

IONA COMMUNITY BOARD - MAY 2022

Proposed Deliverance

The General Assembly:

1. Receive the Report.
2. Commend the Unlocked programme to congregations, ecumenical partners and other agencies as a model for supporting those in poverty, and call on local and national church leaders to resist those proposed increases in fuel and National Insurance Contributions which most affect those in poverty. (*Sections 3.2 - 3.5*)
3. Urge congregations and all people of goodwill to remember the people of Israel / Palestine in their prayers and to press HM Government and MPs to persuade the international community and the Israeli Government in particular to bring about change in the pursuit of human rights, justice and peace for all in the Holy Land. (*Sections 4.4/4.5*)
4. Call upon all people of goodwill to raise awareness of the historical legacy of slavery, and to support congregations and faith communities in their endeavours to research the historical legacy of slavery in their own areas, particularly in relation to local religious buildings. (*Sections 4.8/4.9*)

Report

*Creator God, we give thanks
that we have heard the Spirit of God
in the freshening leaves
and the rush of water.
So we pray for the creation
which nourishes and sustains all that lives.
Renew in us the sense of its value
that we may not squander its riches,
or so bend it to our will
that we find we have destroyed it.*

Prayer by Kathy Galloway in
'Living Faithfully in the Time of Creation',
Wild Goose Publications, 2021

1. FOCUS ON EMERGENCE

- 1.1** The Iona Community Board has met online on two occasions since the last General Assembly. The Board continues to value the equal three dimensions of its membership: from the General Assembly, the Iona Community, and the wider Church, this ecumenical dimension being integral to its work and purpose.
- 1.2** The Covid-19 pandemic has continued to influence the on-going work and potential developments within the Iona Community. However, the Iona Community emerges from this troubled period with a renewed focus on its core purposes and developmental issues. In particular, it has continued to engage with those most adversely affected by the pandemic, being aware of the tenderness and vulnerability inherent in the world, noticing the strength that comes from community.
- 1.3** Rooted in a faith that welcomes questions and is open to the Holy Spirit we continue to worship daily at our islands centres and increasingly through our online gatherings. Members meet monthly to pray, reflect on scripture and other nurturing material, and to support one another in local groups. We delight in the glorious global scope of the worldwide Church of Christ, always alert to how we, as a faith community, can reflect more widely the diversity of God's creation. We were enriched in early 2021 by an 8-week programme of reflection through the Psalms. We remain continually open to the emergent Spirit guiding us in our acting, in our reflecting and in our life in community.
- 1.4** On Monday 7th June, in advance of Columba Day on 9th June, we celebrated the renovation of the living quarters of Iona Abbey through a worship service and party at Iona Abbey. We were particularly delighted to be joined by children from the island community, including three pipers, who helped us tell the story of faith and community on the island over the centuries. We were joined by HRH Princess Anne, Patron of our Capital Appeal, who spoke to us about the impact of a renewed Abbey on the lives of the most needy.
- 1.5** 2021 also marked the 1500th anniversary of the birth of St. Columba. We marked this with the re-publication of Ian Bradley's book, 'Columba: politician, penitent, pilgrim' and by services to mark the occasion.
- 1.6** In 2021 we Hallowed six New Members and welcomed a further fourteen to our New Members programme from six different countries. Our Young Adults Group now numbers sixteen. The Iona Community is now made up of 272 Members and 2,000+ Associate Members and Friends scattered across Europe, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, with Associate Members also in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Cuba, the Philippines, Malaysia and Taiwan.
- 1.7** Our global membership represents in small part the vastness of the worldwide Church. Yet we acknowledge that our membership is made up largely of those in the north and west of the world, informed by culture and norms of the wealthiest and most economically powerful nations. We confess the limitations of this dominant mind-set and will continue to do all we can to widen and broaden our membership and our programmes to reflect the deep diversity of a truly global movement.

1.8 Members continued to meet online, in local Family Groups, as Regions, and through our Common Concern Networks. In addition, we hosted over 150 Members at the Abbey over the course of three Community Weeks on Iona, along with a youth week at Camas for children of Members. Members were delighted to be joined on Iona by Rev. Alex Wimberly, Leader of the Corrymeela Community, reminding us of the deep connection with sister communities around the world. Our global membership has rekindled links with sister centres and communities in the USA and in Canada.

2. FOCUS ON LIVING A VISION

2.1 Our vision, rooted in faith, is 'for a just and peaceful world in which all of life can flourish.' Any strategy is designed to elevate our vision and focus our passions to glimpse more fully the kingdom of God, present on earth.

2.2 With this in mind, four Strategic Objectives, agreed by Council and then by our membership at the 2021 AGM, focus our work on 1) enlivening and broadening our membership; 2) equipping and empowering people in actions for justice and peace; 3) extending the reach and impact of our programmes and our islands centres; 4) increasing our sustainability and resilience.' These are shared more fully in our '**Transforming Lives**' booklet.

2.3 Plans for Iona Learn, an online learning platform and focus for our training, resourcing and programme work were agreed in 2021 and will come to fruition in 2022 and beyond. Through our islands centres programmes, our volunteering opportunities, our new Members Programme, our resources and publications and online training opportunities, and in collaborations with higher education institutions we will continue to inspire and galvanise to action all who seek justice and peace. Memoranda of Understanding signed with the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, and with the Student Christian Movement, provide an additional focus to this programme of learning and equipping. Further partnerships will be sought with educational institutes in the global south to reflect our commitment to genuine globalism.

2.4 In all of this, excellent communication is key. In 2021 we renewed our database, financial accounting package, online bookings system and web-site, all of which ensures easier access to our resources and deeper engagement with our concerns through our membership.

2.5 The start of 2021 saw our staff working from home, our centres closed with an uncertain future, and Council working hard on a deficit reduction plan. With the good will and remarkable generosity of our membership we were able not only to survive, but to see the signs of flourishing towards the end of the 2021 season. This came at significant cost to the many volunteers who devoted their time and energy to ensuring this survival. To them we owe a huge debt of gratitude, as we do to the staff and to our own membership.

2.6 We said farewell to Sarah Metcalfe who led as our Executive Director through a particularly turbulent few months. Sarah's vision, humour, and sharp thinking were an essential driver in the survival of the Iona Community. We owe her real gratitude and wish her well in her new ventures.

2.7 We were joined in September 2021 by Callum Orr as our Executive Director. Callum brings skills of leadership, clarity of thinking and a 'drive to deliver' to this role and to the life of the Iona Community. We welcome him to this post.

2.8 Council oversaw a structural review to bring renewed focus and clarity to the work of Wild Goose Publications (WGP), Wild Goose Resource Group and our Iona Shop. WGP produced thirty one publications in 2021, consisting of nine books (with e-book versions) and twenty two short downloads. Among the books published were *This is God's World*, a new songbook by John L Bell; *Living Faithfully in the Time of Creation* by Kathy Galloway & Katharine M Preston; and *Refugees from Eden* by Rosemary Power. One issue of *Coracle* was published in 2021 focusing on what it means to belong to a global faith community.

2.9 Due to the hard work and visionary leadership of our Council, members and staff, accounts were presented in 2021 which left the Iona Community in a modestly healthy position at the end of the year. A carefully constructed and implemented deficit reduction plan, which included relocating our offices to the Fairfield Centre in Govan, judicious use of furlough and regrettably some redundancy, eliminated the accumulated deficit. Best practice in budgetary management has been adopted, with regular monitoring and financial reporting, responsibility with accountability for budget holders and accurate advance planning. An ambitious but prudent budget for 2022 is being implemented.

3. FOCUS ON ISLANDS CENTRES

3.1 Iona Abbey rang in the Nuclear Ban Treaty in January and livestreamed each week during Lent, breaking the isolation of lockdown and connecting people in prayer across the continents. The Abbey re-opened to guests with Wildlife Week, led by a member of the Young Adult Group, on 29 May. The Abbey welcomed 346 guests over the course of a slightly shortened season in 2021, with sixty volunteers, six resident group members and four contracted staff.

3.2 Despite distancing and other Covid measures, the Abbey Church welcomed over 400 each week during the summer to worship rooted in the common life of the resident team and outstretched to the concerns of the world. Songs of lament, protest and peace were sung in St. Oran's Chapel during COP26. One guest said they felt "a renewed enthusiasm to work for peace and justice. 'Time and Space' was just what I needed."

3.3 Our Unlocked programme ensured that as soon as our doors opened at Iona Abbey, our spaces, including our cottages on Iona, were available free of charge to those in the greatest need, having struggled particularly during the pandemic.

3.4 Working with our partners, including the Church of Scotland's Priority Areas Team, we welcomed sixty three people to join us in community during 2021 under the Unlocked programme.

3.5 One Key Worker who came with their family said: "We had a truly amazing time on Iona. Thanks for the hospitality, kindness, prayer and inspiring us to become more committed and accountable when it comes to social justice. Our child had the first holiday for years where they felt welcomed, accepted and free to enjoy themselves."

3.6 We recognise that the global pandemic hit the poorest across the globe most severely. As we emerge from the pandemic, we abhor the fact that the uneven distribution of wealth and the scandal of an asymmetrical distribution of the vaccine reinforces this inequality. Within the United Kingdom, 2022 will see those already hit hardest by the pandemic further disadvantaged through job insecurity, the end of the uplift to Universal Credit, an increase in energy bills and in National Insurance Contributions. We commit to continuing to work for the eradication of inequality and poverty, to sharing at least 10% of our disposable income with those most in need, and to ensuring that our islands centres and all our programmes and resources are accessible to all who are disadvantaged.

3.7 Our Abbey Programme for 2022 will include Time & Space weeks, and weeks focussing on LGBTQ+, Environment, Youth Festival, Students Week, Racism, the Renewal of Worship and a week for Scotland's Interfaith Leaders. Visit <https://iona.org.uk/visit-and-stay/iona-abbey-centre/iona-abbey-programme-bookings/> for information and booking.

3.8 Camas, our Adventure Centre on Mull welcomed 133 guests from a range of urban and rural settings during 2021, weathering the storm of the Covid-19 pandemic which limited our numbers, while at the same time focussing on the physical and spiritual well-being of young people. Guests represented groups from Mull, Glasgow, Edinburgh and England. These ranged from local schools to families, vulnerable young people and refugees. They were supported by a team of four residents and nine volunteer staff over various parts of the season. Tribute should be paid to those who have sustained and developed the work at Camas through two years of uncertainty. The Camas Programme for 2022 can be found at <https://iona.org.uk/visit-and-stay/mull-camas-outdoor-centre/camas-programme-bookings/>

3.9 The MacLeod Centre, focussed on offering time and space to families and youth groups, has been closed since 2017, initially to provide accommodation to support the renovation of the Abbey. The building is now in need of urgent attention. Plans are in process for a carbon neutral youth centre focussing on environmental justice. This reflects the Iona Community's commitment to environmental justice, and one of our three core charitable objectives: to 'increase the voice, visibility and agency of young people.'

4. FOCUS ON COMMON CONCERNS AND HISTORICAL LEGACY OF SLAVERY

4.1 Members meet monthly in Family Groups – small groups that root us in prayer and action, in our local areas. Complementing these geographical groups are our Common Concern Networks (CCNs) which root us in shared passions and concerns inspired by our faith.

4.2 Our CCNs focus on Environment; Faith & Spirituality; Israel/Palestine; LGBTQ+; Migration & Refugees; Poverty & Inequality; Reconciliation, Peace & Disarmament.

4.3 Each CCN, including Members and Associate Members from across the globe, meets in a format and frequency to suit their membership. Most meet monthly, online. Their primary purpose is to support one another in living out their faith through prayer, actions and campaigns in relation to this specific concern.

4.4 Our CCN on Israel / Palestine, building on the Iona Community's statement of December 2017, has continued to promote discussion within the Iona Community and more widely, in supporting Kairos Palestine, Sabeel-Kairos UK and other organisations seeking justice for the Palestinians, and opposing the policies of the Israeli government which, in defiance of international law and repeated United Nations resolutions, continues to approve the development of illegal settlements on the occupied territory of the West Bank. Meanwhile Palestinians have their homes arbitrarily demolished or possessed by settlers and their olive trees and vines vandalized and destroyed. In Gaza around two million people live under siege with unemployment running at well over 50% and the social infrastructure, not least health and education services, and water and electricity supplies, is close to collapsing.

4.5 In 2020 the Iona Community, along with others, endorsed an initiative by Palestinian Christian leaders, who in their quest for justice, peace and an end to the occupation, invited churches, congregations and other supporters worldwide to back their 'Cry for Hope', urgently seeking decisive action through study and reflection, political engagement (including economic measures), and supporting and visiting local projects and initiatives. In November 2021 the World Council of Churches released an unprecedented statement expressing grave concern over the deteriorating situation in Palestine and Israel, and appealed to the "conscience of the world" concerning "the unremitting military occupation of the Palestinian territories and the ongoing marginalization and obstruction of legitimate Palestinian aspirations for equal human dignity and rights."

4.6 Our CCN on Migration and Refugees has looked in detail at how to campaign around organised refugee resettlement, with expert input from a New Zealand campaigner and a member of the group who has a role in European Churches' collective response to refugee issues. As part of Together With Refugees it is likely that a campaign around resettlement quotas will continue into future years.

4.7 As this Report goes to print, we remember the people of Ukraine, fleeing in millions in the face of unwarranted aggression by Russian forces, creating another major refugee crisis in Europe. We commend the worship material of the Wild Goose Resource Group found here: <https://iona.org.uk/ukraine-liturgy/>

4.8 We remain committed to eradicating injustice wherever we see it and to working for peace. This includes interrogating our understanding of the legacies of slavery, while working for the eradication of modern-day slavery in all its forms. We are grateful to the Iona Cathedral Trustees who researched and published a document on **'Iona Cathedral and Historic Slavery'**.

4.9 We commend the Church of Scotland's Faith Impact Forum for keeping this concern on the Church's agenda; recognise the value of making relevant information and guidance available to congregations; commend work being done around reparations, apologies and conversations with partner Churches in west Africa and the Caribbean; and look forward to a report from the Faith Impact Forum at the next General Assembly. We call upon all to support faith communities everywhere in their similar endeavours through researching the historic legacy of slavery in their own areas and in relation to their local religious buildings.

4.10 Our Young Adults Group (YAG) prepared and shared a resource on racism for study and reflection amongst small groups. Two members of YAG contributed to a recently published book by SCM Press, **'Young, Woke and Christian: words from a missing generation'** edited by Victoria Turner.

5. FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENT

5.1 We stand with the thousands who before, during and after COP26 hosted and fed, marched and met, wrote, campaigned, lobbied and blogged, sang, prayed and protested in the name of environmental justice.

5.2 In advance of COP26 members of our Environment CCN published through Wild Goose Publications **'Living Faithfully in the Time of Creation'**, a collection of prayers, songs, stories, liturgies and essays 'for celebrating Creationtide in an age of environmental emergency.'

5.3 The outcome of COP26 fell short of grasping the radical opportunity it presented. Our political leaders should have taken more bold steps to reverse the climate emergency. Nevertheless, we take heart from the energy of millions of ordinary people from around the globe that was focussed through COP26.

5.4 We applaud the actions for justice taken by millions of people which together cry out with one voice for justice for the living earth. In particular we applaud the work of faith coalitions bringing the voice of unity in faith to this common concern.

5.5 The Iona Community played an active part in convening Scotland's Climate Assembly, along with over 100 representative citizens from Scotland. We urge faith leaders, individually and collectively, to familiarise themselves with the recommendations presented by the Citizen's Assembly to the Scottish Parliament with a view to common action in favour of them: **www.citizensassembly.scot**

5.6 We rededicate ourselves to actions rooted in spiritual reflection that promote environmental sustainability in all we do. The scandal of our squandering of the earth's resources must be named and must stop. We remain committed, through our programmes and our Rule of Life, to 'working for justice, peace, wholeness and reconciliation in our localities, society and the whole creation.'

6. FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

6.1 Members of our Young Adults Group made a pilgrimage across Mull in June 2021, to mark the reopening of the renovated living space at Iona Abbey. Their journeying together is a reminder that the journey of faith, in and through community, is transient. Through the silence and the conversation in community, through the sharing of meals, of support when the journey is tough, and delight when a landmark is reached, we are reminded powerfully of what it means to be pilgrim people focussed on faith.

6.2 We close with the words of prayer with which we began:

*Creator God, we give thanks
that we have heard the Spirit of God
in the freshening leaves
and the rush of water.
So we pray for the creation
which nourishes and sustains all that lives.
Renew in us the sense of its value
that we may not squander its riches,
or so bend it to our will
that we find we have destroyed it.*

In the name of the Board

TOM GORDON, Convener
RUTH HARVEY, Leader
CALLUM ORR, Executive Director