

Iona Community Board speech—General Assembly 2022

Tom Gordon

Moderator, it's remarkable that the General Assembly can meet in this hybrid-format this year. But it is equally remarkable that charities and churches have survived this Pandemic in good shape, and perhaps even prospered. One of these, on which your Board is pleased to report, is the Iona Community. It's coping strategies, commitments, organisational structure, accommodation on Iona and its sharpness of thought have, indeed, been remarkable.

The report presented to this General Assembly, therefore, seeks to emphasise that and highlight specific issues.

Moderator, as it is the custom of the General Assembly to invite the leader of the Iona Community to present the bulk of the Board's report, I would welcome your invitation to Ruth Harvey, the leader of the Community, to do just that.

Ruth Harvey

The report of the Board outlines key achievements and concerns raised in this last year. I propose now to focus on our three charitable aims by way of offering more depth to the Report.

The charitable aims of the Iona Community ring as true today as they did when first articulated in the 1950s. Trustees and Members are bound to:

- Establishing new forms of Christian worship, witness, prophecy, mission and service
- Providing training for the mission of the church today, and
- Work amongst young people

The first of these commits us to establishing new forms of Christian worship. For over 40 years John Bell, along with the late Graham Maule and others, has brought light, challenge, depth and joy to the lives of millions as they have sung his lyrics, grinned at his gospel reflections, and had their lives changed through encounters in workshops and worship, festivals and seminars. John retires towards the end of 2022. It is important to acknowledge in this forum the remarkable impact that John Bell has had on the life of the church and on the ability of millions of people to sing their truth to God. We wish John well in retirement.

It is to the work of the ‘renewal of worship, witness, prophecy, mission and service’ that our teams at our islands centres on Mull and Iona, and on the mainland, and our members around the globe, bear witness week by week as we welcome guests to live an intentional life of community. These are the reflections of one of our guests, Wahida, who joined us under our Unlocked scheme, where space is made available at Iona Abbey free of charge to those who had been adversely affected by the pandemic.

The second charitable aim of the Iona Community commits us to ‘Providing training for the mission of the church today.’

The programme during our annual ColumbaFest next week in Glasgow will include listening to one another as we explore what mission means. One of the most powerful ways we continue to engage in, and train and equip for mission, is through the work of our Common Concern Networks. If the Iona Community’s local and regional groups are the warp that roots the cloth of our community in time and space, then our Common Concern Networks are the weft, weaving our concerns across the globe and across people who hold a range of different perspectives.

Our report highlights the actions of two of these Common Concern Networks: our CCNs focussing on peace in the Middle East, and on migration and refugees.

In March this year, during Lent, we issued a ‘call to peace’ in the face of war, weaving threads of peacemaking between all seven of our Common Concern Networks. Believing that the community we seek must be mirrored in the community we practice, as we make requests of those in power so also Members rededicate ourselves to using our own power, alone and together, to bring peace with justice.

Our ‘call to peace’ said this: “In the face of violence, and in the knowledge that words alone are never enough, we remind ourselves that Jesus calls us, in the Gospel, to welcome the stranger, tend the sick, provide shelter for the persecuted and speak truth to power. Jesus calls us to be reconcilers and peacemakers. We believe this means that we must:

1. **Be islands of sanctuary**, offering space to all refugees and those seeking asylum
2. **Sustain life on earth**: The fossil fuel cost of modern warfare accelerates carbon emission rates at a time when our window of opportunity is closing for hopeful climate action. We weave our lives as stewards of creation with our work as peacemakers.
3. **Eradicate weapons of mass destruction** by joining in with the planned nonviolent actions against nuclear weapons at Faslane starting on 7th June

4. **Practice reconciliation** through training and equipping ourselves to be peacemakers in our lives and in our localities through such excellent charities as Place for Hope, and
5. **Pray for peace**, by reading scripture, reflecting on material that inspires us, and recognising the deep bond that unites us through the Holy Spirit across all boundaries.”

We share here a conversation between Victoria and Liz, two young theologians who will be leading our Membership in reflections on mission over our summer Community Week. They offer both inspiration and challenge to us all.

Our third charitable aim commits us to working with young people. At our Camas centre on Mull, through the work and witness of our Young Adults Group who this year produced a resource pack on racism, and through our volunteering programme at our islands centres we welcome young people from across the globe to meet together in community, to lead the way on campaigning, peace-building, hosting inclusive spaces where all are welcomed, and leading us in worship and the renewal of mission.

We are delighted to confirm that we will be working tirelessly over the next years to retrofit the MacLeod Centre on Iona as a state of the art centre for young people and families, particularly for those who are excluded or marginalised in society. We will work with experts in the field, and in the spirit of the re-building of Iona Abbey, to make sure that the retrofitting of the centre models the very best in environmental sustainability, and that through this project we will also renovate our commitment to gospel-inspired action for justice not only at our islands centres on Mull and Iona, but through the lives and witness of each Member and Associate Member of the Iona Community wherever they live.

I give the final word to Klara, a recent volunteer at Iona Abbey.

Tom Gordon

Moderator, I have pleasure in presenting the report of the Iona Community Board, and, as I am not a Commissioner, I would invite the Clerk to move the deliverances.