

## IONA COMMUNITY BOARD REPORT MAY 2025

### Proposed Deliverance

#### The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Affirm the importance of learning about the pressing economic circumstances affecting the people of our country, in particular those already living on the margins; and commit anew to working, with our partners, towards alleviating hardship for the poorest people in our society (*Section 2.3*).
3. Affirm the consistent position of the Church of Scotland in condemning the existence and threat of nuclear weapons as sinful and an offence to God's created order and urge the Church to recommit to working and praying for peace and disarmament (*Section 3.1*).
4. Encourage all congregations and members to consider how they can further peace in their context, and support peacebuilding organisations (*Section 3.1.3*).
5. Encourage congregations to put environmental concerns at the heart of their mission, recognising that these concerns impact all other aspects of mission (*Section 3.2*).
6. Invite church groups and bodies to consider a stay at Iona Abbey [www.iona.org.uk](http://www.iona.org.uk) (*Section 4.5*).

### Report

#### 1. ROOTED IN HOPE: LIVED IN COMMUNITY

**1.1** 'Divide and conquer' is a cry of the power-hungry. The more we fragment and separate, the weaker we become. On the contrary, the more we build relationships, deepen ties and grow community, the stronger and more resilient we become and the more courage we find to stand up and speak out for justice. In a world where climate catastrophe is writ large – poverty gallops on apace, exclusion and marginalisation continue to blight the lives of many including refugees and asylum seekers, and the voice of young people continues to be squashed – the question remains: what is ours to do? How are we to be?

**1.2** Paul's words of hope in 1 Corinthians 13 are a blue-print for how to keep a radical minority movement alive, describing in down-to-earth detail the kind of love that is needed if we are to flourish. This is a love rooted in faith and in hope. This is a love made real in action, mirroring the message in 1 John that love which does not help our neighbour is not love (1 John 3:16-17); and the message in James that faith without works is nothing (James 2:14-26). In the same way, hope which doesn't try to make 'God's Kingdom come on earth' isn't hope but delusion. It is this kind of hope, lived in the real lives of real people, to which we are called and committed.

**1.3** As a Christian community, we in the Iona Community lean on a framework of hope to guide us. This is a framework rooted in God's time: *kairos* time. This framework of hope opens us to possibilities as yet unseen, tapping into intuitive as well as logical approaches to the world's challenges. It is a framework that is perhaps more resonant of the notion of emergence than of robust plans: hope in the not yet, nestled within the now. Hope in the story of resurrection in the midst of catastrophe. Hope in the small, ordinary miracles of love and justice in the face of so much that is wrong. Hope in acts of compassion and kindness. Hope in the welcome of the stranger at our tables, in our centres of hospitality, in the learning, reflection and campaigning inspired by our Common Concern Networks. Hope that extends us beyond optimism to a deep, embedded, visionary belief that despite all that changes, the world will not fall apart: "It's because I don't change, says God, that you don't fall apart." (Rowan Williams)

**1.4** We know this hope is real when guests at Iona Abbey tell us they leave re-energised and focused; when those who meet us at the Glastonbury or Greenbelt Festivals say that we give them hope in times of despair; when folk who follow us on social media, who worship with us daily online, who read our publications or who encounter us through our poetry or hymns say that they are supported, and encouraged; or when our friends in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories tell us how much they rely on the prayers from around the world to cling on to the little hope they have of lasting peace.

**1.5** The Very Rev Sally Foster Fulton addressed the charity Trustees on the Iona Community Council in September 2024 on the theme of hope, encouraging us to 'hold on to each other'. It is in staying connected, in continuing to turn up together when it matters – on marches and at the gates of nuclear weapons bases, in prayer networks and letter-writing campaigns – that we are reaffirming our faith in 'God's goodness at the heart of humanity, planted more deeply than all that is wrong'. We share those words daily in our Affirmation of Faith.

#### 2. IN SOLIDARITY WITH CHURCH(ES)

**2.1** In these times of change and transition we stand in solidarity with all churches and faith communities who work for peace and justice. We remain steadfast and courageous in faith, recognising that as in our short span of nearly 90 years of life as a community, so too our churches in their longer span have witnessed much change and flux. This is the nature of the created order. In times of change, transition and flux, our prayer is that we will remain open to radical transformation for the good of all. In all of this we recognise, applaud and affirm the ongoing and essential ministry of all leaders in our churches, and of lay leaders in particular.

**2.2** Iona Community Learn completed a successful 18-month pilot programme in December 2024 focussing on volunteer pathways, partnerships development and the new members global programme. We are delighted that this work has now been made permanent. The work for this next period will focus on seeking accreditation for our

volunteering programme with Volunteer Scotland; developing further partnerships including with Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities and with the Student Christian Movement, and an additional partnership with the Joint Public Issues Team; and supporting the development of the Wild Goose Resource Group.

**2.3** We celebrated our partnership with the [Joint Public Issues Team \(JPIT\)](#) in 2024, with the Iona Community Lecture given by Simeon Mitchell in October at New College, Edinburgh.

**2.3.1** We see this partnership flourishing in future years with participation in the JPIT annual conference, with JPIT leading a week at Iona Abbey, and with possible collaboration in campaigns and policy work, for example, in relation to the Government's Child Poverty Strategy.

**2.3.2** In his lecture, entitled 'Turning the Tables', focussed on economic justice, Simeon Mitchell affirmed the grounding principles for a Christian understanding of economics, including: Creation is good and abundant; we were created for relationships; God desires the flourishing of all life; we will be judged on our choices – God requires justice and mercy. Jesus' overturning of the tables in the Temple remains a potent symbol of the need for followers of Christ to overturn unjust economic structures.

**2.3.3** He went on to uncover the fallacy of the 'homo economicus' (a model presenting humans as rational, self-interested agents) rooted in a structure which glorifies work, and he encouraged us to look for deeper wisdom when it comes to designing more just economic systems. How do we ensure that the welfare of the worker is as vital as the profit to the employer? How do we look anew at debt, providing more opportunities for jubilee, and for writing off debt?

**2.3.4** Simeon encouraged us to believe that a just economic order is possible, urging us to reclaim economics as part of our civic discourse, vital to democratic decision-making. We commend to the Church [JPITs free six-session course on 'Just Economics'](#), designed to open up questions of justice and the economy within small groups in churches and faith communities.

**2.4** In 2023 we welcomed back to our Youth Festival members of a youth network from a London church. When they first joined us in 2022, many of them had never been out of London. They took a while to adapt to being in a medieval abbey on a remote Scottish island. They kept their hoods up and avoided eye contact. As the week went on, they found their bearings, grew in confidence. The hoods came down a little more each day. As the week progressed, they displayed fine football skills, raced up Dun I, marvelled at Staffa, built intricate sea-weed sculptures on Calva beach and found their voices to read and sing at worship.

**2.5** This year, about 80% of those young people from London returned. Now they knew where they were going and understood the rhythm of the Abbey worship, and life in community. Their confidence spread throughout the rest of the group. They shared reflections in small groups, and chose projects in drama, art or song writing. They hosted a hilarious Open Mic night, and tried out Scottish country dancing with great panache. "We got soaked and frozen on the pilgrimage. It was terrible. And then it was good. We all made it the whole way back. We did it!"

**2.6** Join the waiting list for [Youth Festival 2025](#) or book your group in for our [two Youth Festivals in 2026](#).

### **3. UNITED IN OUR CONCERNS**

**3.1** The Iona Community affirms the consistent position of the Church of Scotland in condemning the existence and threat of nuclear weapons as sinful and an offence to God's created order. Jesus' call to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) is an urgent one. And so, we urge the Church to recommit to working and praying for peace and disarmament.

**3.1.1** Within our Community we continue to learn the art of peacemaking from within, in the knowledge that any call to others to take action for peace must begin with ourselves. We continue to work with [Place for Hope](#) on honing our skills for peace and reconciliation.

**3.1.2** In a year of continuing conflict and escalating militarism on a global scale, it is increasingly important to campaign for peace, reconciliation and disarmament. The Iona Community does this through the activities of individual members and its Peace Common Concern Network (CCN). Opposition to the UK nuclear defence system continues with protest action at the Faslane base, and to the arms trade with actions at UK arms manufacturing sites. We particularly deplore: the Government's refusal to have any association with the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW); the prospect of US nuclear missiles being restationed at Lakenheath in East Anglia; and [the continued export to Israel of parts for maintenance of their F-16 fighter aircraft](#).

**3.1.3** Members of the Peace CCN have been involved with the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, Network of Christian Peace Organisations, and the Peace Conference of European Churches. The conflict in Ukraine and the hope for peace was recognised by the purchase for Iona Abbey of an icon, painted by a Ukrainian artist on the wooden lid of an ammunition box. The proceeds from the purchase went to a Ukrainian mobile hospital, symbolising the transformation of conflict and death into life and hope.

**3.1.4** August 2025 sees the 80th anniversary of the destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On 2<sup>nd</sup> August we will stand in solidarity with church and religious leaders of all faiths as we call for the eradication of nuclear weapons at Faslane.

**3.1.5** "The root of violence in our society today is our intention to use nuclear weapons. Once we have agreed to that, all other evil is minor in comparison." (Richard McSorley SJ 1976). From 9th -15th August we are hosting a week at Iona Abbey entitled ["Peacebuilding in a World of Conflict"](#). Speakers from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Rethinking Security, Quaker peace work and Ulster Community Engagement will give us the opportunity to develop practical ideas which we can then implement in our own circumstances and localities. During the week a triptych by Susie Alexander will be introduced to the Abbey for permanent display – "New Life Rises from the Ashes of Hiroshima."

**3.2** Our Eco CCN produced a [Position Paper](#) setting out the Iona Community's views and commitments around the extreme urgency and great potential of transitioning to a just and sustainable world. Our colleagues on Iona are auditing the carbon footprint of our work there, and have made [recommendations to lessen the environmental impact of guest travel](#).

**3.2.1** The crises of nature and climate do not just happen. As the powerful witness of the prophets, together with voices from global-south churches will confirm, these crises are the result of intentional, knowing and sinful injustice. The environmental movements of UK churches are clear that further development of fossil fuel infrastructure is a choice for harm to people and wildlife.

**3.2.2** These crises will not be 'fixed' in our lifetimes. The choice of inaction, however, rapidly lessens the potential to make significant change. In these circumstances, faith offers a treasure of resources for spiritual resilience. Faith is deepened and joy and community are enriched by the demanding common tasks of response.

**3.2.3** As the World Council of Churches launches its 'Ecumenical Decade for Climate Justice Action: Moving Together in Ecological Metanoia for Transformation' in June 2025, no approach to mission can have integrity which ignores the urgency of mainstream response to and repentance for those threats which are already reality and, without a change of direction, will increasingly fall on future generations. Our own rural and island communities, who will be hit hardest and early, will be of particular concern.

**3.2.4** With active Members and Associate Members around the world the Eco CCN is acutely aware of the many who don't take climate change seriously and/or feel they can make no real difference. Too often other pressing concerns get in the way. They are also acutely aware that many, including numerous young people, do take the worsening catastrophe very seriously. Such concerns are real. And so we believe we must find ways forward. From developing sustainable food systems to greater demilitarisation, from considering technological to theological advances, we are concerned in particular with those most impacted by both change and lack of change. Alongside people of all faiths and understandings, the church must lead by example. As a Community, we seek to play our part.

**3.2.5** We see the synergy between the call of our two Associate Members in Kenya, and the inspirational Founder of the Iona Community, George MacLeod: 'Changing the narrative of climate change is not a solo job, it is not for the chosen few, it is the choice everyone needs to make.' (Frida Wafula and Marksén Masinde, Associate Members in Kenya). 'All is in flux, turn but a stone and an angel moves. Underneath are the everlasting arms. Unknowable we know you, Christ beneath us.' (from a prayer by George Macleod)

**3.3** Aware that poverty is a global issue, members of our CCN on Poverty and Inequality continues to focus their efforts on justice for the poor by promoting the Minimum Income Guarantee that should lift people out of financial poverty and promote independence and dignity. This is an initiative that is being considered by some in Scotland and much further afield. The CCN will draw on the work of the Poverty Alliance, believing that this approach could reduce poverty and inequality for the most marginalised. Members of this CCN continue to support the work of Faith in Community Scotland, Faith in Community Dundee and other similar initiatives in the North of England. These agencies and others amplify the voices of those living with poverty and inequality in order to shape policies and take actions to address injustice.

**3.4** Our CCNs on Challenging Racism, Faith and Spirituality, Inter Faith and LGBTQ+ continue to meet regularly and are preparing Position Papers to outline the demanding common task of these concerns.

#### 4. LIVED IN COMMUNITY

**4.1** Twenty-nine new Members joined the first year of our two-year New Members Programme in September 2024. This programme offers residential and online components so that New Members can experience living in community together, reflecting on the Rule of Life of the Iona Community, and discerning the path to community for themselves and the Community. New Members range in age from 22 to 82 years, live in Scotland, England, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the USA and Australia and represent a range of Christian denominations including Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist.

**4.2** A rigorous business analysis of the MacLeod Centre on Iona has resulted in the decision that the building should provide housing on the island of Iona for those who most need it. As this report goes to print, we are reviewing various options to enable this to happen.

**4.3** Each week at Iona Abbey we welcome up to 44 guests to live with us in community. Our lift, accessible bedrooms and bathrooms, and ramp into the refectory allow us to welcome all. We worked in partnership with the Poverty Truth community in 2024 to support 26 guests from situations of poverty to stay at the Abbey free of charge.

**4.3.1** One guest from the Poverty Truth community shared this reflection, showing her collection of stones and shells, from her time at Iona Abbey in 2024: "These are my stones and my shells, and there's 5 stones and there's one shell. [...] I've been (to Iona) five times and each time I've been, I've picked up one of these and every time it's been a hard time for me. Like my husband died or I've hit crisis point, and really bad, bad things in my life and each one represents a bad thing. But each one is also one that I've survived. I survived that stone and lived so I could get another and another. So, even though each one's a bad thing, it's a good thing. And it's kind of like everyone in the PTC, we're all different shapes and sizes and colours, but we're all still just one collection."

**4.3.2** We were particularly delighted in 2024 to have welcomed members of the Presbytery of Clèir Eilean I to Iona Abbey and look forward to more such visits. "The Business Committee retreat on Iona came about as the result of a providential encounter between myself and the Iona Community Leader at an ecumenical conference early in 2024. I mentioned that the new Presbytery of the Highlands & Hebrides had adopted the name of the island which inspired the

community she leads and Ruth reciprocated by stating the desire of the Iona Community to strengthen links with the Church of Scotland. The obvious outcome was to look for an opportunity to draw together these strands and that soon arose in the search for where to hold the Business Committee of Clèir Eilean I's first retreat. The Iona Abbey team went the extra mile to make the Business Committee of Clèir Eilean I, the Presbytery of the Isle of Iona, feel at home in our eponymous isle. Tha sinn uile fada nur comain!" (Rev Rory MacLeod, Clerk, Clèir Eilean I: Highlands & Hebrides)

**4.4** The Community Life Committee is working with a team of young people to re-launch our Youth Strategy in 2025. We place a high value on the work done at our Camas Centre with young people. The Camas Centre needs essential repair work to its roof. This means that the centre is closed for the 2025 season, while we are doing all we can to ensure that it reopens to guests in 2026.

**4.4.1** One young person from a group of refugees who visited Camas in 2024 commented: "It's a very new feeling but wild is great. Standing from a distance we will see an endless ocean. It's been a long time since I've felt like I had family around me, everyone is so warm!"

**4.4.2** "Camas has more than a 75-year history with the Church of Scotland bringing young people who have faced big challenges in their young lives, and being welcomed into week-long transformative experiences on the Isle of Mull. From the Rev Dr George MacLeod bringing borstal boys in the 1950s, to current connections with church and church-birthed organisations who bring youth groups, we continue to witness the power and impact of community experience. Simple living, fostering connection with the natural environment and building relationships of trust truly changes lives for the better. Well into adulthood, a visit to Camas remains a memorable experience held on to when life throws up difficulties; an experience that grows resilience and widens horizons." (Rev Sarah Brown, Minister, St. Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen)

**4.4.3** Our Young Adults Group completed a pilgrimage from Melrose to Lindisfarne in 2024, staying in church halls and meeting with local church groups on the way. Their commitment to a life of prayer and action was evident in their daily devotions – held in fields, on hillsides and in hostels – and in their commitment to campaigning for peace, equality for all, and climate justice.

**4.5** All are welcome to join us in community whether that means living or working with us in intentional community at Iona Abbey or joining our active, praying dispersed global community – [www.iona.org.uk](http://www.iona.org.uk)

**5.** The Members, and Board of the Iona Community are grateful to Rev Anikó Schütz Bradwell who has skilfully convened the Board since 2023, a role which she relinquishes in May 2025. Her wise and dedicated leadership has inspired the Board. We wish her well in her ongoing ministry.

## 6. A PRAYER FROM OUR FOUNDER, GEORGE MACLEOD AND OUR DAILY AFFIRMATION

Invisible we see You, Christ beneath us.

With earthly eyes we see beneath us stones and dust and dross,

fit subjects for the analyst's table.

But with the eye of faith, we know You uphold.

In You all things consist and hang together:

the very atom is light energy,

the grass is vibrant,

the rocks pulsate.

All is in flux; turn but a stone and an angel moves.

Underneath are the everlasting arms.

Unknowable we know You, Christ beneath us.

### Our daily affirmation

With the whole church

we affirm that we are made in God's image,

befriended by Christ, empowered by the Spirit.

With people everywhere

we affirm God's goodness at the heart of humanity,

planted more deeply than all that is wrong.

With all creation

we celebrate the miracle and wonder of life,

the unfolding purposes of God,

for ever at work in ourselves and the world.

*In the name of the Committee*

ANIKÓ SCHÜTZ BRADWELL, *Convener, Iona Community Board*

TORSTEN HAAK, *Executive Director, Iona Community*

RUTH HARVEY, *Leader, Iona Community*