

## Iona Community Board Speech—General Assembly 2023

### Tom Gordon

Moderator ...

O Christ the Master Carpenter, who at the last through wood and nails purchased our whole salvation, wield well your tools in the workshop of your world, so that we who come rough-hewn to your bench may here be fashioned to a truer beauty of your hand. We ask it for your own name's sake. Amen.

Moderator ... the Iona Community Board is pleased to inform the General Assembly that this prayer, written and first spoken by George MacLeod, the founder of the Iona Community, still remains at the heart of what the Iona Community stands for. For the Iona Community offers its tools in God's work for justice, peace, the alleviation of poverty, the integrity of creation, the renewal of worship, and much more, as it has always done. It remains rough-hewn, but is pleased to give of itself in the workshop of God's world, so that the truer beauty of the Kingdom of God might be revealed to all.

Moderator, as it is the tradition of the Assembly that the convener of the Iona Community Board hands over to the leader of the Iona Community to offer the bulk of the Board's remarks, might I respectfully request that you invite Ruth Harvey, current leader of the Iona Community, to address the Assembly.

### Ruth Harvey

Moderator, convener – my thanks for this opportunity to introduce the report of the Board of the Iona Community to the General Assembly.

In this time of rapid change, we remember who we are in our churches, we stand in solidarity with you and all faith leaders offering hope, vision and models of Jesus-centred actions for love and compassion in a world sorely in need of both.

Our modest Iona Community of around 3,000 Members, Associate Members and Friends, rooted in Scotland and located across the globe, remain passionate about the interface between contemplation and action; dedicated to working for peace with justice; focussed on the needs of the poorest and most marginalised in society; engaged in finding authentic voices for worship.

In all of this we see you, we lean on our need for partnership, and we stand in solidarity alongside all here gathered.

We bring a particular focus, developed over these last 9 decades, on the renewal of worship, on the eradication of poverty, and on work for peace.

The escalation of war in central Europe along with the ongoing 'nakba' or catastrophe in Palestine remind us that the peace to which Jesus calls us is a costly peace asking those of us with power to share it, those of us with hope to articulate it, those of us with rage to focus it. We stand in solidarity with peace makers everywhere.

We stand in solidarity with the growing number of new Iona Community Associate Members in Kenya, Rwanda, DRC and Uganda under the leadership of our Africa Regional Coordinators Fridah Wafula and Marksen Masinde who share here their passion for peace and justice through the lens of the Iona Community.

We remember who we are, and we stand in solidarity with all people of goodwill who yearn for a life of contemplation and action. We notice an increase in interest and expertise within our membership in reflective practices that, through giving time and space, bring renewed focus to action for justice. A time of collective stillness and prayer within a busy central London park in advance of the climate action march around parliament by tens of thousands of people in London recently is a powerful testimony to this yearning for the action/contemplation balance.

Rooted in the life and inspiration of Jesus Christ, and our faith in him, we remember who we are, and we stand in solidarity with all of you here gathered as we find and renew our words and rituals, our symbols and songs that speak of faith and doubt today.

Leaning on the remarkable body of work prepared by John Bell, Graham Maule, colleagues in the Wild Goose Resource Group, and by many others within the wider Iona Community, our Council has passed an ambitious programme of worship renewal work for the next period. With a focus on training in leading congregational song; on rigour and creativity in our use of language; and on equipping and resourcing local groups in the art and craft of worship leadership, we will continue to partner with others and build on existing wisdom to support the tender growth of a church, always in need of reform.

As William Bridges and others say in their work on transformation and change, leading through times of change takes courage and vision. Our hope is that as we remember who we are, and stand in solidarity with you gathered here, together we can catch that kingfisher splash of colour darting across our vision – that glimmer of hope in the midst of so much that is tough.

An Advisory Group of Members, allies, staff and friends has worked for the past 6 months on this renewed vision of our work in the area of worship. Two of that group, Alex and Louise share here their vision of the power of worship to renew God's weary people.

We remember who we are, and we stand in solidarity with young people everywhere, grateful that they lead the way in noting the intersectionality between refugees, war, climate catastrophe and economic hardship.

Our Young Adults Group help us weave words of faith into actions for peace with justice. Their recent workshop resource on Tackling Racism spotlights powerful actions we can take to rid the world of this scourge. We stand in solidarity with the Faith Impact Forum and are grateful for the careful work they are doing in resourcing our churches to dismantle all forms of racial injustice.

Our Young Adults Group also lead us with hope, humour, and courage – essential ingredients for leading through change and transition.

In particular, in these uncertain times, they lead us with courage to step into unknown territory – courage similar to that modelled by Matt, one of our most recent Associate Members, who stepped into the unknown when he took part in 'The Big One' protest with 60,000 others in London in April, protesting in the name of Christ for the survival of the planet.

Matt also took the courageous step to become a Christian late last year. I will leave the last word to Matt, hoping that his courage in the face of so much that is wrong, will offer you solidarity, and will remind you, and all of us, of who we are as Christ's disciples.

## **Tom Gordon**

Christ, you are within each one of us. Nearer are you than breathing, closer than hands and feet. Ours are the eyes with which you, in the mystery, look out with compassion on the world. Take us outside, O Christ, outside holiness, out to where soldiers curse and nations clash at the crossroads of the world. We ask it for your own name's sake. Amen.

Moderator, I am pleased to present the report of the Iona Community Board, and, as I am not a Commissioner, might I invite the Clerk to move the deliverances.