

IONA COMMUNITY BOARD MAY 2024

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Encourage the Church of Scotland at every level - nationally, at Presbytery and in congregations - to identify specific ways in which the different strands of the work of the Iona Community might inform and influence the future planning and delivery of mission and outreach work of the Church.
3. In the face of Brexit and ongoing rise of populism across Europe, urge Presbyteries, Kirk Sessions and congregations to take up opportunities to forge links, cross-cultural learning and partnerships across Europe.
4. Commend the work of the Church of Scotland in Israel and Palestine, while regretting the withdrawal of Church of Scotland funds from the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (*Section 4.2*).
5. Welcome the proposal by Monica Lennon MSP for an Ecocide Prevention (Scotland) Bill in the Scottish Parliament which seeks to deter mass environmental damage and destruction taking place in Scotland, and aims to protect the environment, habitats, and natural resources by introducing the crime of ecocide into Scots Law; note the engagement by both members of the Iona Community Environment Common Concern Network and the Public Life and Social Justice Programme Group in the consultation about this proposal; note the involvement of the World Council of Churches in the Faith for Ecocide Law initiative, and support further development of legal protections of the environment both in Scotland and internationally (*Section 4.3*).

Report

1. GROWING A GLOBAL FAITH COMMUNITY IN PARTNERSHIP.

1.1 Our global community continues to expand particularly through the use of online platforms. While we recognise the limitations, we celebrate the opportunities to connect across borders that this technology offers. We are aware of the injustices that remain, with connectivity to our members in the Caribbean and in parts of Africa, for example, remaining a challenge. In the face of these challenges we are glad that global membership is increasing with renewed alliances with the [Wellspring Community](#), and a growth of our membership in Africa along with increased membership in Central Europe.

1.2 The [daily worship](#) prepared by Members of our Community and shared on our social media channels is followed by scores of people who tell us regularly how much they value being part of a global worshipping community committed to justice, peace and the renewal of the church.

1.3 We recognise the necessary and painful work that the Church of Scotland is doing to support renewal, and continue to pray for the Church and all its members at this time.

1.4 One way in which we continue to support churches is through our [Wild Goose Resource Group](#) which continues to offer resources for creative worship and faith exploration. Through them we offer ideas, inspiration and methodologies that enable others to develop imaginations, skills and sensitivities in the areas of liturgy and worship, bringing the Bible alive, delving into deep God-talk, and so playing a part in enriching the responsiveness of people of faith to the realities of contemporary life.

1.5 Through our WGRG we continue to support the life of local churches which is focused for a season on Gorbals Parish Church in Glasgow. We contribute regularly to [Spill the Beans](#), and offer input to the Glasgow University short course on liturgy and worship.

1.6 In these times of extensive change and consolidation within the mainstream churches, we trust in God that this renewal is a path which will bring more peace in a world at war, more justice in a world imbalanced, and more hope in a world of despair.

1.7 Some of our most profound learning about the interface between spirituality and justice comes from our engagement with people in non-church/faith settings. Our presence at the [Glastonbury Festival](#), where we have for over 30 years hosted a sanctuary space for up to 500 festival goers, and at the [Greenbelt Festival](#), where we host workshops and Big and Wee Sings for 100s of participants hungry for liturgy and song that expresses faith rooted in every-day life, are reminders of the desire particularly amongst young folk for words and ways in to faith. We welcome a renewed and deepened relationship with the Greenbelt Festival in 2024.

1.8 A visit in 2023 to the [Agape Centre](#) near Turin in Northern Italy, founded out of the rubble of the second world war as a sanctuary space for young people from different sides in that conflict, reminded us of our shared roots as communities of peace rooted in faith. Later in the year, our Trustees visited the [Corrymeela Community](#) in Northern Ireland, yet another example of the power of community in the face of war and violence. We treasure these relationships and are glad to belong to [Oikosnet Europe](#), a network of faith-based communities and 'lay academies' across Europe. Members will meet in Community in 2024 in the [Augustinian Monastery](#) in Erfurt, Germany. As communities across Europe fragment and polarise, so we celebrate these deep connections.

1.9 2023 saw our Leader, Ruth Harvey, join the [Wellspring Community](#) in the lands now called Australia to take part in a 5-week pilgrimage meeting 30 indigenous Christian leaders who shared their stories of creation care, the quest for a 'voice' in the Australian parliament, and their desire for peace with justice rooted in a faith in Jesus Christ. You can read about this pilgrimage at [Iona Community Learn](#).

2. LEARNING AND EQUIPPING

2.1 In the 1940s and 50s the 'experiment' on Iona which resulted in the rebuilding of the living quarter of Iona Abbey, and the explorations in forging new approaches to living in communities of faith were variously described by George MacLeod as a 'laboratory' or a 'lighthouse of learning.' The programmes offered to guests at our islands centres remain part of that learning process. A deeper learning comes from the shared experience, at these centres, and in our local Family Groups across the globe, of living in community with one another as we account for our keeping of the [Rule of Life](#).

2.2 A pilot scheme to expand and consolidate our approach to learning and equipping was launched in 2023. Through [Iona Community Learn](#) we are developing new pathways for volunteers, supporting our global New Members programme, and deepening our work with our partners in the field of higher education.

2.3 In 2023 this included working with staff on Iona and at Camas to learn about the rhythm of life at our islands centres and the 'radical/costly hospitality' they offer year round. How our volunteers, who number up to 80 annually, fit in with this rhythm and are supported through it, will be the next step. We will be helped in this with the new post of Volunteer Manager. The health and well-being of our volunteers, along with managing the workload of our hard-working staff, remain core priorities in this ongoing 'laboratory of learning.'

2.4 Since Brexit, we have become aware of increasing barriers to volunteers seeking to travel to the UK from Europe and further afield. This restricts opportunities for all of us, both in learning from those from other cultures, and in opportunities for young people from the UK to travel and work within Europe.

2.5 We are particularly keen to ensure that our islands centres attract a more diverse and global group of volunteers. Conversations are ongoing with experienced practitioners working with people living in poverty including the Church of Scotland Priority Areas team, Faith in Community Scotland and the GK Experience. We recognise that in our offer of hospitality, including the food we share, we are modelling the community that we seek. And so we celebrate the [Iona Abbey Cook Book](#) by Anja Jardine, reflecting the justice at the heart of hospitality.

2.6 Iona Community Members and Associate Members world-wide are nurtured by the songs and liturgies produced by the Wild Goose Resource Group and others, and by the hands-on spirituality which connects their faith and their daily living. Those whose first language is not English are teaching us ways in which our gatherings can be more inclusive and contextually sensitive. Our New Members programme includes 13 people based in the UK, 3 in Germany, 5 in the United States of America and 1 in Aotearoa/New Zealand. We recognise that while our primary belonging in community is with those who live near us on site, we can also forge deep and lasting connections across time zones, continents and oceans. We are learning again the art of dispersed community.

2.7 With our current learning partners, the School of Divinity at Edinburgh University, the Theology and Religious Studies Department at Glasgow University and the Student Christian Movement, we are exploring mutually enriching learning opportunities. This includes collating postgraduate research that has focused on the Iona Community and exploring ways to gather existing research in an accessible format while also connecting university students with Members and the work of the Iona Community. Our Young Adults Group continues to support monthly worship at the University of Glasgow, and Members regularly take part in panel discussions and book festival events hosted by the School of Divinity in Edinburgh.

2.8 We value and aim to advance the interplay between theological rigour and contextual practice. This comes to life particularly as masters or research students seek the wisdom and experience of our Common Concern Network members to deepen their research. The annual Iona Community Lecture (this year offered by the Joint Public Issues Team on Friday 25th October 2024 at New College, Edinburgh) will explore issues of poverty and inclusion.

3. IONA ABBEY, CAMAS OUTDOOR CENTRE, AND THE MACLEOD CENTRE

3.1 [Camas Outdoor Centre](#) on Mull had an outstanding year in 2023, often supporting young people from situations of deprivation. Our staff team of 9 residents, supported by up to 6 volunteers each week, welcome groups of guests, up to 28 at a time, who stay with us for a week. In 2023 our staff welcomed 450 guests over the course of the season. 70% of those guests are living with disadvantage of some kind, whether they are asylum seekers or refugees, people with little social or economic power, or individuals recovering from addiction. Everyone who comes to Camas is welcomed into community, into the home of our staff. Together in community we share in the beauty of what Camas has to offer.

3.2 Camas remains a centre primarily for young people and young adults living on the margins of society. 60% of our groups in 2023 were aged under 18, with most of the rest primarily being people under the age of 30. Of the 20 volunteers we had in 2023, 19 were under 40 and 18 under 30. Guests and volunteers of all ages are always welcome to ensure wide diversity.

3.3 Twice daily worship in Iona Abbey remains a key part of our daily rhythm of life and one of the joys is that any member of the team - staff or volunteer - is invited to lead. Many arrive never having led worship before but with support and encouragement, we have been truly moved and challenged by their passion and creativity. The overwhelmingly positive feedback we receive from those who join in worship is heartening: one example being a day visitor who hadn't been to church for decades and was ardent in his gratitude for feeling so welcome.

3.4 Every Wednesday evening, we offer an Agape Service in Iona Abbey - sharing around a table, hearing stories from lived experience, often from guests, and from 'Scriptures and other well-springs of nourishment', followed by sharing a home-made cookie and a cup of 'living water'. It is a time of deep solidarity: for instance in September 2023, during a week focusing on Israel/Palestine, the three leaders (Jewish, Muslim and Christian) each read from their own scriptures - in Hebrew, Arabic and English. We had no idea of what was about to happen in the Middle East and their presence with us made that ever more personal.

- 3.5** In July, we welcomed some three dozen young people to YouthFest: two groups from London - the majority of whom were from black and minority ethnic communities - and one group from Maryland, USA. As well as the energy they brought, one of the most telling things from their feedback was how they were in awe of the beauty of the nature around them on Iona - a totally new experience for many who had never been out of the city before.
- 3.6** We continue to welcome guests through the Unlocked Programme - for people for whom the cost of living crisis means they cannot afford a holiday, and those who are burnt out through work or for other reasons and need a break.
- 3.7** An outstanding 'moment' of 2023 was sitting in a semi-circle in the Abbey Church with the trans Scottish actor and playwright, Jo Clifford, as she performed '[The Gospel of Jesus Queen of Heaven](#)' - a soul-stirring expression of Jesus' love for everybody, particularly those who suffer from prejudice or rejection from the society around them.
- 3.8** The MacLeod Centre on Iona is temporarily closed, with a Project Manager in place to bring business planning expertise to build on the vision, agreed by Trustees, for a centre focussing on young people and environmental concerns.

4. COMMON CONCERN NETWORKS

4.1 Over 1000 of our Members and Associate Members find expressions for their life and faith through our global [Common Concern Networks](#). Each of these CCNs is led by volunteer moderators who host monthly online meetings. For these many hours of dedicated leadership in a world sorely in need of hope we offer our deep gratitude.

4.2 Our Israel/Palestine Common Concern Network brought a revised [Position Statement](#) to the Community in early 2023. They also brought their considerable talent and expertise to bear in leading a programme week at Iona Abbey in September. This week brought input from those who are observant members of Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths. We listened to Palestinian voices (Muslim and Christian). We reflected with British analysts and activists (Jewish and Christian) and left informed, energized and grateful for the creative engagement of volunteers and staff. Less than a month later we were traumatized by seeing the violence on and since October 7th, and by the bombardment in Gaza that killed 21 family members of one of our guest speakers, Ahmed Alnaouq.

4.3 CCN Environment

4.3.1 "The environmental crisis overshadows every other issue: The story here is of an insanely unbalanced account of human entitlement and human capacity that has consistently, in the last three centuries, ignored any sense of the interdependence of human life and the life of the organic order as a whole: the life that matters has been, explicitly or implicitly, defined as human life - and human life lived in a specific mode, that of expanding consumption."

(Rowan Williams, Conference of European Churches General Assembly 2023)

4.3.2 Our Environment Common Concern Network is truly international, with active members in Australia, Kenya, Europe and North America. Both professionally and personally, their environmental action includes: local community gardening and food-growing, national campaigning and vigils on fossil-fuel divestment, biodiversity conservation and reforestation, and public speaking and preaching. It also includes action on the horrendous and utterly unaccountable ways in which conflict, militarism and the global arms trade devastate habitats. They share their experience and ideas, and bear witness to each other about the local impacts of the worldwide disaster that is still limply referred to as 'climate change.'

4.3.3 But though members act locally, their deepest area of sharing is in the conviction that this is a profound spiritual and theological crisis, well-expressed in the words of Rowan Williams above. The Network remains committed to amplifying the unlistened-to and unheard voices of the victims of environmental injustice, and to rekindling community in an expansive, inclusive Commonwealth of God that promotes thriving communion of our human, and nonhuman, siblings.

4.3.4 Members of the Iona Community CCN Environment have contributed to and support Monica Lennon MSP's proposal for an [Ecocide Prevention Bill](#) and invite the Church of Scotland General Assembly to offer its support for this issue.

4.4 CCN Migration and Refugees

4.4.1 Members of our Migration and Refugees CCN have been active in protesting against the Illegal Migration Act as it passed through Parliament. Members have also been challenging the current government's attitude towards asylum seekers and refugees - for example, in supporting refugees housed in hotels and other accommodation, including the barge at Portland; in providing clothing, toiletries and Christmas gifts to asylum seekers and refugees in various locations; in devoting some time to the needs of those at Calais; as well as in offering hospitality to Ukrainians.

4.4.2 Alison Phipps, an Iona Community Member and [UNESCO Chair Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts \(RILA\), Glasgow University](#), led a week at our Camas Centre with refugees marking World Refugee Day. She says "every World Refugee Day marks the loss of more protections and provisions. As political leadership in these lands is contested, using a barometer of cruelty, whilst many cannot feed themselves or their children, the past feels hauntingly close."

4.5 CCN LGBTQ+

4.5.1 We uphold the right of all loving couples to have their commitment acknowledged within our churches, and commend those denominations that have made this possible, including the Church of Scotland in enabling ministers to marry same-sex couples, and encourage clergy to opt in to offer this ministry.

4.5.2 The Iona Community, through our LGBTQ+ CCN, responded to the outcome of the [Living in Love and Faith](#) process of the Church of England. As an ecumenical movement working for justice and peace, we affirm the inherent goodness of people of all sexualities and genders and their loving relationships. We continue to uphold our commitment to “celebrate human diversity and work to combat discrimination on grounds of gender, sexual orientation or religion.”

4.5.3 We remain concerned about the ongoing impact that homophobic and transphobic statements and exclusionary teachings have on LGBTQ+ people and those who love them, and the impact in wider society. We long for the day when all in the LGBTQ+ community are welcomed equally throughout the breadth of churches and we support our members in actions to promote this.

4.6 The Iona Community added their voice to the Poverty Alliance’s call for the First Minister of Scotland to make good on his word and use this next Programme for Government to take meaningful action to rid Scotland of poverty. The Interfaith Relations CCN and Peace CCN prepared daily prayers for the Week of Prayer for World Peace in 2023, with leaders from eight different religious and spiritual traditions following the theme of this year’s WPWP: Praying with Hope in a Troubled World. The CCN focusing on Challenging Racism continues to promote education tools to raise awareness about the historic legacy of slavery.

5. OUTLOOK

5.1 We look forward to the Glasgow weekend in early June 2024 and the Hallowing of 11 New Members. We invite Commissioners and all others to join us in the Iona Community: to [‘stay, pray, belong.’](#)

In the name of the Committee

REV. ANIKÓ SCHÜTZ BRADWELL, *Convener, Iona Community Board*
TORSTEN HAAK, *Executive Director, Iona Community*
REV RUTH HARVEY, *Leader, Iona Community*