary, evangelist and preacher, mission strategist, social visionary and person of prayer he played pioneering roles in the United Church of South India and in the World Council of Churches. After forty years in India his last twenty-five were devoted to addressing the spiritual malaise of the secularised West. Lesslie Newbigin was a great friend of George MacLeod, and features in the film *A Sermon in Stone*.

*Service of Thanksgiving: Sunday, 6th December, 2009, 6:30pm, St George's West, Church of Scotland, 58 Shandwick Place. Preacher: The Revd Canon Dr Andrew Wingate*

*Public Seminar: Saturday, 12th December, 2009, 10am – 4pm, St John's Scottish Episcopal Church Hall, Princes Street, Lecturer: Professor Veli-Matti Karkkainen*

For more information, contact Rev Murdoch Mackenzie: [mackenziema@gmail.com](mailto:mackenziema@gmail.com)

Murdoch is a Member of the Iona Community.

## IONA COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN

The Iona Community e-bulletin, companion to *Coracle*, is full of news, features, campaign information, worship resources, reflections on the Word, poetry, reviews – and more ...

See past editions online at [www.iona.org.uk/coracle.php](http://www.iona.org.uk/coracle.php)

If you are a Member, Associate or Friend, make sure the Glasgow office has your current email address so that you can receive the e-bulletin and keep up to date on all that's happening in the Community.

## THE STORY OF THE BIRD BATH IN THE PEACE GARDEN OF IONA ABBEY AND A REQUEST

This bird bath (*below*), carved out of a piece of Yorkshire stone, was bought by the Yorkshire Family Group in memory of my husband, Eric Welburn, and dedicated by John Harvey at Community Week 1994. Eric was the groundsman at Iona Abbey from 1979 to 1982 and went to nearly every Work Week from the late '70s up to his death in December 1993. He looked after the doves and always made sure they had plenty of water. The stone is appropriately placed in the Peace Garden outside the Abbey and has been enjoyed by many birds, but as time passes, its origins are forgotten. Recently, a friend hosting at the Abbey found it dirty and overgrown. She was joined by many of the guests at the Abbey in clearing the weeds and making the bird bath accessible to birds once again. I fear that one day workmen, looking for a piece of stone to fill a gap, might break it up, not knowing why it is there. So I would be grateful if, when you visit Iona, you would look out for the bird bath in the Peace Garden, and make sure it is accessible to the birds and full of water.

*Pat Welburn, Member*



Photo of the bird bath in the Peace Garden by Catherine Hartkin

Neil Squires

# I will seek peace

I will seek peace at heart

Try to overcome my fears, my anxieties and troubled, anxious mind

I will look for solace

Search for comfort

I will seek peace at heart

I will seek peace at home

Reach out to those who are victims of abuse through age or gender or sexuality

I will challenge those who are perpetrators

Speak up for those who have no voice

I will seek peace at home

I will seek peace in the virtual world

Encourage young and old to dream the right dreams

live creatively, have real adventures –

which are free from violence or aggression

I will seek peace in the virtual world

I will seek peace with the earth

I'll campaign for the forests

Buy fairtrade products, recycle, keep a compost

and wonder at the beauty of nature

I will seek peace with the earth

I will seek peace in the marketplace

Live humbly and responsibly

Share my wealth and my home

Stand up for the rights of the poor and exploited

I will seek peace in the marketplace

I will seek peace not war

Study non-violence, resolve conflict,

campaign against arms, lobby governments

and challenge apathy

I will seek peace not war

And in my seeking

I will live with hope

Strive for change

Act with humility ... courage ... and faith

And choose love not hate ...

*Written for worship at an Iona Community plenary; reflecting on themes from the World Council of Churches' 'Decade to End Violence'*

**Neil Squires** is a Member of the Iona Community.



**Let us pray for the continent of Africa,  
where nations still struggle to be free  
from poverty and malnutrition  
and from the debt or corruption  
on which poverty thrives.**

**Let us pray with the people of Zimbabwe  
for justice in their nation,  
with the people of Darfur  
for an end to genocide,  
with the people of Malawi  
for prosperity for all.**

**Lord, in your mercy,  
hear our prayer ...**

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From *Harvesting the World***

**coracle**

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