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THE POVERTY TRUTH COMMISSION

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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 bi-monthly 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 e-mail or on disk) but cannot always be included.

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John and Molly Harvey

From the holy city: the Poverty Truth Commission

'A demanding common task alone builds community' – now where have we heard that before?

And here it is again.

Nearly three years ago, we were asked if regular meetings could be held in our house in preparation for the Poverty Truth Commission, to take place in March 2009.

This was an amazing event, which happened in Glasgow's City Chambers over one afternoon. 400 people came together, to hear the experts: people who were actually living in poverty shared their experiences – the Testifiers – and called for change. Also there, listening, was an invited group of civic leaders – church leaders, politicians, MSPs, MPs, representatives of the police and the media – who were there to hear the testimony of the former group, and respond – the Commissioners.

The purpose of the meetings in our house was to bring together the group of people who would speak out at the event as the Testifiers, about their experience of poverty and exclusion – speak out either in spoken words, in song, in drama, in dance or in film.

And so began an amazing journey:

- as this group met together to share their stories and to work out how best to present them
- as we all came gradually to trust each other and to form a strong bond
- as the task became more focussed and more urgent; and also more demanding, with expert facilitation from Elaine Downie, guidance from Paul Chapman (the initiator of the whole project) and overall leadership and inspiration from Martin Johnstone, from Faith in Community Scotland
- as we adopted the great slogan, first coined by the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa: *'Nothing about us without us is for us.'*

For us, there were many echoes of the work of Glasgow Braendam Link with families living in poverty, where both Molly and Elaine had worked during the 1990s. The same values, of respect for individuals' dignity and integrity, were basic to the work of the group; the same desire, too, to enable people living in poverty and social exclusion to be equipped to speak out and to be heard in their own terms. We saw all this developing over the months of hard work, and counted it a tremendous privilege to be involved, even in a small way.

Many great individual stories were told, with much struggle, tears and laughter, as the group worked towards the event of March 2009. One of the most moving ones came from Ruchazie, a peripheral housing scheme on the north of Glasgow. Through the local church there, a small group of young people from the scheme travelled to Malawi, and spent time living with local families, and working with local young people of their own age. Four of the young people from Ruchazie were involved in the Poverty Truth Commission – and we were all deeply moved as we heard them speak of how they had come back to Glasgow, their minds blown open by the courage, enthusiasm and resilience of the young people they had met in Malawi, who, as one of the Ruchazie boys put it, 'just had nothing but were so happy!'

This story has a tragic part to it as well, which illustrates the huge difficulties that young people living in poverty in some parts of Glasgow have to cope

with. It's well-known here that in some of our peripheral housing schemes, there are territorial boundaries which it's often not safe to cross. One of the Ruchazie boys, with a group of friends, had to cross one of these boundaries one evening to attend a birthday party. They borrowed a car from one of their parents, as it wouldn't have been safe for them to cross the boundary on foot. Tragically, the car crashed – and the lad who had been to Malawi, and had his whole life changed, was killed.

In March 2009 the event in the City Chambers in Glasgow took place. The presentations on that day were remarkable: straight storytelling, rap, dance, film, song – the talent on show was tremendous. The Commissioners responded in the best way possible – came back after a brief meeting together, and instead of falling into the usual trap of either offering bland comments or instant solutions, simply said, 'We want to meet with you and see what, *together*, we can achieve.'

And so began the next stage of the Poverty Truth Commission, when some of the original Commissioners met with some of the original Testifiers – all now called Commissioners – and formed three small sub-groups, to start working on specific areas which they jointly identified as needing to be urgently addressed, if poverty was to be tackled seriously and effectively in this city. Tricia McConalogue, who had also worked with Glasgow Braendam Link, became co-chair of the Commission, first with Jim Wallace, and then with Maureen McGinn.

A group formed to see what could be done about *violence*. This group included John Carnochan, head of the Strathclyde Police Violence Reduction Unit which was already pioneering a radically new method of tackling violence. He said: 'The Poverty Truth Commission has helped shift my perspective and influenced our work.'

A second group set about tackling the issue of *misrepresentation of poverty by the media*, to see if the usual biased and sensational coverage that it so often gives could be changed.

A third group centred on the work of the *kinship carers*, mainly grandmothers caring for their grandchildren because their own parents were unable to look after them due to problems with addiction. This group was seeking to promote a level playing field of financial support for these women, who give so much care for their own family members, but who often, due to the uneven distribution of government help and benefits, struggle financially in a very serious way.

By now, two part-time administrators, Kat Watts and Miriam Rose, had been employed by Faith in Community Scotland, and their input was invaluable in terms of expertise, and of planning and following up meetings between these three groups and decision-making bodies.

Apart from addressing specific issues, two other significant outcomes of this phase of the Poverty Truth Commission were that several of the original Commissioners spoke of how the whole experience had changed aspects of their work practice. Also, at a personal level, labels came off, and firm friendships were formed across the old Commissioner/Testifier divide, as people worked at the demanding common task.

All of the above was working towards the final event on Saturday, March 16th, 2011. Again, this was held in Glasgow's City Chambers, before a packed audience, mainly of representatives from organisations committed to taking forward the cause. For two hours, the Commissioners shared the story of their two revolutionary years – through film, dialogue, rap, stand-up comedy, and hard-hitting accounts of the three main issues they had tackled: overcoming violence, media

misrepresentation and kinship care.

Martin Johnstone summed up the day, and the two years' work, by speaking of the legacy of the Poverty Truth Commission. He highlighted the two main outcomes. There was the *confidence* that the people in poverty had gained, as they had discovered their voice, and realised that it could be, and was, heard by the people in power. And there was the *knowledge* that the people in power had gained, that with all their wisdom and even a lifetime of public service, statistics and sound bites were never enough to deal with poverty – what was needed was a complete culture change.

So what is this culture change? In Martin's words: '*If it had been white people leading the black civil rights movement in America, nothing would have changed!*' If people in poverty don't lead the fight against poverty, then nothing will change. The experience of the Commission has been that as people in power have come out from behind their desks – as people in poverty have stopped being treated as, and feeling like, victims, and have found their voice – so a whole new energy, and a whole new dynamic, for change has been set loose. '*Ultimately*,' said Martin, '*this is about human relationships – getting rid of the labels and the badges – and putting real meaning in the bland phrase "We're all in this together!"*'

The work will go on. Over twenty-five organisations, in Scotland and across the UK, have already committed themselves to taking up the challenge, and the process, of the Poverty Truth Commission. The three working groups will keep at it. The lives of the individual Commissioners, by their own admission, have been changed for good. The event in the City Chambers ended with everyone in the hall being asked to turn to their neighbour and share the great slogan: '*Nothing about us without us is for us.*' We left the building, very conscious that it was also up to all of us. ●

Ruth Shanks

From Atlanta, Georgia to Glasgow's East End

Associate Ruth Douglas Shanks tells the story of the foot clinic she set up in 2008 at Glasgow's Lodging House Mission ...

As we flew down the St Lawrence River, with Quebec on one side and Maine on the other, with New York some miles ahead, the sky cleared, apart from a few clouds whose reflection on the water made them appear like floating islands on the sparkling sea. It felt like the final stretch down to Atlanta where the adventure and life-changing experience would start – a chance for me to become a volunteer for three months at the Open Door Community, helping each week with the Thursday evening foot clinic and the Tuesday morning breakfasts, and sharing in the Sunday afternoon Communion and the fine meal that followed.

Our first contact with the Open Door (or '910' as it's known locally: it's a big house at 910 Ponce de Leon Avenue near downtown Atlanta) was in 2000 when Norman, my husband, spent a month of his 'sabbatical' as a resident volunteer there. He'd been back for a couple of short visits since then and some of the Open Door people had visited Glasgow and Iona, including a week that Murphy Davis and Ed Loring, two of the Open Door's founders, had led at the Abbey in 2002. But now, during Norman's three months as a visiting scholar at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, just half an hour's bus ride from 910, I was to have the chance myself to find out what he was so enthusiastic about!

At 910 (for over 25 years now) there is a community of committed people, some of them formerly homeless, who provide hospitality for homeless people (mostly male, African-American or Hispanic), inviting them into their home for meals, 120 or so each day, and offering them support in the form of counselling, showers, clothing, toiletries, etc. All the Open Door's work is rooted in prayer and worship, and includes prison ministry and political activism – campaigning against poverty, racism and the death penalty.

It was a very powerful, heart-warming and memorable experience for me, out of which grew the idea of starting a foot clinic in Glasgow. I realised, after three months of working with destitute men and women in Atlanta, that this was something that I could do on returning home – using my skills as a physiotherapist in the sort of way I had been looking for since retiring. So I approached the Lodging House Mission, a church-related day-centre in Glasgow's East End mostly for folk who are homeless or in hostels and supported accommodation, about the possibility of starting a foot clinic there, and they readily agreed. The plan was to base the practicalities broadly on what happens each week at the Open Door, although I recognised that there would be significant differences due to context and culture (and I've certainly discovered that most of the people who come to the foot clinic are better off than those we dealt with in Atlanta, owing to the lack of welfare benefits in the US). Some of the local churches helped with donations of foot-baths, sprays, scrubs, cream, towels, scissors, clippers, etc, as well as giving money, and this generosity is ongoing. Initially Alison Macdonald helped me, then Duncan Finlayson, before he moved back north; now with Iona Community members Katy Owen and Carolyn Smyth making up the team, the foot clinic continues to thrive.

What happens each fortnight on Tuesday mornings? We rely on people referring themselves; so introductions, initial conversations and explanations of what we do are important. People who come naturally

can be apprehensive: taking off your socks and shoes for this purpose makes you vulnerable (and you can't escape in a hurry!), people can be embarrassed about dirty feet and so on. Clearly we are not trained podiatrists. What we offer is foot-washing, using foot-spas, basic chiropody (e.g. cutting nails, removing hard skin and corns), massage and general advice on footwear, foot care and other minor problems (e.g. muscle strains, infections). We have a supply of shoes and socks. As well as giving advice, if there are more serious problems, we encourage the men and women to attend a nearby medical clinic. The maximum number of people we have treated in the two-hour period is 12, and it tends to vary each time, depending on how long it takes to deal with each person who comes.

We deliberately sit at a lower level than the folk who come. Apart from being more comfortable and the practical reasons (relating to foot treatment) for this, it puts the relationship on a more level playing field, and we feel this is important. After all, in what's happening the vulnerability is mutual – for the giver as well as the receiver, and this helps achieve a sense of sharing and equality in this basic and intimate task.

Why is this important to us and how does it relate to our faith? In general the folk who come initiate, and are keen to engage in, conversation about their story and circumstances; and we often have the sense of opportunities missed and young lives wasted. Occasionally they ask us why we are doing this. Sometimes they tell us about their family and how they became homeless – very often because of family break-up and addiction problems. They often speak of their dream to be in some sort of employment (even more difficult, of course, in the present economic

situation) and mention people who have helped them at some point along the way; such names as Colin Anderson, John Miller and Betty White have cropped up!

As far as the faith dimension goes, I feel there is something sacramental in what we are doing. Jesus cared for the marginalised and needy, washed the feet of the disciples and told his followers to do likewise in loving and caring for one another. One example of that is Mary, who according to the Gospels washed the feet of Jesus, using expensive ointment, even before he washed the disciples' feet: so Mary can be seen as the model disciple. And I'm reminded too of the old saying, which happens to be prominently displayed just inside the entrance of the Open Door: *'Often we meet Christ in the stranger's guise.'*

As I finish this reflection I'm continuing to ask myself why it has taken so long, since Neil (Editor of *Coracle*) first suggested it, to put pen to paper and write about something that has meant so much to me. I still don't know the answer. But I do know that it is a good thing to do, it's fulfilling and most of the time it's fun. ●

www.lhm-glasgow.org.uk

www.opendoorcommunity.org

Note from the Editor: Ed Loring's new book is *The Cry of the Poor: Cracking White Male Supremacy – An Incendiary and Militant Proposal*, ODC Press Publications: www.opendoorcommunity.org

If you've not read Ed's books before, you are missing one of the most passionate, prophetic voices in the Western world.

Looking at the environment through the lens of prophecy

Eurig Scandrett

Taken from a talk given to the Edinburgh regional plenary, 2010 on 'being a prophetic church in the 21st century' ...

A great deal of the church's thinking about the environment has been based on different understandings of creation. Creation theology has in some places been seen as a synonym for environmental theology: the fact of being created, being creatures alongside all other creatures, creation being good, humanity having dominion over the earth, the Sabbath as the crown of creation, etc.

I want to argue that it is a mistake to start from creation in order to understand a Christian approach to the environment. It is a mistake both theologically and politically. The appropriate place to start is *prophecy*.

Walter Brueggemann has argued that two distinct trajectories can be identified in the Bible. One encompasses creation, the Book of the Covenant, the wisdom tradition. This is the tradition of the kings, of the priests, the hierarchy. It was written and edited over a long period of time by those with influence, wanting to preserve their position.

It emphasises stability, hierarchy, reflection, changelessness.

This is all very well, but the Israelites, the worshippers of Yahweh, were founded and held together not by hierarchy or stability but by liberation: *'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt'*, that's why *'you shall have no other God but me.'* The liberation from slavery is the founding narrative; the Exodus gave the Israelites their faith. As Dorothee Soelle says: *They had to know they were liberated before they could know they were created.*

So there is this other tradition, the prophetic tradition, with origins in the liberation from slavery and the Exodus, and includes the prophets who develop a narrative of returning to the liberator God. This tradition emphasises radical change – it is unsettling, divisive, exposing oppression, rousing the poor, condemning the rich. Brueggemann argues that this is the tradition in which Jesus locates himself.

So I'm arguing that we should look at the environment not through the theology of creation but through the theology of prophecy – and only then, secondarily, should we look at creation. Our approach to creation should be based not on the original myths of Genesis, but on the prophetic utopia of 3rd Isaiah, of the new heaven and new earth.

So if we are thinking about the environment through prophetic eyes, we should ask: Who is suffering in the current state of the environment? Who are the oppressed? Who is the oppressor? Who are the environmentally poor?

Bound together through 'relations of actual harm'

The first thing to say about this is that we live in a globalised world. It is impossible to separate ourselves from the poor and oppressed because we are oppressors. The way the global economy is set up means that we cannot help but oppress others through our everyday activities. We may buy fair trade products, environmentally friendly products, we may make



ethical decisions in every aspect of our lifestyle, but by being in the world as citizens of a European nation, we oppress. Andrew Dobson, who writes on environmental citizenship, calls this the '*relations of actual harm*': the social relationships in which we exist cause actual harm to someone somewhere in the world. We cannot extricate ourselves from this (and even if we did manage to find a way to separate ourselves from all societies and live self-sufficiently in perfect isolation from everyone else, then notwithstanding the legacy of oppression we would take with us, we would also do nothing to challenge this oppression). This is the tragic dilemma of the parable of the talents – using the talents which have been allocated to us enables us to benefit from the exploitation of others, but burying the talents does no good either.

Neo-liberalism

The second thing to say is that we live in a particular form of globalised world – a neo-liberal one. Neo-liberalism puts the interests of capital above all other interests. It is a breach from the policies of the welfare state, in which most countries accepted a compromise between the interests of economic growth and the welfare of citizens. Neo-liberalism tears this up. The state no longer has the responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. The responsibility of the state is to make things easy for capital accumulation or economic growth. All things must become commodity, to be bought and sold in a marketplace, so that businesses can make profits out of them – or if they don't, they go to the wall. There is a constant striving to turn more things into commodities. Carbon trading is a way of commodifying the atmosphere: companies can buy and sell portions of the global atmospheric carbon cycle.

Neo-liberalism was first experimented with in Latin America by

US client dictators and juntas, then was introduced to the UK by Margaret Thatcher, to the US by Ronald Reagan, to Europe, Australia, Japan, the Pacific fringe, and then more recently to India and China, where it is currently leading to massive dispossession and, in India, civil war. The geographer David Harvey points out that, it is not quite true to say that neo-liberalism maximises economic growth. In many places throughout the world, when neo-liberalism was introduced, economic growth was lower than in Keynesian social democracy. The point is, neo-liberalism maximises particular kinds of economic growth: that which benefits the elite class, the owners of the big companies and their allies. So the point of neo-liberalism, to Harvey, is a shift of class power away from working people – who had achieved some influence through the welfare state – to the transnational capitalist class.

So the point is, we live in a time of globalisation but it is the particular form of globalisation which is the problem, the neo-liberal globalisation which puts the interests of the seriously wealthy, who need to find new ways to invest and make money, above the interests of everybody and everything else. But it doesn't have to be like this. Globalisation could mean many things which are in the interests of the poor, the dispossessed, the exploited. That is why the vast majority of movements – the environmental activists, trade unionists, tribal movements, land rights campaigners, peasant groups – who gather to protest at international meetings of the World Trade Organisation or the G8, or who gather themselves at the World Social Forum, call themselves the '*Alter-globalisation Movement*' – not anti-globalisation but alternative globalisation, under the banner of '*Another World Is Possible*' (which sounds very like a 21st-century secularised translation of 'the

Kingdom of God is among you').

Dumping onto the poorest

And thirdly, I want to describe the global economy as based on a logic of dumping. The economy, whether local or global, is essentially a mechanism for extracting materials, turning them into things which we need or want or can use, or into the energy which we need or want or can use, distributing these to us and then disposing of the materials again. At each of the stages in this process, economic decisions are made. We are used to making our decisions as consumers, for example in the selection of commodities which we buy: do we pay that extra premium for the organic vegetables or the fairly traded products? Do we take the environmentally-preferred train to London for £150, or the plane for £50? We make these decisions – I guess we usually choose to pay extra for the ethical choice, if we can afford it. If we can't afford the organic potatoes sometimes we buy the chemically-produced ones and what we are doing is shifting the difference in cost onto the soil whose life is shortened, the contaminated rivers, the workers exposed to the chemicals. We shift costs, not because we are bad but because we can't afford not to.

Well, everybody along this supply chain is making similar choices – and not usually on the basis of ethics. They are making decisions on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis in a competitive environment, constantly looking for ways in which they can make savings in order to stay afloat. So when push comes to shove they try to shift costs off their budget sheet so that the cost-benefit equation comes out better. Shifting costs is part and parcel of the decision-making of economic agents. And costs need to be shifted in as cheap a way as possible – which usually means dumping them onto the poorest: those with least leverage to resist; those who can't buy themselves out of being dumped on; those whose own cost-benefit analysis means that they are so desperate for a job that they will

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tolerate being dumped on; countries whose foreign investment is predicated on providing a space which is 'safe' for dumping – such as the Special Economic Zones in India, where environmental and labour laws are relaxed in order to attract foreign firms.

So the three things to say about the wider world and the environment are that we are all bound together through 'relations of actual harm', that we live in a neo-liberal form of globalisation in which everything is commodifiable, and that the logic of the economy is one of dumping onto the poorest. In this context, who are the poor? Who are those whose interests are the core of a prophetic vision to which the Iona Community can respond in matters of belief and action in the world?

I want to talk about one group of people who are the environmentally poor in the present day, who some of you will have heard me speak about in the past – the survivors of the Bhopal gas disaster.

Twenty-five years ago, on the night of 2nd-3rd December 1984, toxic methyl isocyanate gas leaked from the Union Carbide insecticide factory in the city of Bhopal. It leaked because of the logic of dumping. The factory was set up by the US company Union Carbide, in the poor sector of the city of Bhopal, to provide insecticides for the new high-yielding crops introduced in the Green Revolution. As sales plateaued, profits were squeezed and savings had to be made. Maintenance was reduced, staff levels were cut, training was diminished, worn parts were replaced with cheaper alternatives, broken monitoring gauges were not replaced at all, refrigerator units were switched off, chemicals stockpiled, expensive safety equipment was removed. And so when water leaked into a tank of gas and

started a chemical reaction, there was nothing to stop thousands of people being killed – an estimated 8,000 people in the following few days, some 25,000 to date.

I have had the privilege of working with the survivors who have been campaigning for justice for over 25 years, demanding commensurate compensation, economic rehabilitation and pensions, adequate healthcare, environmental remediation of the factory site and the contaminated water, corporate accountability from the company. But during this time, India got the neo-liberal bug and started doing whatever it could to attract multinational capital to invest in its high-tech corridors, its mineral deposits and its Special Economic Zones. Multinational capital from corporations like Dow Chemicals, which bought Union Carbide. The last thing which the Indian government wants to do is send out a message that such companies could be liable for expensive reparations if an accident happens during its ordinary cost-shifting, dumping activities. After all, one of India's unique selling points is that its population is cheap.

And the chances are, we have all benefited from the production of cheaper food as a result of Dow's pesticides, or nicer-coloured paint on our walls, or car engines which work, or printer's ink or computers or mobile phones – all the accoutrements of modern life in which we are, without much choice, implicated in the 'relations of actual harm'. And all around us, companies are still shifting costs as cheaply as possible – cutting corners, moving operations to India, increasing productivity; putting profit before humanity is an ordinary, everyday activity. As one of the Bhopal campaign slogans puts it *'We all live in Bhopal'*.

Starting with prophecy

So, returning to the theological task of looking at the environment

through the lens of prophecy, rather than of creation: what implications does this have for our action?

Starting with prophecy means that we ask different kinds of questions about the world. What does it mean to look at the environment from the prophetic perspective of the environmentally poor?

When we start with creation, we have a tendency to ask: How can society sustain itself? Sustainable development is the mantra. We need to sustain things more or less as they are. How can we go on like this? How can we keep the lights on?

But when we start with prophecy, we ask a different question: How can society be *transformed*? How can things be different? How can we make another world possible, an alternative globalisation which isn't based on the logic of dumping? As rich and reluctant oppressors, our lifestyles would not be sustained in such a transformed world.

When we start with creation we ask: What lifestyle choices should I make? How can I make decisions ethically? How best to use the power of choice which I'm blessed with?

But when we start with prophecy, we ask: Where are those who are dumped on resisting? Don't start with those of us who have the power of choice: look at those who have least choice but are still challenging the logic of dumping which they are experiencing most acutely. How do we join them in their struggle?

The creation-focussed starting point asks: How do we become better stewards of our possessions; make sure what we have is environmentally friendly? What should we be doing with what we own the better to make positive impacts on the world?

But the prophetic starting point is: How do we lose our possessions? How can we engage with the world in ways that risk losing what we own? Ending injustice means ending the privileges that we get from being rich in a corrupt, unjust world, privileges like being able to be stewards of our possessions.

Making ethical choices, being good stewards, sustainable development: it is almost inevitable that we will want to support these. But these will never transform the world and the corrupt logic which dumps onto the poor. And the more we focus on our ethical choices, the more we will want to hold on to the privileges which give us the power to make them.

I want to finish with the prophetic insight of 15-year-old Amir, in Bhopal, whose parents were exposed to the gas and whose friends include those born with severe abnormalities: *'What has happened has happened and we can't change that but we will keep on fighting. We want to stop another Bhopal happening elsewhere. Even when we get justice we will keep fighting so that no company feels it can do what Union Carbide did, and nobody else will have to experience what Bhopal has.'* ●

Eurig Scandrett teaches sociology at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh and carries out research into environmental justice movements. He is co-ordinator of the Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study and edited Bhopal Survivors Speak: Emergent Voices from a People's Movement: www.word-power.co.uk. He is a member of the Iona Community.

John Dale

The Bron yr aur experience

New member John Dale explores the physical and emotional challenges of living permanently in an isolated, off-grid cottage in the 21st century ...

In 1972, just as I was about to start at theological college, I bought 'Bron yr aur' – a small stone cottage 500 feet up a steep hill in a remote setting in North Wales – as a holiday cottage. Built in about 1790, it was a 2-up, 2-down farmer's cottage with no running water, no lighting, and a range in the living room for cooking, with adjacent bread oven. One end had a stable with hayloft, above the other end had been a large barn (demolished in about 1950). Water had to be fetched from a well some 230 yards away; no bathroom, just an outside toilet next to the pigsty!

For 35 years I used 'Bron yr aur' at various times of the year as a place to stand back from hectic everyday life, a place of retreat to write theology, to seek refreshment, to have time to be and to commune with God. It was fun collecting wood and having a basic lifestyle for a few weeks. It seemed a good place to retire; but being usable for short stays is quite different from permanent living, so in 2007, as I approached retirement, I decided to return it to a permanent home but with 21st-century amenities. What I wanted was a house with electricity, heating system, good water supply, roof that did not leak, telephone and broadband internet.

I almost fell at the first hurdle – electricity. Yes, a supply could be connected (for £19,000). This drove me to consider installing all the necessary equipment for an off-grid solution; and after looking around and talking with people at the Centre for Alternative Technology near Machynlleth, I decided to go down that route.

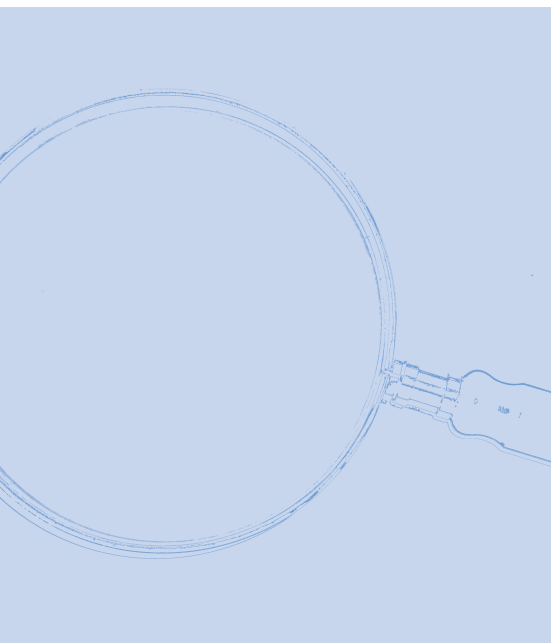
Being within the Snowdonia National Park made for interesting discussions with the planners. Despite it not being a listed property, no solar panels would be allowed on the slate roof and no insulated metal chimney for the boiler. Eventually I obtained planning permission for reslating the roof, solar water-heating panels, photovoltaic panels, a wind turbine and a small water turbine, and an extension to house the wood-pellet boiler together with its 4 tons of pellets and a battery bank. Local builders did an excellent job, and all the technology was then installed and the water-supply pipe buried. I revamped the kitchen and bathroom, and in autumn 2008 my wife and I retired here with our 14-year-old daughter.

Immediately I came across problems.

Firstly, BT wanted £23,000 to install a telephone line – no way!

Luckily mobile phones now work in the area, but how to get internet, which was important for my daughter's GCSE and wife's doctoral studies? The standard dongle was so slow as to be of only limited help. Satellite broadband proved to be the answer (and luckily the capital cost was paid for by the government).

Secondly, whilst initially a local person made and delivered wood pellets on a small lorry, he ceased trading and all other suppliers only had large lorries, which could not get to us because of low trees on the access track. The remedy has proved to be delivery to the lay-by a mile away at the foot of the mountain and then many journeys with car and trailer.



Lastly, I found that when using the boiler more electricity was being used than was being made, needing the backup generator to be switched on regularly.

The boiler – a wonderful machine – *but* consider that when I was age 13, i.e. 55 years ago, my father changed the coke-fired boiler to gas and ever since then I had lived in homes with either a gas- or oil-fired boiler which needs no attention: contrast the wood-pellet boiler which needs daily feeding, turboladers cleaned twice a week and regularly a deep-clean. Quite a shock to the system!

Living here, I soon found that it was essential to be both physically fit and emotionally strong.

Physically fit for: Shifting wood pellets, collecting and cutting logs, cleaning the water filter (250 yards away over rough ground), changing the settings on the water turbine, moving the generator, maintaining a half mile of stone track and six ditches, and walking out for shopping when snowed in – a mere two miles but what a hill!

Emotionally strong: Constantly being alert to electricity usage (never ever leave an appliance on if not in use!) and remembering never to use two high-wattage appliances at the same time (if you do the system shuts down – checking and monitoring the various technologies has made me a micro-power-station manager); remembering to check the boiler

at least three times a day; coping with silence and isolation (the nearest neighbour half a mile away, the nearest town two miles).

‘Bron yr aur’ is a place of silence – just the sheep and birds (and the occasional RAF jet!). No neighbours (just the postman and the occasional lost hiker). My wife – a non-driver – has used the isolation to write her doctoral thesis and two books. I have used it to transform the garden into part flower garden and part vegetable plot, and, yes, I have begun to adjust from being a busy minister to an occasional service-taker.

Silence frees me from all distractions and enables me to see the greatness and power of God in nature – within the sun, shade, rain, snow, wind, mountain views, sheep grazing and sky of all colours ...

As a former marathon runner I have experienced the loneliness of the long-distance runner. And here at ‘Bron yr aur’ there is plenty of loneliness within the silence, which is both wonderful and deafening. I have found that silence can be oppressive, for surely people are made to live in relationship with other people. I am especially glad to have become a member of the Iona Community and am grateful for the love and support within our Family Group.

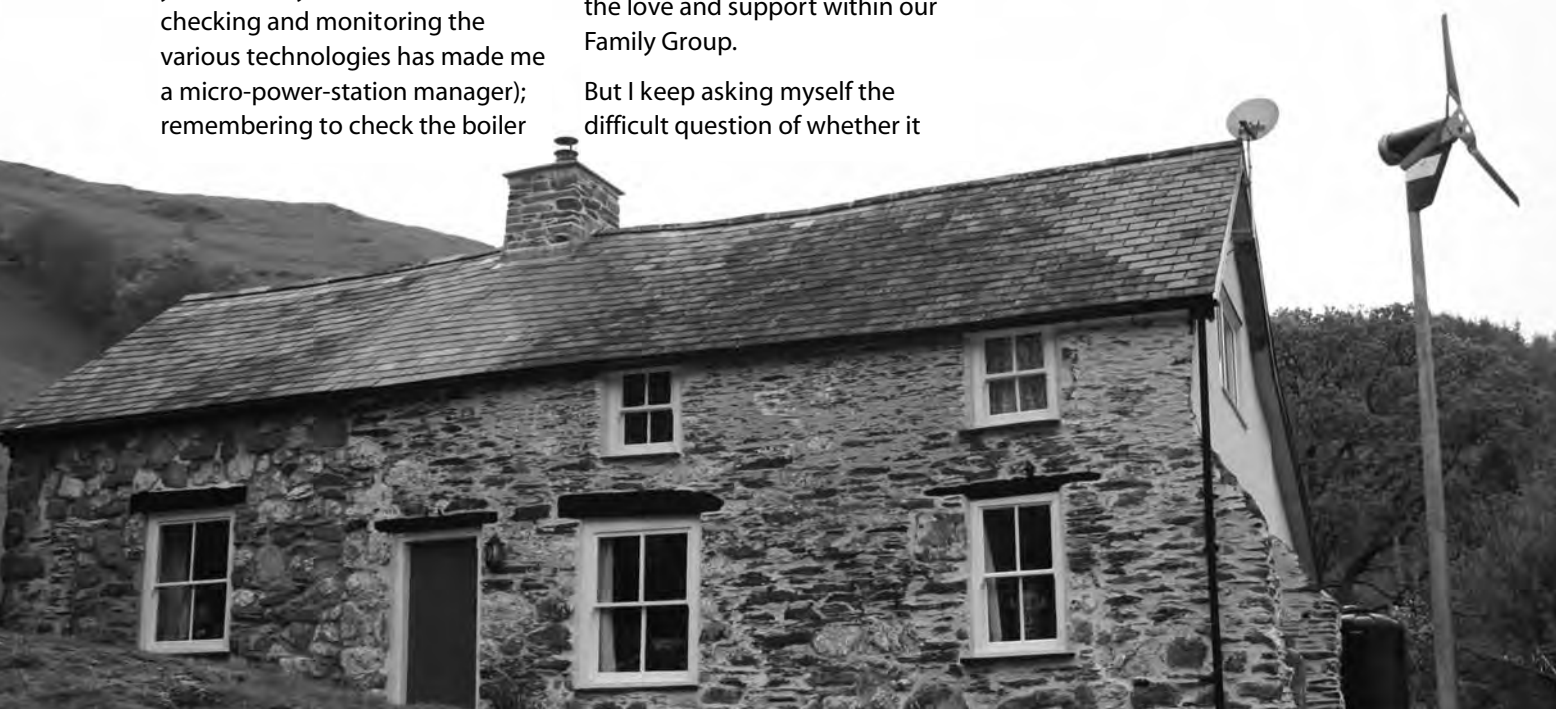
But I keep asking myself the difficult question of whether it

was right to want 21st-century standards in this remote setting. Should I have gone back to oil lamps and candles? No TV or computer? Rise and to bed with the sun? It would be possible, but I think not. Perhaps I should have done it differently? The biggest change would be to have a larger wood-burning stove to heat water and the sitting room and perhaps bathroom, but that would necessitate a very large supply of logs with collection from a large area, and then hours of use of the chain saw ...

Bron yr aur is Welsh for ‘breast of gold’ (referring to the hillside bracken that turns golden in the autumn). But all that glistens is not gold. Using ‘Bron yr aur’ as a retreat was wonderful when I was younger. Living here permanently has proved to be quite a challenge and commitment. ●

Technical details:

Battery: 625 amp-hour Fiamm, made in Italy
Boiler: 15 kW Baxi multi-heat, made in Denmark
Generator: 6kV Pramac 6000S, made in Italy
Photovoltaic: 1kW by 8 125 watt BP solar panels, made in India
Solar water heating: 2 Vitosol 110, SV1 by Viessmann, made in Germany
Water turbine: Stream Engine, made in Canada
Wind turbine: 2½ kW Proven, made in Scotland
Wood-burning stove: 11kW Gascon by Franco Belge, made in France



Bonnie Thurston

IONA: Icon of marginality and engagement

In 2002 I committed a serious act of downward mobility. I resigned a university chair and full professorship in New Testament to live quietly and marginally on a hillside in my home state of West Virginia. I wrote a Rule of life modelled on St Benedict's and accounts of Celtic solitaries. But in spite of careful planning, I wasn't prepared for the jolt of being 'status-less'. When asked the commonest social question 'What do you do?' I had no response but 'Uh, nothing.' I tried saying 'I grow tomatoes,' to which people responded, 'Oh, you're a farmer.' How strong is our need to have and give a label!

I could have answered 'anchorite', an unfamiliar word, or 'hermit', which carries heavy baggage. Whatever it's called, 'opting out' elicits strong responses. The most clueless is 'Well, wouldn't that be nice', as if it were self-centered, spiritually sybaritic. The 'look' I get recalls a story of Roman Catholic mothers returning from Mass on the Feast of the Holy Family. 'Didn't Father give a good sermon on family?' asked one. 'Yes, and I wish I knew as little about it as he does,' quipped the other.

People who imagine a life of chosen marginality and solitude is idyllic or escapist haven't tried it. It is what Sr. Jeremy Hall, O.S.B., a hermit for 20 years, calls a life 'of self-emptying openness to God'. 'All too often,' she writes, 'we take refuge in noise or words, sometimes almost unconsciously, to escape from inner abysses and outer tensions that we lack the courage, or ... the fundamental honesty, to face.'¹ A solitary or marginal life is demanding, without ordinary 'psychic cushioning'. When you live alone, you live with yourself all the time, unprotected from your darker impulses.

The larger question this choice raises is the one American feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether put to Trappist monk and hermit Thomas Merton in the 1960s.² What good is such a life in the face of the world's mammoth problems? Isn't withdrawal basically both useless and self-indulgent? Although the question presumes theological positions I don't hold, it is fair and of interest to the Iona Community which is devoted to balancing work and prayer, social justice and contemplation. I suspect it's why the *Coracle's* editor asked me to write about the relationship between my choice and my pilgrimages to Iona.

In Benedictine fashion, I make my living by the 'work of my hands'. I write, occasionally speak, give a retreat or spiritual direction – a modern equivalent of the desert mothers' basket-weaving. But how do I address the charge that I have forsaken a useful for a useless life? I hope I am 'fruitfully marginal', although society tends to equate 'marginal' with 'useless', 'unproductive', certainly 'unprofitable'. Society isn't keen on the marginal, not just hermits, but the physically or psychologically chronically ill, the poor or unemployed, refugees, prisoners, the elderly, children, the unborn. But chosen marginality, marginality for freedom and 'connected marginality' can be powerful, if quiet and subtle, Christian 'action'.

Chosen marginality

Consciously chosen marginality bears witness that the way things are is not the way they have to be, certainly not what God intended. It presents the challenge of deliberate irrelevance, of an authentically lived 'counter-cultural lifestyle'. In an informal talk in Calcutta in October, 1968 Merton said: 'The marginal person ... calls into question the meaning of life ... the office of the monk or the marginal person, the meditative person or the poet, is to go beyond death ... to be, therefore, a witness to life.'³

This witness is often experienced by observers as a challenge, if not an affront. It raises painful questions. What if we aren't our 'label', professor or farmer, for example? Who am I without the 'identity' conferred by social groups or political party or parish or denomination or all the things I do? Could people who have opted out of mainstream society see something I don't? Marginality frightens people. It suggests something might be seriously wrong with the society, groups and life in which they are heavily invested. The witness of marginality is the challenge to change. And for individuals and societies change is not easy.

Marginality for freedom

One of St Paul's most important assertions occurs in Galatians 5:1: 'For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (NRSV). The marginal Christian understands much of what society passes off as routine and normal is slavery. Merton noted the 4th-century desert Christians (Christianity's paradigmatic marginal people) 'did not believe in letting themselves be passively guided and ruled by a decadent state, and who believed that there was a way of getting along without slavish dependence on accepted, conventional values.'⁴ They incurred disapproval because 'the opinions of others had ceased ... to be matters of importance. They had no set doctrine about freedom, but they had in fact become free by paying the price of freedom.'⁵

Chosen marginality offers costly, delicious freedom, the fresh perspective that comes from being 'outside the camp'. It is exemplified by the boy who, when everyone else ignored the truth, publically declared 'the king is naked'. When for the sake of Christ's freedom one leaves the camp, it is important not 'to carry the world with you as an implicit standard of comparison' which would only be taking along 'the negative standard of the world one had abandoned'.⁶ In

order to build God's Kingdom, Jesus needs some people content to be on the world's sidelines, able to see what the players in the game miss. Like Abbot Bessarion's monk, they must be 'all eye' and see with the clarity of one not deeply engaged in the clatter and the clamour of the daily game.

Connected marginality

Paradoxically this kind of marginality is 'connected' to what it does not choose, perhaps most tenaciously by the clear-sightedness of its separateness. The desert Christians of the 4th century left the world not *'as though escaping from a wreck'*, but left *'a world that divided them from themselves'* in order to help save it. *'They knew they were helpless to do any good for others as long as they floundered about in the wreckage. But once they got a foothold ... they had not only the power but even the obligation to pull the whole world to safety after them.'*⁷ Isn't this what St Columba did by his self-imposed 'exile' on Iona?

The great paradox of chosen marginality is that one doesn't leave 'the world' and normal social life because one hates it, but because one loves it so much. To love the world without being of the world is a prodigious challenge, but central to the Christian witness of marginality. Sr. Jeremy reminds us that in Jesus *'we see the perfection of ... self-emptying openness to God ... infinite capacity to serve in love.'*⁸ Sometimes, as Milton's sonnet 'On His Blindness' so eloquently says, the service is passive, 'to wait'. Indeed, the Psalms and prophets continually admonish us to 'wait on the Lord', but that voice is silenced by the world's noise-makers, its lack of stillness. Bede Griffiths, O.S.B., wrote *'Stillness within one individual can affect society beyond measure.'*⁹ Earlier St Seraphim of Sarov had said: *'Keep your heart in peace and a multitude around you will be saved.'*

Christian marginality is far from self-indulgent. It is a call to growth

in Christ's self-emptying openness. That opening happens in prayer, which is central to the whole enterprise. Our renunciations open inner space. The more open we become, the more space there is for God, and the more deeply we move into the heart of God. We begin to experience what Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel called God's pathos, perhaps even God's broken-heartedness. The marginal Christian's diminishing self-reference and growing freedom and open-heartedness creates a space that God and God's world perfectly fit.

Christian marginality is useless only if prayer is useless. Devoid of any power but that of the crucified God, the open-hearted person is also the broken-hearted person, because, although we don't take the world's standards to the margins with us, we do take the world in its woundedness. Our 'utility' is to love and pray it toward health.

Finally, the solitude, 'oddness' and patience of the marginal Christian images the 'inner plentitude' requisite for all authentic ministry. We know ourselves broken and being healed, sinners and forgiven. We choose environments where we can live in the light of healing Love and constantly reach out toward it in worship, prayer, devotion, stillness, study, trusting that it reaches toward us. Though we remain needy and sinful, we grow in inner freedom and expansiveness, serenity and security – for service, even if it is primarily Miltonian, 'to sit and wait'. The ability to wait characterises marginal people as lines by the homeless shelter and the unemployment office or monastic vigils attest. But 'doing good' from anything less risks using service to fulfill our own needs and devalues the process of love we see enacted in Christ's self-giving passion.

Marginality and Iona

People who choose marginality recognise how easy it is to be

dominated by a false self, a world-conditioned ego. They choose not to be shaped and ruled by false values of 'a decadent state'. They recognise they don't have to live under Caesar, knowing that one can 'opt out', and doing so, exercises a radical freedom that ultimately overcomes alienation. It is also to be a 'scary example' of that possibility. For Love's sake one takes to the margins the world one relinquishes.

It is what St Columba did. As a result of his withdrawal to a small rock in the sea, from his marginality, a whole swath of northern Europe became Christian. Quite apart from its beauty, its mysterious natural, vibratory power, Iona is an icon of marginality and engagement. The point of an icon is to invite a step through it into the Reality it reflects. Iona hangs at the edge of the world inviting us to be in but not of it. When we take Iona's history and spirituality seriously, sometimes in reality, mostly metaphorically, we stand on its margins and, like the Macedonian to St Paul, invite others to 'come over and help us'. ●

Notes:

1. Sr. Jeremy Hall, O.S.B., *Silence, Solitude, Simplicity*, Liturgical Press, 2007, p.28
2. Mary Tardiff, OP (ed.), *At Home in the World: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Rosemary Radford Ruether*, Orbis Press, 1995
3. N.B. Stone, P. Hart & J. Laughlin (eds.), *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, *New Directions*, 1968/75, p.306
4. Thomas Merton, *Wisdom of the Desert*, *New Directions*, 1960, p.5.
5. Merton, *Wisdom of the Desert*, p.10-11
6. Merton, *Wisdom of the Desert*, p.22.
7. Merton, *Wisdom of the Desert*, p.23.
8. Hall, *ibid*, p.28.
9. Quoted in H. Ward and J. Wild (eds.), *The Monastic Way*, Eerdmans, 2006, p.135.

Bonnie Thurston is the author of many books, including *For God Alone: A Primer on Prayer (DLT)*, and *The Spiritual Landscape of Mark* (Liturgical Press). Her new book is *Belonging to Borders: A Sojourn in the Celtic Tradition*, Liturgical Press: <http://www.litpress.org>

Ann Kelly

Fusing the void: Be-ing and Do-ing embodied in prayer

A reflection on Community Week, 2010 ...

I stopped praying when I was twelve. It became meaningless. A ramble through words learned by heart in rituals of obligatory practice, words bereft of connectivity with the world as I was experiencing it. Looking back now, I see a little girl enthralled by the mysteries of God and the human sacred rituals of worship. She loves Mass. She has a desire to get close to the centre of sacred space, to go beyond the altar railing and become a Mass server. It is a time of a dark dawn. The space beyond the altar railing is exclusive and exclusionary, forbidden territory for women. Closeness to the unfolding sacred drama of Mass is for men only. Closeness to God is for men only. Women are outside, the unwelcome, the 'not quite right ones'. She has no language to describe or explain this, no language to make sense of it. It seems at once wrong and true: a wrong thought to think, a knowing deep inside that feels true.

If women were 'not quite right' within the walls of the church, their bodies were also problematic in the world outside. My first moment of politicisation came during Ireland's Eighth Amendment to the Constitution which would prevent the legalisation of abortion at any time in the future. I remember punitive rhetoric spoken against women who had abortions, their demonisation from the church pulpit. Banished to silence were the lived experiences of the women themselves, the stories that compelled their actions. It was the banishment of complexity and difference. Even if I disagreed with abortion and I was unsure of my stance at that time, I wondered what made it wrong and sinful to hear an experience of a life different from my own. I wondered what made it right for another to speak with such authority on an experience that he could not possibly know, without allowing her with the experience to speak. I remember the deep-felt absence of a compassionate and just God and I could not imagine the body of woman embodied in the body of Christ.

The language which would make sense of this early experience of abandonment by God came years later in studies in feminist theology. With it began a conscious coming home to my own sense of God. In a nutshell, I came to understand that when silence is imposed on the lives of women and men by the human institution of the church, religion floats above reality as it is. Reality as it is, the everyday lived experiences of individuals and communities, is the breathing place of the sacred. Smother this breath through dogma and authoritarianism and God is made absent, uprooted from earthy ground and disembodied from relatedness: a way of being in this world that *'deepens relation, embodies and extends community, passes on the gift of life'*,¹ a way of being lived by Jesus in his commitment to and practice of solidarity and reciprocity with the excluded and marginalised in his community.

The most resonant expression of this for me is told in Luke 7:36–50. In the house of the Pharisee, Jesus allows a 'sinner' to rub his feet in oil and dry them with her hair. There is incredulity in the room around him; surely, the Pharisee thinks, if this man is a prophet he must know that this woman is a sinner, not to be given recognition in this way. Jesus confronts the doubt, challenging them to see and hear what is actually happening. In facing Jesus, this woman is facing herself in her sinfulness

and in her desire for forgiveness. In giving to him, she is opening her heart and mind to receiving forgiveness. The ease with which Jesus lives in his body always strikes me in this story. I don't believe he could have met this woman in the way he did without a deep knowing of the sacred territory that is the human body.

This story came to life for me in a surprising way during Community Week 2010. I had come to Iona to co-lead workshops with Rev Jenny Williams,² exploring 'Living Breathing Pulsing Being – Transforming Prayer' in the context of the teaching of the Aramaic Lord's Prayer, a prayer rooted in the ancient Aramaic Bible manuscripts of the Peshitta texts of the Churches of the East.³ I fell in love with this prayer from my first encounter with it: something forgotten became a living part of my life again after a long absence. I began to experience prayer as meaningful, life-giving and life-sustaining. During Community week, my relationship with it deepened as I began to think critically about my own unexplored position that the practice and state of prayer is quiet, solitary and internal and the doing of the work of living in faith in this world is external to this. I felt a void, one articulated by others in the community, an articulation that gave life to something hidden. I found myself revisiting the meeting between Jesus and the 'sinner' woman in Luke 7:36–50 and exploring it in the context of my relationship with prayer.

My reflection led me to think about this as a story within which be-ing in prayer and the ethical work of do-ing are fused. The actions of this

woman, her giving to Jesus in the way that she does, is her prayer for change in her life. In his openness to her gift, Jesus' receiving of it is a moral act. He, in a public space, makes manifest forgiveness in what to those around him is an unimaginable act. Consequently the woman's life is transformed. She is regarded in the wholeness of her personhood, no longer constricted to the label of 'sinner'. The life of the body of Jesus' community is transformed, for its unspoken doubt is spoken into hearing by Jesus. Here begins dialogue, the awakening of his community out of its stupor of rigidity and complacency. In what Harrison describes as the 'central virtues of Christian moral life',⁴ this is a story of the work of 'radical love'⁵ in the world, 'expressing human solidarity and bringing human relationship to life'⁶ and in the process challenging and transforming that which works against life. It is the work of Christian community founded on Grace, characterised by Peter Macdonald as 'acceptance, love, trust, equality, accountability, co-operation, sharing, inclusivity, participation and mutual recognition of gifts and needs'.⁷ This story teaches us in a beautiful way that when this work of radical love is embodied, lived deeply in 'our bodies, ourselves',⁸ it is at once prayerful and ethical and breathes in relatedness. This reflection helped me to see that my practice of prayer and my understanding of what it is to live an ethical life were unconsciously separate. I had not made conscious connections between ways that I experience prayer in my own body and how this experience relates to how I live in the body of my community and the body of this world.

Jesus' native language was Aramaic, a sister language to Hebrew. The Aramaic word for prayer, *shelah*, means 'to create a space, to hollow out a space in our lives for God'. *Shelah b'sheme* is translated as 'pray in my name'.

B'sheme is translated as 'with my vibration or atmosphere'. Jesus invites his followers to tune themselves to his vibration, to enter into sacred space as he enters. The invitation is to bring one's life in tune, in resonance with the Source of All Life. The first word of the Lord's Prayer, *Abwoon*, which we know as *Our Father*, may be translated as:

Shimmering Sound whose vibration moves through our hearts and through all existence.

A – reminds us of our Source – *Alaha, the Absolute, the One, the Only Being.*

BW – reminds us of the continual process of giving birth, through sound and vibration, a process in which the universe participates.

OO – points to the Breath/Spirit of all, through which this birth happens, it connects with our breath and with the way that life is always changing from one form or state to another.

N – points to the creation of new and diverse beings, it reminds us that life creates itself anew in each moment and expression. By remembering this process, we have the opportunity to be born anew each day.⁹

Abwoon: the first word we taught to the Iona Community. The Aramaic Lord's Prayer is prayed in a circle. It is a prayer that is rich in sound and word meanings and incorporates body prayers that connect with spiritual practices of Jesus' time. It is prayer that connects with breath, the breath that is within the body of each individual, the breath within the body of community, the breath that is Source, Unity, God, Love. Because of the language structure of Aramaic, this is a prayer that, when translated, offers a cornucopia of imagery and an inclusiveness in language that is welcoming to people like me who feel excluded in much of the church's male-oriented language. This is prayer that honours the gift

of imagination so necessary to a community's 'ongoing process of interpretation of their own faith and everyday reality'.¹⁰ I imagine the sacred space we are asked to hollow out as a warm holy hearth that is deep within each of us, and when we pray in this way, in resonance with one another, in resonance with God, we make manifest in community a shared holy hearth space. When I chant *Abwoon*, alone or in community, I remember the ringing of the church bell on a Sunday morning, its sound resonating across the fields to us who lived in the rural parts, a continuous rippling from the centre out and back into the centre. I hear its sound, I feel its memory in my bones, the memory of community coming together from the edges to the centre and dispersing home again, the memory of a little girl's feeling of God.

As I reflected on my own experience of sharing this prayer with the Iona Community, some responses from participants, responses that encompass acceptance of and resistance to this way of prayer, have been helpful to me in exploring the void between the practice or state of prayer and the living out of an ethical life. What I share is my own witness. My intention is to honour the participation of those concerned.

On the morning of our first workshop in the village hall, a woman arrives a little late. She remains in the doorway. She seems to me to be balancing her body in her wheelchair on the threshold. I wonder if she will join us. After our morning break, we will pray and move the first line of the prayer in a circle, *Abwoon d'bashmaya*, which we know as 'Our Father who art in heaven'. We invite her and her friend to be in the centre of the circle. She accepts, saying that she is always causing disruption. Asking her afterwards of her experience, she says that she is not used to being at the centre, it is not usual to have someone take her into the centre. Her response makes me

think about the potential in this way of prayer to disrupt the familiar in the body of community. I remember those women from my childhood whose life experiences disrupted the deadening life of a patriarchal church, a human institution that in its actions and words made God absent. I begin to think about the woman in Luke 7:36–50 and Jesus as disruptors of ‘the way we always do things,’ ‘because this is the way we are.’ In that small circle of prayer created by ‘the woman on the threshold’ and her friend, and held within the wider community of prayer, was a sacred space honouring the body that disrupts. Her courage that morning gifted me this realisation: bodies that disrupt reveal a holy moment of stillness in which we see the hidden in ourselves or in the body of our community, for the first time. On my way home from Iona, I wondered how dialogue might have been shaped if that space honouring the body that disrupts had been shared with people in the community who are used to being a part of its centre. What would have been the experience of prayer in a circle of paradox?

In the afternoon, we are a smaller group working more intensively with the first line of the prayer. As we begin to move clockwise, a voice questions why we have to move in this direction, her body wants to do the opposite. Remembering the morning, we create a circle in the centre, a circle of resistance and there is an invitation for anyone to come into this circle who feels resistance or discomfort. In this smaller inner circle, we listen to our own bodies and move according to what feels right for each of us. A woman whose hand I am holding lets go, she leaves the circle and the building. I can feel her leaving in my hand. We are now a smaller circle, a circle that holds the memory of her presence and the reality of her absence. There is a moment when I am conscious of a

consistent pulse in our movement. From a place of resistance, there is a harmony in our prayer. This woman’s resistance was not my experience but it felt real in her body. It needed a breathing space, a naming and an honouring of its reality in the midst of our community of prayer. Making it visible, hearing it into speech, praying from the truth of its presence in the body of our community enabled us to find the sacred breath of life within it.

Her resistance was a gift, the teaching that, like any sacred ritual, this way of praying can become dogmatic and exclusionary if the breath of any member of the prayer circle is denied its life because of its challenge to the ‘way things are.’ The gift in her resistance was the reminder that the body of our community could have ‘lost’ her and the teaching she had to give, a teaching to be wary of complacency and familiarity. The woman who needed to leave honoured her own body in that moment. Her leaving brought home to me the sensuousness of embodied prayer in a circle, her leaving was more than a knowing in my head. It was tactile, her absence a physical experience inscribing her presence and the presence of her absence onto our prayer space. The Aramaic Lord’s Prayer resonates within the body of each person, through the body that is the circle of prayer and from and to the centre that is God, Source, Unity, Love. This ebb and flow from and to the Source images the reality of ebb and flow in community, the truth that community cannot meet us where we are in ourselves all the time. She did not come back to the circle that afternoon but she did return the following day for the pilgrimage and was magnificent in her participation.

To touch the void that is the unbridged space between be-ing in prayer and do-ing in the name of peace and justice in the world is to touch that void between the

wisdom of the body, so maligned in Christian theology and teaching, and the knowledge of the mind. It is to live that polarity that says morality is from the space of rational thought, emotions are of the body and we are most moral when we are detached from our feeling selves, when we are disembodied. However, in as much as we think through our moral responses to life events so too do we feel moral responses to life’s struggles. We feel anger in the face of injustice, sadness in the face of suffering, hope in the face of justice. We feel and think ourselves as moral beings. To touch the void is to live that polarity that says prayer is an internal state, relatedness with God that is deeply personal, a relatedness that is not contextualised in the wholeness of our lives. It is to live that polarity that splinters solitude from community, one cannot resonate the other.

Disembodiment, the split between mind and body that permeates every level of our intellectual, social and spiritual lives, robs us of the truth that *‘it is such a privilege to be embodied’*.¹¹ The human body is for each person the primal home in the body of this earth, the space from which we breathe our first and our last breaths, the space from which we feel the first experience of relatedness, the space that is *‘the home of your soul on earth’*.¹² The Aramaic Lord’s Prayer honours the sacredness of the wholeness of being as a vibrating web of connectivity. This is a challenging way of prayer for we begin with ourselves as we are, from reality as it is, from the intimate, direct experience of our lives that is in the blood, bones and cells of our being. Our bodies are complex landscapes that hold so much, including memory, illness, joy, pain, disappointment, fear, happiness. In resonating with Holy Breath, God, Love, we become stilled in our holy hearth place in whatever stories our bodies hold. Sometimes, I don’t even know what the story is, there seems only fear and uncertainty and a fair dose of hopelessness. I have come to know

these times as 'kneeling in darkness,' I will trust and will not be afraid' (Isaiah 12:2). *'The quiet loyalty of breath'*¹³ is the anchor in hard times, the constancy of its rhythm a tactile resonance with the Holy Breath of Life that is God.

Jesus' visceral body-prayer of anguish in Gethsemane is testament to the truth that the darkness within has to be faced and prayed through so that there can be new life or resurrection. That which injures life in our own bodies and in the body of our community has to be faced and prayed through if we are to speak and act with clarity and integrity in our wider world. If the difficulties in the body of our own community seem like 'small details' compared to the scale of injustice we see in the world around us, consider again for a moment the 'small detail' who was the 'sinner' in the Pharisee's home. Consider the transformation in the life of that community because Jesus created a holy breathing space through an act of mutual reciprocity for the injustice present to be seen and heard so that it could be transformed.

Embodied prayer, whether prayed as the Aramaic Lord's Prayer or integrated into other ways of praying, dismantles the idea and the experience of separateness between the internal state of prayer and the external doing of life-giving, life-sustaining work in

this world. If there is separateness, it is of our creation when we, consciously or unconsciously, live out the disembodied scripts. When I fail to confront that which injures Life, Love, the Sacred within my own being, my capacity to challenge with integrity injustice beyond myself is diminished. A community that denies that which deadens life within its own body compromises its potential and integrity in its work of peace-making and social justice beyond itself. Fusing the void in prayer moves us to the *'necessary edge of who we are'*,¹⁴ revealing to us in the presence of the Source of All Life the wholeness of our being – the visible and the hidden, the spoken and the silent. Fusing the void in prayer makes manifest *'a sacred space of possibility'*¹⁵ within which is a holy gift; a treasure-trove of embodied imaginativeness pulsing breath of Life that resources each of us in our own bodies and in the body of community to live out the teaching of Jesus, that *'the inclusive community we seek must be embodied in the community we practise'*.¹⁶ Amen *Ameyn* ●

Notes:

1. Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, Carol S. Robb (ed.), Beacon Press, 1985, p.18.
2. Jenny Williams is Chaplain to the Christian Fellowship of Healing, Edinburgh, an interdenominational organisation living out its commitment to offer a ministry of listening and healing prayer:

<http://www.cfhsotland.org.uk>

3. The Aramaic Lord's Prayer researched and translated by Neil Douglas Klotz: <http://www.abwoon.com>

4. Harrison, *ibid*, p.18.

5. Harrison, *ibid*, p.18

6. Harrison, *ibid*, p.18.

7. Peter Macdonald, *Coracle: the Magazine of the Iona Community*, 'From the Holy City: Louder than Words' (2010, 4/44) pp.1-2.

8. Harrison, *ibid*, p.13.

9. Taken from Lessons 1 and 2: *A Healing Journey with the Aramaic Lord's Prayer*, <http://www.abwoon.com>

10. Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, SCM Press, 2004. p.17

11. John O' Donohue, *Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World*, Bantam Press, 1997, p.69.

12. O' Donohue, *ibid*., p.70.

13. John O' Donohue, *Benedictus: A Book of Blessings*, Bantam Press, 2007, p.27.

14. A quote from Colum McCann on the cover of *Edna O'Brien, Saints and Sinners*, Faber and Faber, 2011

15. Kathleen Ingram, quoted by Polly Burns in a pre-Christmas e-mail to the Iona Community Prayer Circle, 2010. Original source unknown.

16. A quote from a brief summary of the life and work of the Iona Community, *Coracle: the Magazine of the Iona Community*, (2010, 4/44), p.1.

Ann Kelly grew up in Co Roscommon in the west of Ireland and now lives in Edinburgh. She works as a gardener and writer and holds a Masters in Theological Ethics from New College, Edinburgh.



Jim Wilkie

Community: the greatest challenge

Member Jim Wilkie ponders community through offering some stories from his rich past, living and working in various communities in Zambia and throughout the UK ...

Coming away from the Iona Community plenary at Coatbridge, I found myself pondering the questions those present seemed to be asking themselves: 'What makes the Iona Community a community?' And 'What kind of community does the Iona Community want to be?' ...

I've been a member since 1960, and the vision of community I caught on Iona has inspired everything I have tried to do since – working for community in society and being part of it in the Church.

I believe that the need to learn how to create community is perhaps the greatest challenge we face as post-modern human beings.

Pompous words? Not at all. For me this sentence is shorthand for a life's work. The basic line of approach was set for me by the SCM and by Iona, and the Rule of the Iona Community has kept me thinking about community and acting in accordance with it. But all sorts of other experiences have contributed to firm up the conviction expressed in the sentence. Now, all I can do is offer some stories from my past. They are just stories, not prescriptions for action, because each generation will tackle the challenge in its own way.

Some philosopher in the latter part of the nineteenth century commented that 'Abraham could travel as fast as my grandfather.' It is only in the last 150 years or so that the dramatic changes have occurred. Community used to be taken for granted. Until not so long ago those neighbours who had been given me by who I was and where I lived would have been my community.

I first began to reflect on this seriously when Irene (my wife) and I worked among village people in remote rural Zambia. At one time the people lived for security from wild animals and hostile enemies in fairly large fortified villages. If the chief needed to gather the people together all he had to do was beat a drum. The elders sat round in a communal area in the evenings. The men talked. The women sat around beyond the inner circle once their work was done, sometimes putting a word in, and children listened. During the day the women did most things together in a group, and the children were cared for mutually. Then came the Pax Britannica. Tribal warfare ceased, and the wild beasts were mostly hunted down and killed. It was now safe to live near the field where the crops were planted, so that you could scare the monkeys off the maize. People moved out of the villages into little individual nuclear family homesteads. In these places a wife and the children could work all day around the home without ever seeing another soul, except for any passer-by. What a difference in lifestyle! What about community now?

Just after Zambia received its independence in the 1960s, we were living in the small country town and administrative centre called Isoka, in the north of Zambia. Over two years, with very little money, entirely with their own labour, and help from others in the town, the local congregation of which I was pastor put up its first church building in permanent materials. No other white person was directly involved locally except myself. The previous building had been pole and mud with a thatched roof. This one had a cement floor, burnt bricks, glass in the windows and a corrugated-iron roof. Everybody in the town took an

interest in it, many worked on it, and it was completed in 1969.

There were a good few disputes among us in the course of getting it all done, but in the end it was the only community effort in the town that was finished on time and in budget. Many of the government schemes fell apart for various reasons, but the Church had offered a visible practical demonstration of what a local community could do if it set its mind to it and people worked together.

Later we lived in the capital city of Lusaka. We noticed that the people who gravitated to town looking for work tended to live together in one particular area, often where folk spoke their own tribal language. They created new communities in the new environment where they were now living; and, begun by the local church and reflecting this in its own way, a Bible study group flourished in our home for expatriates a long way from their homes.

As the Protestant chaplain on the residential campus of the University of Zambia I was responsible for co-ordinating a weekly ecumenical service. We set up a student pastoral committee of twelve which met weekly at 9pm in one of the study-bedrooms. It planned the services and managed the offerings. But it also learned from its members who the students were who were having problems, and we considered how together we might help them. The group continued as the heart of the Protestant Christian community long after I left, and there are some remarkable stories of pastoral care.

Nowadays people are very mobile. I have a son and two daughters all married with families living around Guildford. As we visited them when they were younger, by our way of it they seemed to sit quite loose to any kind of local community. If a job necessitated a move to another part of the country, or to another country, they felt they could just get up and go, if the children's schooling could be worked out. It is true that telephones mean that they keep in touch with one another, and with us, so that there is a kind of electronic community, and they visit each other in their cars, but there are advantages and disadvantages in this. And have these been thought through? Ought there always to be a local dimension to one's community? And how do you define 'local' these days?

Our nearest local community here in Edinburgh is the group of eleven flat-owners who live with us in our tenement building. Irene and I worked with our neighbours at looking after the back garden, and arranging for the cleaning and painting of the common stair. When our roof started to leak, however, we knew that we had to get organised to carry out expensive 'common repairs' together. With difficulty the work was done, but as soon as the crisis was over some of the owners refused to pay anything towards ongoing maintenance. And now there is no shared management of the building.

The Church as community: when my sister and I were very small our parents moved away from the area where their families lived, the Lothians and Fife, to a totally new area for them – the city of Aberdeen. They became members of a local church, and as children we were completely integrated into it. Our mother died when I was five and our father when I was 13 years old. At that point our uncles, who were our guardians, had to decide what to do with us.

The options were to split us up, each going to a different uncle or aunt, or to keep the home going in Aberdeen with the housekeeper, who had looked after us since our mother died. They decided on the latter policy. We were established in the neighbourhood and had other children as friends round the doors. And the local congregation was our other focus where there were folk who had known our parents and who cared for us. This was our community.

I believe that the need to learn how to create community is perhaps the greatest challenge we face as post-modern human beings.

Everywhere we have moved since we were married, we have sought out a local church and tried to become part of it. In Africa these churches worshipped in local languages and we had to learn how to do that, but it paid tremendous dividends in fellowship with the local people. In the London suburb of Surbiton where we lived for eight years while our children were teenagers, our membership of the local Methodist church paid off in a quite incalculable way. There is a period with teenagers when they won't listen to their parents but they may listen to other adults they have come to know and trust. We were immensely grateful that other adults in that congregation, through the youth group, were able to pastor our children in ways that we just could not do at that time.

Robin Watt was a member of the Iona Community. He had been disabled from birth and the disabilities gradually progressed, though when I first knew him he was still practising law. He had qualified both in law and theology. For years he shared a house with Don Stubbings, another Community member, but

then Don moved to his own place and Robin lived on his own. He became less able to do this, and the problem for his family was that Robin was a bachelor, and that one brother lived in London, and the other in the United States. They both came to Edinburgh from time to time, but were too far away, and Robin could neither see to type e-mails, nor talk easily on the phone because of his deafness.

A group formed round about him. Don, Iain Whyte and other Iona Community members visited him regularly. Iain, who had trained with Robin in Glasgow, organised other old friends to call from time to time. Irene (with CAB connections and medical experience) saw to his benefits and allowances, and kept an eye on the professionals who cared for his health. Another family friend, Susan, had him to lunch most Sundays and looked after his clothing and other needs. A lawyer friend kept his finances. I drove him to church every week. And through Susan we all reported to the brothers by e-mail. This was a great example of what 'care in the community', the current buzz phrase, could be all about. All the various professionals who dealt with Robin and encountered us were amazed – and no wonder. But for every person in need who enjoys this sort of care, there are so many who get little or none.

As for ourselves, the local congregation where my wife and I continue to worship each week is our key local community, and the various Iona Family Groups in which we have shared over the years since we returned to Britain have always enabled us to probe much more deeply our personal commitment to being and building community.

So I have come to believe that to have thought about community, and to try to create it locally, is perhaps the greatest form of evangelical service that a Christian can offer. ●

A TRIBUTE TO GEORGE CHARLTON, by Colin Anderson

My most vivid memory of the first General Assembly of the Church of Scotland I attended as a young minister some forty years ago now is of a tall, craggy-featured, prophet-like speaker at the podium urging us to ban the bomb and work for peace. It was George Charlton at the height of his powers, then wholeheartedly dedicated to what he always considered his principal ministry – the Church Extension parish of St Ninian's in the large new housing area ('Wimpeys') at the east end of Musselburgh, where he worked for 19 years from 1968.

What came before Musselburgh, while of great value in its own right, served as preparatory experience. He was eight years in Tullibody at a time of unrest in the community's main industry, coal mining, during which George firmly nailed his colours to the mast by joining demonstrations in support of miners on strike. Before

that, he spent seven years in the very different setting of the island of Islay (Kilmeny parish.) He had qualified for the ministry by theological study at Glasgow University after demobilisation from wartime service in the army. But equally important in his formation was the training and influence of the Iona Community, which he joined in 1952 and of which he was a fully committed and active member for the rest of his life. Because of this he served his ministerial apprenticeship at Govan Old under Rev. John Symington, but with the tutelage and inspiration of its former minister and Founder of the Community, George MacLeod, a major factor in his development.

The result of all this was the honing of this son of the manse – with a keen mind, deeply pastoral instincts and a spirituality rooted in prayer and the sacraments – into a powerful and effective Christian minister of the highest calibre in the best traditions of the Church of Scotland. The benefits are still fondly remembered in Musselburgh. These were difficult times for Church Extension work. The 'elixir of newness' gratefully recognised by the original minister of St Ninian's, Duncan Finlayson, was gone. Social and attitudinal change were causing problems for the buildings and financing of the institution. But the missionary task remained clear and had to be answered. And it was – thanks to the '*vision George brought to the congregation*' (noted by the writer of the history of St Ninian's, celebrating its 50th anniversary), his '*powerful oratory*', and his emphasis on youth work, active participation in local community life and serious ecumenical co-operation with other churches. Things now regarded as common were pioneered then – not least the lead his wife, Dorothy, gave to the church's development of pre-5 playgroups and the welcome shown to Vietnamese families settling in the area.

George's time in Musselburgh was cut short by the onset of health problems arising from a collapsed lung, the recovery from which it was felt would be easier in a quieter place. Hence his move to Fort Augustus in 1987. But by this time, no Church of Scotland charge was light in workload. There was a widely scattered community to serve with three places of worship – Invergarry, Fort Augustus and Tomdoun (possibly his favourite), where among the parishioners was the man, then a young boy, who currently sits at the Cabinet table in Westminster as Chief Secretary to the Treasury. This reference is not to be taken as an indication of George's political leanings! In fact he was well to the Left, the only position compatible for him with the central tenets of the Bible and his most profound Christian convictions. This was the source of his consistent opposition to nuclear weapons, which took him frequently to demonstrations at Faslane, led him to be Chair of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Scotland and made him a forthright supporter of the Stop the War Coalition formed to oppose the Bush-Blair invasion of Iraq. George was a man of great integrity, which threaded itself into all parts of his life and work.

With some reluctance he recognised in 1992 that the time had come to retire from full-time ministry. But his work was not finished. In 1996, Porterfield Prison in Inverness needed a few hours per week of chaplaincy. As well as previous experience in Glenochil, George's gifts and faith were perfectly suited to a ministry with justice at its centre and the Gospel offer of mercy, renewal and peace its pastoral dynamic. He served with great compassion and willingness to try to help any in trouble whatever its cause. His influence on many prisoners, and staff, was profound, not least one (now dead) serving a life sentence for murder, who had a religious awakening at Porterfield which led to a well-grounded profession



of faith and subsequent completion of an external degree in Divinity from Glasgow University.

Crucial, of course, to the functioning and effectiveness of George was Dorothy, daughter of a mine manager and herself a nurse. They had known each other at primary school in Mauchline, Ayrshire, married in 1953 and travelled as true partners together through all the struggles and successes, pains and pleasures and difficulties and delights of both parish and personal life. They had four children – Dorothy Mary, who died tragically early in 1980, Paul, Margaret and Frances. There are four grandchildren.

In the end death came quite swiftly to George – and mercifully, after a time of decline through Alzheimer's, which for one of his natural vibrancy was hard to bear and to manage. As was fitting for his character and outlook, a 'modern' hymn was sung at the funeral in the Old High Church of Inverness, 'One more step along the world I go.' There can be no doubting the fulfilment for George, now as before, of the promise of its lines: *'All the new things that I see, You'll be looking along with me ...'*

Colin Anderson, who died recently, was a Church of Scotland minister whose visionary and prophetic ministry touched the lives of many people of all ages and in all walks of life. Over the years, Colin had been a parish minister, an industrial chaplain, a local Councillor, a university chaplain and an active associate member of the Iona Community.

A TRIBUTE TO BETTY WHITE, by Stewart Smith

One of the traditions about St Bride of Kildare, whose figure looks down from a small stained-glass window in the Choir of Iona Abbey, concerns her chosen Beatitude. *'She helpeth everyone in a strait and the Beatitude she chose for herself was Blessed are the merciful.'* If merciful means showing a steadfast and unshakeable love and care, especially to the marginalised and

vulnerable, then that Beatitude also describes Betty White.

Betty was born in 1921 and grew up with her sisters, Mary and Margaret, in Rutherglen, with a strong family connection with Stonelaw Parish Church. During the war, Betty served as an inspector of small tools in a Lanarkshire factory, a responsible position for a teenager, which she fulfilled very capably. After the war, she went to St Colm's College in Edinburgh to train as a 'Church Sister'. Her first placement was in Burntisland, and she was commissioned as a Deaconess of the Church of Scotland in 1950. In 1951, she moved to Cardonald in Glasgow and served there till 1958, after which she went to St Andrew's Church in Irvine. From 1962 till 1971, Betty worked in Castlemilk East Church. From there she went to the Gorbals, to Rutherglen Road Polmadie Church, where she stayed till 1977.

Betty then undertook a course in Pastoral Studies at Trinity College, Glasgow, before taking up a three-year appointment at St Paul's Provanmill. Betty's final appointment was to Townhead Blochairn Church in Royston. There she worked up to – and beyond – her retirement. Even, for a time, working for no pay!

Betty was a very gracious person, and also quite formidable. When she went to Royston, there was no roof on the church hall. With that deep concern for young people which marked her whole ministry, and with the youngsters in the area having nowhere to go and nothing to do, Betty set about rectifying the situation. With no money available from Church sources, Betty approached Sir Malcolm Rifkind, then Scottish Secretary, and eventually the Hall roof was restored.

As a result of Betty's enthusiasm, youth clubs were set up, along with a 'nearly-new' shop and meeting places for the older members of the Church, but the main achievement was the

Rainbow Club for young people. The Rainbow Club is still a sign of hope in Royston today. Betty's concern for young people included standing with them in court, and taking groups of youngsters away from the city. The visits of Betty and her young people to Iona, and to other centres, were memorable!

Betty joined the Iona Community in 1979 and found in the Community a continuing source of encouragement and support in her own ministry. She was a member of the then Glasgow South Family Group for many years and discussions in Betty's company were never dull. Some ten years ago, Betty's health began to fail and she was admitted to a nursing home in Rutherglen, where she died at the age of 89. In the Diaconate Council, where she was its first President from 1977-1980, Betty is remembered with much affection and gratitude; and in the Community too, we give thanks to God for Betty's friendship, and for her courage, faith and cheerfulness, as she served others in Christ's name.

Coracle regrets that it was unable to locate a photo of Betty. (Ed.)

POEM

*Step by step,
in your footprints:
Brendan, Brigid,
Columba, Adamnan.*

*Step by step,
in your footprints:
Margaret, Cormac,
Anna, Michael.*

*Step by step,
in your footprints:
Sue, Kate,
Ian, Alice.*

*Step by step,
in your footprints:
all you saints,
all you angels,
step by step
I'm coming home.*

Ruth Burgess

GOD OF THE POOR, GOD OF

A SIMPLE PRAYER

God,
 I have a simple prayer for the Church.
 I pray that one day soon
 I will be part of a church that when we pray for the poor,
 we will pray for 'us' and not 'them'.
 I pray for a Church that will not only have the courage
 to work for the poor,
 to struggle with the poor
 but will also be of the poor.
 And I pray that one day
 there will be no poor people in the Church
 because there will be no poverty.
 And I pray to you,
 the God of miracles,
 the God of the rich,
 the God of the poor.
 Amen

*Martin Johnstone, Church of Scotland's Priority Areas
 Secretary; Chief Executive, Faith in Community Scotland*

BY NAME

Made in your image.
 Every single one.
 Knit together.
 Every single one.
 Called into being.
 Every single one.

No matter what the headline says.
 No matter what the state of my purse says.
 No matter what my postcode says.
 No matter what my accent says.
 Every single one.

Called into being, called by my name.
 No matter where I shop.
 No matter who I sit next to.
 No matter what the label.
 No matter.

God of the poor. God of the rich.
 God of the struggling somewhere in between.
 Rise with us in the morning and dare us to dream.
 Turn our heads with your vision of justice and joy.
 May we work together with hope as our guide.

May we greet all your children by name alone. Amen

Elaine Downie, facilitator of the Poverty Truth Commission

YOUR NAME

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your love and
 generosity, given in abundance, so no one should go
 hungry.

We pray for the people living in poverty, judged and
 written off, that they may have a place at Jesus' table.

We pray for a world that has become materialistic; guide
 us to recognise that people are more valuable than
 objects, especially for those living in poverty.

Please help those who close their hands and eyes
 to the plight of people in poverty, that they may
 open their hearts and show compassion to those
 less fortunate than themselves, so that this will
 then lead them to action.

Heavenly Father, you created us as loving and
 caring people so we can know and love you in
 heaven. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us to
 embrace all who are living in poverty, that we
 may stand alongside them and support them to
 have their God-given right to a decent life with
 the opportunity to contribute.

We ask this in your Name. Amen

*Tricia McConalogue, Projects Co-ordinator, Bridging
 the Gap; Co-chair Poverty Truth Commission*

'BLESSED ARE YOU POOR' (LUKE 6:20)

Blessed – how?
 There's never enough money –
 every pay day is 'pay away' day –
 and the Benefits system
 makes me feel dirty and ashamed.
 The bankers get bonuses
 for plunging the whole country into debt;
 me, I get blamed, and threatened with the law.
 I'm tired and I'm angry
 and the last thing I feel is 'blessed'.

So, Jesus, if you really mean it,
 if this blessing you talk about
 is for here, and not just for eternity,
 then this is my prayer:

Change the culture of this country –
 upset not just the tables but the spirits
 of the men with money and power –
 give me the words and the wisdom
 to speak my truth to them,
 and give them the patience and the pity
 to listen;
 then maybe, just maybe,
 we'll all get a blessing in the end.

John Harvey

'YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE POOR WITH YOU' (MARK 14:7)

Our trouble,
 Jesus,
 is that 'the poor' are seldom 'with us'.
 Too often,
 we keep people who live in poverty
 at arm's length:
 in sink estates,
 in 'developing' countries,
 and think of them as victims,
 or a burden,
 or worse.

By your solidarity

THE RICH ...

with the outcast and the rejected
you honoured their humanity
and released their potential.
Forgive us our arrogance
and our stupidity;
open our hands and our hearts
to receive the gifts they bring;
and show us how to work together
so that the curse of poverty
may be outlawed from the earth.

John Harvey

FAVELA

A shamble of boards
like fallen tree-huts,
rubbish dump homes
for discarded girls.
Stolen water for a thirsty child.
Squashed homes for oppressed people.

But Christ is in the fight for justice,
Christ is in the starving parent
dying for a half-fed child.
Christ is in the unity of shared walls.
And Christ is in the lines of
knuckle-scrubbed washing:
hope and defiance
drying in the sun.

Susan Johnstone

A BRAND-NEW DAY

Fucking hell
stop ringing the bell
you're no getting in,
you're oot yir face,
get awa from my place,
I'm phoning the polis,
they're on their way,
now, do you want to stay?
Na, I didnae think so,
on yir toes, running like hell,
jist stop ringing my fucking bell ...

The daddy-long-legs
outside the window,
it's raining,
it's struggling,
it wants in,
up and down it crawls,
still trying to get in,
I keep watchin',
will I, won't I
let it in?

Na, I just keep watching,
it flies away,
looking for sanctuary,
somewhere else I suppose ...

I love the moon,

the stars, the sky
I go to bed
and wonder why

I wake up
look out the window,
the sun is shining
a brand-new day,
now I know why ...

Bubbles, they're nothing but
trouble
so many young lives lost
at what cost?

They get so high, then so low
they're so young,
they don't know
hanging from the trees
is there gonna be
autumn leaves

No
their relatives are grieving
the only thing they'll be
receiving
is the thoughts of their small child
growing up
now every tree will hold a
memory
and that is so sad
not to look at a tree
cos you don't want that
memory ...

I brought him in,
the poor soul,
he's good at that,
'poor poor me'
I wash his clothes
give him a bath
even trim his beard
how does he repay you?
he kicks you in the teeth
I fone the police
he scampers before they arrive
calling me a rat and a grass
bloody cheek! ...

Heroin,
they say it's better than sex,
the needle
pumping it through your veins,
ahh bliss,
that's their kiss.
What about making love then,
but without the needle
you don't need heroin for that –
total ecstasy,
the human kind
smell, touch, feel, see, taste,
if you don't want that instead
then what a waste ...

I stand next to him
I want to touch his skin
next to mine
we dance all night
Oh! What a night!
he pulls me close
his lips to mine
my eyes are closed
I open them
yes, he's still there
for I can't get free
his arms are still holding me ...

He screams and shouts,
my ears are ringing
I can't stand the noise
he's out of his fucking face,
again,
I walk away,
pretend I'm singing ...

Looking up,
teardrops,
running down my face
no more pain,
I am numb,
I just stare ahead,
get up, walk away,
and close the door,
he won't see me no more ...

Life
it cuts you like a knife
right through my heart
like a speeding dart
I feel the pain
if it wasn't for the kids
I'd go insane
fight your corner
stand upright
cos if you didn't
life would be shite ...

Karen Buchanan

Karen Buchanan is a single mother of four children, ages ranging from 13 to 22. She lives in the centre of a Dundee housing scheme with a widespread culture of drugs and violence. She came to CraigOwl Communities to do a cooking class, then to a literacy class at which her writing talent was immediately obvious. She joined the CraigOwl Writers Group in the early spring of 2011 – these poems are just a fraction of her incessant output reflecting the harsh realities of her life.

CraigOwl Communities is a voluntary organisation that seeks, through a range of provisions, to tap into the potential of those furthest from the job market. It has a strong record of both bringing people to 'job readiness' and finding actual employment. www.craigowl.com

Philip Newell

A peace-offering

Philip Newell introduces the Praying for Peace Initiative, which he and others launched earlier this year, and offers resources for healing and peace within the Abrahamic family ...

Is there something more important to do than pray for peace, and in particular to pray for peace within the family of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar? The shadow side of Christianity, Judaism and Islam is at the heart of some of the most conflicted places of hatred and violence in our world today. We know the frightened and angry countenance of religion. We need to look it in the face and denounce it as a false expression of religion. But do we also know that deep within our religious inheritance are visions and practices of peacemaking that hold the key to transformation in our lives and world? We desperately need to access these now. Without peace in the family of Abraham there will not be peace among us as nations.

Praying with the Earth (SCM/Canterbury), along with its companion CD of meditative chants, *Chanting for Peace*, is a peace-offering from within the Christian household. Every morning and evening in the new prayer book, sentences from the Quran, the Hebrew Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus are used in order to pray for peace. And the same is true in the new collection of chants, allowing words from other parts of the family to draw us back to the true roots of our inheritance, the oneness of the human soul and the essential unity of the earth.

The inspiration for this project grew out of my teaching relationship in the high desert of New Mexico with Nahum Ward-Lev and Rahmah Lutz, a Rabbi from Santa Fe and a Sufi Muslim teacher from Abiquiu. Every summer Ali and I co-teach with Nahum and Rahmah on themes of peace within the Abrahamic community. Our daily pattern is to take it in turn. Whichever one of us is teaching offers words of scripture from our respective tradition for the group to take into silence before shared reflection and conversation.

The first summer together I offered our class words from St Matthew's Gospel. As people meditatively walked in the desert landscape or sat prayerfully in the coolness of the adobe chapel, I noticed that Rahmah's face was radiant. Her countenance always shines but on this occasion she looked like Moses coming down from Mount Sinai. I wondered what was happening in her heart. When we gathered, she was the first to speak. She said, 'I so love Jesus, peace be upon him. He is so compassionate. He is so truthful. He is so merciful. I so love Jesus, peace be upon him.' Most of us in the circle were from the Christian household. And many of us sat with tears in our eyes. As I looked at Rahmah I thought, *You are teaching us how to speak about Jesus.*

If Jesus' wisdom is again to be recovered within the Christian household, in ways that will enable us to lead the world in peace rather than divide the world in hatred, I believe its rebirth will come largely from outside Christianity. Other parts of the Abrahamic family have not forgotten the essence of Jesus – his compassion, his truthfulness, his mercy. It is from them that we will be helped to remember the true heart of Jesus. And it is from them that we will be helped to remember how to truly follow Jesus.

We need one another. Our traditions are given not to compete with each other. They are given to complete each other. This is my hope in *Praying with the Earth*. This is my intention in *Chanting for Peace*. In listening to the true heart of Islam and Judaism, we will be led not away from the true heart of Christianity. We will be led to a recovery of our distinct treasure, the wisdom of Jesus, who taught us to pray for peace, and who showed us how to live love.

These new resources are only two particular expressions of the way forward. It is of course not just a prayer book and a collection of meditative chants that we need. Our deep need and our truest desire is for greater relationship within the Abrahamic family. Relationship, relationship, relationship is what will change us as individuals and as traditions. And it is the re-establishing of relationship that will heal us. The Praying for Peace Initiative, which I and others launched at the beginning of 2011, is committed to praying and chanting for peace by using the words and wisdom of other parts of the family. It is a way of becoming more deeply aware of one another's treasure. Many members of the Christian household have never read the Quran, let alone used its words to pray. Shall we choose in new ways to live in relationship?

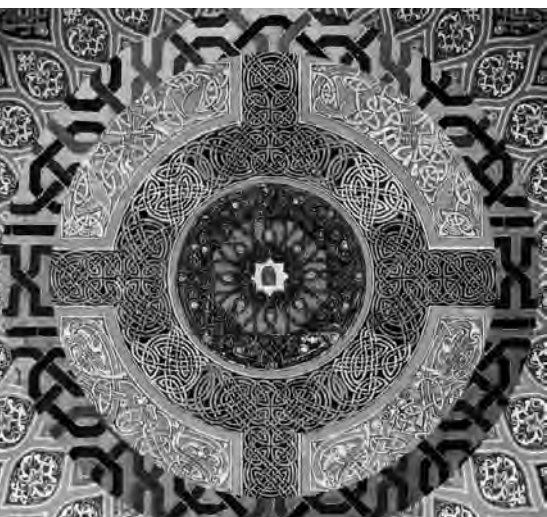
People often think that peace is a pipe dream. In part this is because the word 'peace' has been limitedly associated with a future kingdom or a perfect realm of God on earth. And so the impression has been created that if true peace were to come it would be forever, as if eternally established. But is this the nature of relationship? Who are the people who are most important to us in our lives? They are the people who have chosen again and again and again to look to our heart and to remain in relationship with us even when we have been false. And the reverse is also true about the most important relationships of life. In every moment of our lives and world we have the capacity to choose to be untrue,

whether as individuals, as nations, or as a species. This is the challenge, as well as the beauty, of life in its interwovenness. True relationship must always be chosen. This is its greatest blessing. I can look to your heart and honour you now or I can look away from your heart and dishonour you now. And so the way of peace is not about thinking that we need to create a perfect realm of relationship that will hold forever. It is about choosing to be true to one another in every moment, again and again and again. The time of peace is now. Now is the time to make our offering. ●

*To the home of peace
to the field of love
to the land where forgiveness and
right relationship meet
we look, O God,
with longing for earth's children
with compassion for the creatures
with hearts breaking for the people
and nations we love.
Open us to visions
we have never known
strengthen us for self-givings
we have never made
delight us with a oneness we could
never have imagined
that we may truly be born of You
makers of peace.*

from *Praying with the Earth*, by Philip Newell, SCM/Canterbury Press: www.chbookshop.co.uk

Philip Newell is an associate member of the Iona Community. He is the author of many books, including *Christ of the Celts: the Healing of Creation*, and *Each Day & Each Night: Celtic Prayers from Iona* (Wild Goose Publications) www.ionabooks.com



WILD GOOSE PUBLICATIONS

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Around a Thin Place: An Iona Pilgrimage Guide, Jane Bentley & Neil Paynter (book), £10.99 (plus post and packing)

Island visitors and 'armchair pilgrims' alike are invited to take a prayerful, perhaps life-changing, journey around what George MacLeod described as 'a thin place – only a tissue paper separating the material from the spiritual'. A rich collection of readings, prayers, poems, photographs, songs, stories and reflections.

Jane Bentley is a former member of the Iona Community's Resident Group on Iona and is a community musician. Neil Paynter is also a former member of the Resident Group, and is the editor and author of many books, including *This Is the Day*.

Tell Me the Stories of Jesus: A Companion to the Remembered Gospel, Janet Lees (book), £10.99 (plus post and packing) A sequel to *Word of Mouth*

The purpose of the gospel is to change things and the change it offers is from death to life.

Many people will be familiar with the gospel in written form but not everyone uses written versions of the gospel all of the time. Alongside the written Bible, ordinary people often use oral or remembered versions. This book is about the why, how, when, where and what of remembering the gospel. Altogether it presents a companion to remembering the One – Jesus, the Life Giver – whose gospel it is.

Tell Me the Stories of Jesus is based on work done with many groups of different sizes and ages and cultures. The examples are set out here to encourage other groups to 'just go for it': remember and by remembering share life and build community. This companion to the remembered gospel aims to encourage and support those who want to work with this process with ordinary people in any place.

Janet Lees, a speech therapist and an ordained minister of the United Reformed Church, has been developing the remembered Bible method for over 15 years.

New children's book

The Monk and the Mermaid: A Story from Iona, Kenneth Steven, £6.99 (plus post and packing)

On St Columba's Bay at the south end of Iona, the beach where the monks first landed in their coracles from Ireland, you can still find the most beautiful green stones, polished by the sea. This is the legend, told for children, of how these wonderful stones came to be, and why they are there to this very day.

Kenneth Steven lives in Dunkeld in Perthshire with his wife and daughter. Iona has been his spiritual home since he was a child; he learned to walk on one of the island's beaches. For many years now he has led writing retreats on the island.

TO ORDER: 0141-332-6292

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ALTERNATIVE BOAT HIRE, IONA

Sailing Trips & Boat Hire, Mark Jardine, Lovedale Cottage, Isle of Iona, PA76 6SJ, Tel. 01681 700537, e-mail: info@boattripsiona.com

What are Alternative Boat Hire trips about? They are about discovering the coastal world. About travelling in a fashion, once commonplace on the Atlantic seaboard, which is now largely ignored. About being really close to the sea, its wildlife and the coastal fringe. The smell of kelp at low tide. Watching the swoop of fulmars. Hearing the singing of seals.

Seeing the rip of the tides. About the lift of the swell and feeling the boat lean to the wind. About the anecdotes of today and the stories of the past. About red sails in the low sun and the rhythmic sound of the engine on a calm day. The emphasis is on a family atmosphere, with easy communication: a friendly intimate kind of trip.

JAZZ OF COLOURS IONA GREETING CARDS

Anja Grosse-Uhlmann, a German living on Iona since 1999, has been a passionate photographer for many years. Inspired by the colours and light, and the striking beauty of the Hebridean landscape, she tries to capture the essence of the place in her photographs. When not taking photos, you can find her being creative in the kitchen, out with her lovely daughter, Freya, or sailing with husband, Mark.

To view and purchase Jazz of Colours greeting cards: www.orancrafts.co.uk

Pat Livingstone

SIGNS OF HOPE: FABULOSITY — MUSIC EDUCATION THAT CHANGES LIVES

Signs of Hope is a series celebrating projects and people creating positive change in local and global ways. Here, member Pat Livingstone tells about the Fabulosity Project she has helped set up in schools in disadvantaged areas of the UK ...

The teaching assistant is bubbling with excitement: Had I heard that Callum has won a scholarship to such and such a school?! 'His mum is absolutely delighted. It's such a good school and he would never have got in without his music, and she could never have afforded music lessons.'

I haven't seen Sharon for a while. She quietly tells me of one boy who finds staying on task in class difficult, and often needs to be told something five or six times. In the music lessons, however, he only needs telling once.

The headteacher of another school, who to begin with had reserved judgement – now sings the praises of the Fabulosity Project, where she sees dramatic changes for the better for her pupils.

It's 8am and I'm walking across a rather dreary, grey playground surrounded by high chain mail and there's the obligatory buzz-in entrance. As I sign in, various members of staff are arriving, setting up their classrooms for the day. I can already hear the practice taking place down the corridor – there are fifteen eight- and nine-year-olds playing their way through Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy'. The tutor uses a flip chart with the letter names of the notes. The tutor and teaching assistant play along with the youngsters, and I help, playing the piano whilst I'm there.

The next day I visit another school. Up the six flights of stairs to the music room of this sturdy Victorian building, I find a group of young clarinettists. It's ten past eight and one boy races in late. The headteacher takes him aside and talks to him. He's a troubled youngster and she is there to support this project. Last term one of the children's fathers was murdered on the local estate. The school grieved, but took action, fundraising to help pay for the funeral that the family could not afford. Although some children drop out of the project the school continues to support them, and gradually the group becomes more stable.

Another morning I catch up with some young cellists – who are doing very well. The two teaching assistants are learning double bass alongside the children. Most of the teaching assistants learn an instrument with the children. They are also absolutely invaluable in sorting registers, chivvying children to attend, befriending and behaviour-managing. In all we have 85 places for children in six schools. Almost all of the children on this programme are receiving free school meals.

The young string players, after learning for six months, went to the Royal Academy of Music to play in a Strings Day; to the London Symphony Orchestra to take part in the 'Take a Bow' performance with the string section of the LSO; and to the Barbican to perform in the foyer before attending a concert there.

The wind players took part in Youth Music's celebrations at Birmingham City Football Ground – when four and half thousand young people came together to play a commission by Tim Steiner; played with one hundred and fifty children in the local People's Day, and in rehearsal with the Tereso Carreno Wind Band from Venezuela, whilst they were in residence at South Bank.

This term we are working towards a performance at the Horniman

Museum. This is a partnership project with SAGE Educational Trust, an inner-city music service, two schools collaboratives, the museum and the London Symphony Orchestra. The young wind players are learning to create music inspired by the aquarium in the Museum. All the children have come together for their first rehearsal as a children's orchestra and will be rehearsing with three London Symphony Orchestra players. I've composed a piece especially for them all entitled 'Jellyfish'.

This programme has two very clear elements: regular practising together – two hours a week in each school and a further hour when the children are mini-bussed to central schools for wind band and strings orchestra practice – and a series of ongoing aspirational events. It is modelled on the El Sistema programme from Venezuela, where 30 years ago the project was set up to improve the life chances of the poorest children. Inspired by El Sistema, Christine Turner, an Associate Head in the borough, and I spent many hours putting together the programme. A year on, the overwhelming response from schools and partners is one of real delight at the progress.

Another two schools will be joining this programme, with another 30 places, and I am just setting up another Fabulosity Project for five schools for another 70 children. The funding is precarious at this time but the key is the choices made by headteachers.

And will it change lives in the long term? It already has, and will continue to do so. ●

Pat Livingstone is a composer and a former Iona Abbey Musician. Her CDs include *I Saw a Stranger* (with Oran) www.ionabooks.com, and her most recent CD, *Reflections*, her musical response to the isle of Iona. For more information about the Fabulosity Project and to order *Reflections*: oranpat1@aol.com

review

Living Cells: Vision and Practicalities of Small Christian Communities and Groups, by James O'Halloran, Columba Press, 2011, <http://www.columba.ie>

Over the decades in which the Salesian Jim O'Halloran and I have collaborated, the church has been in debt to him for his vision and practical skills in encouraging into existence and resourcing the growth of small Christian communities. We are now more deeply in his debt for this remarkably comprehensive and insightful book which covers the field in an unmatched way. I note two theological points which form its basis.

The incentive to develop communities of love comes from the Trinity, whose relationship is described in the African proverb: 'Three dancers, one Dance'. Communities of love on earth take their style from that unity. The only subsidiary element is assignment subsidiary: Jesus Christ, 'though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality in the Godhead as something to hold on to', but willingly became human as they make them till, assignment completed, he resumed his place in the Godhead. His prayer for us to the Father was that we come to know the unity with the Father which marked his earthly life.

Jim considers forms of the church which are institutional and those emerging in character. Of the two, both of which have gifts to contribute, he sees the latter as providing the more fundamental church form. Big church can produce anonymous adherents. Professionals can feel their position safer if they dominate. In small groups, enquirers, shy and awkward personalities can get confidence to develop and play their part in the total ministry of the church. In the Iona Community I note again our debt to Ralph Morton who so clearly saw the

need for Family Groups.

Jim's theological insights were accompanied by practical gifts which went beyond anything I had to offer. Imagine him in an area of Africa for four or five weeks. When he leaves you might find that twenty or so new basic ecclesial communities have come into existence. Not one of them would have an O'Halloran trademark on it. Yes, Jim would share insights and ideas from his own wide experience. But somehow this would be done so that it sparked off indigenous thinking: what kind of people might be helped into relationship, in what kind of group, in what specific environment? – that was what determined the nature of each community; and since the form taken was native to each particular situation, it did not need outside aids to continue and develop. It belonged to its environment as naturally as members belonged in their shared life.

For good measure Jim provides thirty examples of how meetings might work out – as a stimulus to different communities' own perceptions and plans.

How can a book be so magisterial in its scope and still be so accessible? I consider this to be one of the rich theological products of this century and practical as theology ought to be – Jesus' parables are! Jim is a gift of the Spirit, that Spirit who by spontaneous combustion brings Christian communities into being all over the world.

Ian M. Fraser

Ian M. Fraser is the author of over twenty-five books, including *Living a Countersign: From Iona to Basic Christian Communities*, and *Reinventing Theology as the People's Work*. His most recent book is *A Storehouse of Kingdom Things: Resources for the Faith Journey* (Wild Goose Publications) www.ionabooks.com

A touching place: news and letters

coracle 24
summer 2011
review/a
touching place

EKWENDENI HOSPITAL: MALAWI/SCOTLAND CONNECTIONS THEN AND NOW

From friend of the Community William Primrose:

Last year we had the chance to spend five months in Africa – myself (a consultant physician, through NHS Sabbatical leave arrangements), and my wife as a General Practitioner, who for a time was a 'free agent', having left an inner-city GP partnership. The first few months were spent in Kenya (a story in itself), and following a short midpoint holiday we arrived in Malawi, the 'warm heart of Africa'. We spent the second half of our stay in Ekwendeni Hospital – part of the Northern Malawi synod, and all around us we found the traces of links with Scotland.

Ekwendeni is a small market town some 20km from the city of Mzuzu, the 4th largest conurbation in Malawi and the administrative centre of Northern Malawi. The mission station was established in the later 1800s and is still a thriving part of the community. Apart from Church-related activities, there are several centres of education of both primary/secondary schooling, as well as support for orphans and tertiary educational and vocational opportunities (such as cycle repair, carpentry and sewing). However, not surprisingly, our involvement was focussed on the hospital.

The hospital has an important role in providing outpatient and inpatient services for paediatrics, obstetrics, medicine and straightforward surgery, and patients would often travel 50-100 miles to be seen. Apart from the routine emergency clinical work, there was much community outreach in terms of health education, family planning and HIV/AIDS testing and support. The hospital is primarily staffed by Malawi-trained staff, with clinical officers substituting for doctors. While we were there we augmented the local medical team of a part-time Dutch doctor and an American – both supported by external missionary organisations.

Our role was to share in the clinical

management of the medical wards and to a lesser extent support the outpatient clinics. We helped develop guidelines which were particularly needed for the conditions commonly seen in the UK – such as relating to diabetes or stroke disease. We also took on small projects relating to improving patient flow as well as suggesting small ways of improving the assessment of older patients. Although we think of African countries as being ‘young’ in terms of their age structure, the mean age in Malawi is now 56 and we met patients in their 90s and even a fine 102-year-old man.

While exploring the dusty tracks around the mission station, within which the hospital was located, we came across a rather neglected monument. On closer inspection we could just make out the writing and read that a certain George MacLeod had opened the refurbished hospital in 1958 when Moderator of the Church of Scotland. We felt that without fairly urgent repair this part of the local history would soon disappear, so with a small grant from an Aberdeen friend arranged a simple restoration. Those on the mission station were quite delighted to see the change which raised morale and gave a sense of pride. The small gift from our Aberdeen friend also improved the signposting to the hospital, which again was much appreciated by the local community, as well as the hospital staff.

Ekwendeni Hospital continues to have links with Scotland, in part through the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society (EMMS), and since our return home some recent fundraising has resulted in more than £1000 being gifted to an inspirational HIV/AIDS Orphan project. We hope to return in the coming years to spend further periods of clinical practice supporting this small hospital. For further information, or to be sent a photograph of the monument: willieprimrose@hotmail.com

THE IONA-NEW WORLD FOUNDATION, THE KIRKRIDGE RETREAT AND STUDY CENTER, AND THE IONA COMMUNITY

In May a meeting was held at Kirkridge Retreat Centre in Bangor, Pennsylvania between Peter Macdonald (Leader of the Iona Community), John Dillon (President of the Iona-NWF), Scott Blythe (Treasurer of the Iona-NWF) and representatives of Kirkridge Retreat Center. The purpose of the meeting was to consider the Iona-New World Foundation/Iona Community entering into a formal agreement with Kirkridge that would enable them to: provide administrative support for the Iona-NWF Board and office bearers; ease communication with US Associates and Friends; further the proposal to hold an annual Iona Community Associates event at Kirkridge (it is planned that as many as four events might be held there using Iona Community leaders).

It was agreed that Kirkridge would provide these services to the Iona-New World Foundation. It was also decided to invite John Dillon to continue as President of the Iona-NWF, Scott Blythe as Treasurer, and Bill Klein, Paul Masquelier, Kathleen Roney (Kirkridge Board) and Jean Richardson (Kirkridge Director) to form the Iona-NWF Board until the next AGM on June 9th, 2012 at Kirkridge.

To see all wonderful things happening at the Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center, and its beautiful setting in the Pocono mountain region, go to: www.kirkridge.org

IONA COMMUNITY YOUTH DEPARTMENT NEWS: ANTI-SECTARIAN WORKSHOPS

‘Can You Hear the Bigots Sing’, a 6-week anti-sectarianism course entirely funded by the Scottish government and facilitated by the Iona Community Youth Department, has been running for a year now in adult prisons in the West of Scotland. To see results of attitude change in each prison, go to this web page:

http://iona.org.uk/youth_home.php

The statistics here are impressive and encouraging!

Future youth work will include working in secure units (Kibble and St Mary’s Children’s Unit), doing anti-sectarianism work. And Youth Projects Co-ordinator, Laura McAleese, is also busy planning a series of workshops in secondary schools, using drama to target sectarianism. The first workshop will be piloted at Bellahouston Academy ...

NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM FRIENDS OF OUR PURPOSE

Waymarkers: Collected Prayers, Poems and Reflections for the Pilgrimage to Iona, by Mary DeJong: this collection of scripture, prayers, blessings and meditations aims to provide the pilgrim journeying to Iona with materials to guide and deepen reflections en route to this sacred site: www.waymarkers.net

Another interesting publication, from Journeying, is *Walking to an Island*, a 22-page booklet charting the history of Pilgrim Adventure in its first decade, by David Gleed:

<http://journeying.co.uk/default.aspx>

Bread for the road

To say ‘No’ in today’s world in the name of a greater ‘Yes’ is hard to do alone. It requires communities of resistance, with prayer at their heart – Ron Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose*, Wild Goose Publications

Prayer of the Iona Community

O God, who gave to your servant Columba the gifts of courage, faith and cheerfulness, and sent people forth from Iona to carry the word of your gospel to every creature: grant, we pray, a like spirit to your church, even at this present time. Further in all things the purpose of our community, that hidden things may be revealed to us, and new ways found to touch the lives of all. May we preserve with each other sincere charity and peace, and, if it be your holy will, grant that this place of your abiding be continued still to be a sanctuary and a light. Through Jesus Christ. Amen

Western knitter

Rosemary Power

coracle 26
summer 2011
poetry

Lifting her eyes to the hills of a lifetime
clouded by age, she sits in the sunset,
hands knotted to aching, back bent from the burden
as a sheaf in the wind,

knitting in time to the throb of her thoughts
patterns of the past in colours of her kingdom,
with a stitch in the wrist and a turn in the yarn
and memories of those who once laughed.

Each winter, though harder, she works by the window
till word of the south feeds the world in her heart,
and neighbours, now few, speak of sowing and growth,
and friends the winds scattered.

Her own grain now garnered, her face to her future,
she waits in the west for the word in the news,
linking the strands and the shades and the needs
of children not hers she would serve.

As prices keep rising she skimps on the heating,
sweeps the house slowly in search of the last coin;
lets pension and post send her parcel a pilgrim
to neighbours divided by ocean and culture

as she flings on the winds like a prodigal sower
her hopes and her warmth so that others find comfort,
sends bread on the waters, her gifts on the world
that knows nothing of her, for the word that knows all

of the pain of creation cast on from silence,
that the cold may be clothed in the love of a stranger,
that grain may fall open, that bread may be broken,
that the harvest abound.

Rosemary Power works in pioneer ministry in County Clare, Ireland, and is a member of the Iona Community. Her latest book is *The Celtic Quest: A Contemporary Spirituality*, Columba Press
<http://www.columba.ie>

'Western knitter' won first prize in the 2010-11 Coracle Poetry Contest. Other winning poems will be printed in future editions.

Photo © Neil Paynter





BLESSING

May prayer feed your actions
and may your actions
feed the world.

AMEN

Neil Paynter

(from *Holy Ground*, Wild Goose Publications
www.ionabooks.com)

Cover photo © David Coleman

coracle

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