

IONA COMMUNITY FAMILY GROUPS IN AMERICA  
PROTOTYPICAL GROUNDWORK WHEREBY CLERGY AND  
LAYMEN CAN LEAD A MORE CHRIST-LIKE EXISTENCE

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of  
Drew University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree,  
Doctor of Ministry

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Madison, New Jersey

May 2014

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my father and mother, Patrick E. Roney and Ida Catherine Roney. They gave me life, but more importantly, they gave me a loving perspective on humanity that is diverse and accepting, a preference for conquering my fears, and the intelligence to know that the love we show toward others will be the measure of our judgment by the Lord. The picture in the beginning of the Conclusion chapter is of the dogwood that was planted in the Kirkridge Peace Garden in honor of my mother's memory. Every time I visit there, I am filled with love and become invigorated for my days ahead.

On the Island of Iona, prayers are offered by the Iona Community on the thirty-first day for those who have passed away. In all other services, it is a more simple tribute. In honor of the worship that I have shared with the Iona Community and to pay respect to those of the thirty-first day, I say to you, as stated in the Iona Community Prayer Book, "They have not failed us, may we not fail them."

## ABSTRACT

### IONA COMMUNITY FAMILY GROUPS IN AMERICA PROTOTYPICAL GROUNDWORK WHEREBY CLERGY AND LAYMEN CAN LEAD A MORE CHRIST-LIKE EXISTENCE

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Reverend Kathleen L. Roney, Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Moorestown, NJ, and Associate Member of the Iona Community, Scotland, conducted her Doctor of Ministry project for the Drew University Theological School, Madison, NJ, at the Kirkridge Retreat Center in Bangor PA in March 2012. The purpose of the three-day We Are Family retreat was to lay the groundwork and produce a prototype for expanding the Scottish Iona Community into America so that clergy and laymen can lead a more Christ-like existence by adopting the Iona Rule of life. Iona Family Groups facilitate growth of the intentional community's body, mind, and soul devotional method of work and life as prescribed by Reverend George MacLeod and St. Columba.

Retreat participants learned and practiced the Iona Rule of Life and how Family Group members keep the Rule through daily prayer and Bible-reading, communal worship, accounting to each other for use of resources such as time and money, and working together to participate in peace and justice activities. Ordained spiritual experts gave presentations centered on the five-fold Rule that Family Groups follow. After each

presentation, participants split into Family Groups for intimate discussion, and then returned again to a large group to evaluate what had just been learned and practiced in the topics of the Iona Rule of Life.

Surveys and evaluations were guided by the attending Drew faculty advisor, which confirmed that Americans do yearn for the genuinely spiritual devotional practice employed by Iona Family Groups. Participants, both clergy and laymen, considered the Iona Rule and Family Group practice to be appropriate for Americans who no longer feel embraced by their churches. Retreat findings support Reverend Roney's proposal for an American branch of the Iona Community, making the greatest use of the existing Service Agreement between the Kirkridge Retreat Center and the Iona Community. The proposal for an American Iona Community suggests that Kirkridge become a hub of ministerial training, promoting a more Christ-like existence for clergy and laymen through regional American Family Group expansion with the Iona Community remaining the spiritual home on Iona for Family Groups worldwide.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the Iona Community for inspiring me to take this wonderful journey. It was my many trips to the Island of Iona and Associate membership with the Iona Community that have brought me closer to a more Christ-like existence and enabled me to share that love with others. Special thanks to courteous and knowledgeable Reverend Kathy Galloway who paved the way for me to meet the Leader of the Iona Community, Reverend Peter Macdonald. He offered the kind assistance of the Iona Community, both personally and through the Iona Community Glasgow Office. I am so grateful for having the Iona Community in my life.

As a traveler, it is always nice to have a great friend who loves to travel too, so I want to thank the Reverend Matilda Chase for taking the time to be so much more than just a friend. As my Doctoral Committee Chairperson, Tillie worked tirelessly with me. There was not a step I took in this journey of a lifetime without you and I appreciate your diligence even when you were exhausted. You kept me going, too.

I want to thank everyone at the Kirkridge Retreat Center and all of the staff. Your help in running the We Are Family Retreat was wonderful and I could not have done it without you all. I want to offer a special thanks to Dr. Jean Richardson who not only helped me with so much documentation and scheduling, but also made my introduction to Reverend Katherine Rennie. Reverend Rennie flew to New York to assist with my first

retreat, which had to be cancelled due to Super Storm Sandy. I do hope to spend time with her in better weather.

I want to thank my Doctoral Committee, Reverend Dr. Jean Richardson, Reverend Katherine Rennie, Reverend Robert Coombe, Reverend Dr. Cynthia Alloway, Reverend Cindy Garis, the Committee Chair, Reverend Matilda Chase, and Drew University Faculty Advisor, Reverend Dr. William Presnell. Thank you all for being so understanding and rescheduling the retreat with me. This thesis would not have been possible without your astute expertise. I am thankful for having all of you in my life.

I also want thank Nancy Schreirer for her beautiful pictures of the Kirkridge Retreat Center. They added a visual element to this thesis that words could not have matched. Also, thank you Reverend Matilda Chase for taking such great pictures during our last trip to the Island of Iona. I wish that I could publish them all. I am grateful that photography is among your many talents.

Thank you to the anonymous participants who were so forthcoming, open, and honest in their contribution through Family Group discussions and final surveys at the We Are Family Retreat. You helped lay a foundation of understanding that we are already building on today. Thank you all.

I also want to tell my daughters, Kelly M. Wilson and Catherine P. Wilson, that I appreciate your constant love and support. I could not have asked God for two better daughters. For all of this and more, I am so very grateful.



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## INTRODUCTION

It is a daunting struggle for many people to bring together their personal yearning for a substantial way to follow Jesus Christ and the standards of practice within American churches. For many denominations, the assurance of the teachings of Christ, as He shared it with His disciples, seems to have melded into a curriculum of consensus that more closely fulfills institutional direction. Today, some look at religious practice as a relic, moral and spiritual guidance that is no longer needed to constrain people when secular common law can take its place. That could not be farther from the truth. For following the path of Christ as an intentional Christian is fulfilling in ways that have nothing to do with compartmentalizing one's life to be a good Christian on Sunday while conducting one's daily activities in a self-directed manner during the rest of the week. Our walk with Christ is a way of life.

In searching for a way to more closely follow Christ, the candidate became familiar with the Iona Community on the Island of Iona in Scotland. The Iona Community "is a dispersed community"<sup>1</sup> just as many American families are dispersed throughout these United States, if not the world. For the purpose of clarity, all uses of the terms America and American in this thesis are specific references to the United States of America and American citizens.

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1. George MacLeod, *Sermon in Stone*, DVD-ROM (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

The Iona Community keeps the feeling of belonging alive for the Full members and Associate members, who may not revisit the island but once a year. It does this primarily through its broad vision of and practice within localized Family Groups on the mainland of Scotland.<sup>2</sup> The Family Groups function in their meetings and discussions, in ways similar to the American family that returns to the paternal elder's home for Thanksgiving, family events, or other religious holidays celebrated within the family. Unlike the typical American family, the Iona Family Groups account to one another for use of time, money, and other resources. They discuss peace and justice and how they may assist in making their influence matter in the lives of others. For some members, this is a liberating experience, allowing them to bear their souls in a way that they cannot within the traditional family unit. There, competition among siblings or the ire of judgmental parents or family members may be prohibitive, and discourage this kind of open sharing. The Iona Community prays together and apart in a way that spiritually binds their intentions to the Iona Rule of Life and each other. It is through prayer that the all-pervasive Rule shapes the individual into a functioning part of an Iona Family Group.<sup>3</sup> Could Iona Family Group structure be exported to the American setting? And how would American Associate members of the Iona Community re-create a similarly spiritual atmosphere that would aid them in voluntarily committing their transcendent objectives to the Iona Rule of Life?

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2. George MacLeod, *Sermon in Stone*, DVD-ROM (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

3. Ibid.

It is to this quest that the candidate dedicated her efforts. She knew that there were others in America that had traveled to Iona, had become familiar with Iona Family Groups, and were trying to follow the Iona Rule on their own. Little did she know that a divine sequence of events were about to take place that would change her life and direct her toward a Doctor of Ministry project that would move the dream of Iona Family Groups in America, closer to realization.

‘So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him.’ (Luke 11:9-11, Jerusalem Bible)

**CHAPTER 1**  
**THE ISLAND OF IONA**



Figure 1. Reverend Matilda Chase, “Mystified, Abbey of Iona, Scotland” (2013).

The sound of the ferry boat cutting through the chop of the wind-swept waves only enhances the air of mystery that cloaks the Island of Iona, which is barely visible in the gray ocean mist. Such is the passage from Mull, Scotland to the Scottish Island of Iona. The almost constant silver haze fades as the rocks begin to appear. Then, as if a shroud is pulled away, the stone Abbey comes into view. The Iona Abbey is the physical and spiritual anchor to which all visitors and pilgrims are drawn.

Amid the Hebridian islands, Iona is located in the waters referred to as the

Highways and Byways of Scotland.<sup>1</sup> The journey to the island has one exposed to the elements as it must have been in the early days as pilgrims crossed the Sound of Iona with the barrier-mountains of Mull at their back, which shield Iona from the mainland. The island still retains its Gaelic name for Iona, I Chaluim Chille, which means the island of Columcille, referring to St. Columba who built the original Abbey.<sup>2</sup>

It is a small ferry dock that modern-day pilgrims disembark upon and then walk up the jetty to get a bearing on where they have landed. At the top of the dock, one gets a first sense of the true isolation of Iona from the rest of the world. As with all destinations cut off from civilization, one's imagination tends to run ahead of actual footsteps, as it is the talk of mysterious places that draws the pilgrim to Iona in hopes of something new.

Even in this modern world, one must be aware that few automobiles are allowed on the island as the indigenous population of around one hundred inhabitants do not have much need of them since the island is three miles, stretching north to south and only one and a half miles wide from east to west.<sup>3</sup> As one travels northward from the dock toward the Abbey, it becomes evident that good hiking shoes and a strong soul will carry one well over the varied and rough terrain of sand, rock, pasture and gravel. For hundreds of years, pilgrims have walked the well-worn path to the Abbey, traveled by many others with hopes and dreams that Iona would be their new spiritual home because the island is said to be a thin place, where the veil between heaven and earth is at its thinnest.<sup>4</sup>

In the walk to the Abbey, one passes the ruins of the Augustinian nunnery, which

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1. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 11.

2. E. Mairi MacArthur and Colin Baxter, *Iona* (Granton-on-Spey: Colin Baxter Photography Ltd., 1999), 3.

3. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 110.

4. George MacLeod, *Sermon in Stone*, DVD-ROM (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications)



Figure 2. Michael Nicholson, “Ruined Medieval Nunnery on Iona, ca. 1985-1996 Iona, Inner Hebrides, Scotland, UK” (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

is believed to have been built around 1203 to house the Order of the Black Nuns<sup>5</sup> and abandoned during the reformation period in 1560.<sup>6</sup> It is presumed that the nuns were Irish since Ranald, Lord of the Isles founded the nunnery.<sup>7</sup> However, it is now a peaceful place of prayer, filled with many wild flowers growing among the ruins and graves of the order’s nuns and women of noble birth from far and wide who were interred there. The exact dates of the nunnery’s occupation and abandonment, along with the names of those who are buried there have been lost to time, but the ruins stand tribute to their existence.

As one continues, MacLean’s Cross, the first of the high crosses comes into view along the pilgrim trail. Thought to be carved and erected sometime between the late 1400’s to early 1500’s, the tall, slender cross was carved from a single stone<sup>8</sup> and even

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5. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 119.

6. Dr. Nicki Scott, *Iona Abbey and Nunnery* (Edinburgh: Historical Scotland, 2012), 37.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 34.



though it is well worn by its exposure to the elements, the ornate carvings are still remarkable. The MacLean's Cross marked the intersection of the Street of the Dead and the pathway to the dock.<sup>9</sup> Climbing an incline as one passes MacLean's Cross, the smell of the ocean air gives way to the vision of endless waters surrounding Iona. Only Mull is visible and its dormant volcanic mountains appear as a sleeping sentinel in a giant ocean.

With the salty air in one's face, the barely visible ancient pathway, Sraid nam Marbh, the Street of the Dead<sup>10</sup>, appears beneath one's feet. It is the road of large red granite cobblestone, brought from the Island of Mull,<sup>11</sup> that early inhabitants used to carry the dead to Reilig Odhrain, Oran's Burying Place, at the Abbey.<sup>12</sup> Iona was believed to be the first firmament of earth by the ancient Celts, a geological fortress, and therefore, the only hallowed soil worthy of receiving the lords, kings and queens of old.<sup>13</sup> The following is a Gaelic prophecy about Iona:

Seven years before that awful day  
 When time shall be no more,  
 A watery deluge will o'ersweep  
 Hibernia's mossy shore.  
 The green-clad Isla too shall sink  
 While with the great and good  
 Columba's happy isle will rear  
 Her towers above the flood.<sup>14</sup>

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9. Dr. Nicki Scott, *Iona Abbey and Nunnery* (Edinburgh: Historical Scotland, 2012), 34.

10. *Ibid.*, 7.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 114.

13. Celtic Oral Tradition, Iona Community.

14. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 115.

As a matter of geological fact, the bedrock of Iona is estimated to be 1,500 million years old, which makes Iona, one of the oldest places on earth.<sup>15</sup>

Shakespeare's Macbeth is among the forty-eight Scottish kings resting in Reilig Odhrain, the graveyard attached to the Abbey.<sup>16</sup> Most of the gravestones now reside in the island's museum because visitors were chipping small pieces from the stones as souvenirs of their visit. Now, only the curator is privy to the map that plots the actual resting places of the kings of Scotland, along with kings of France and Norway. MacLeod, MacLean, and MacKinnon are among the celebrated clans that carried their deceased across icy waters and then along the Street of the Dead in order to bury their dead leaders in Reilig Odrain on Iona.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 3. Michael Nicholson, "Chapel and Graveyard at Iona Monastery ca. 1985-1996 Iona, Inner Hebrides, Scotland, UK" (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

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15. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 116.

16. *Ibid.*, 114.

17. Dr. Nicki Scott, *Iona Abbey and Nunnery* (Edinburgh: Historical Scotland, 2012), 32.

The small Chapel of St. Oran greets the visitor who passes the graveyard and invites them to learn about the mystical life of St. Oran. It has long been held that Oran's Chapel had a very strange beginning. Several times, the chapel was built and the next morning when the monks woke up it was in ruins. St. Columba had a vision where he saw that a living person must be buried beneath the foundation in order for the foundation to remain as they built it and St. Oran volunteered to be buried.<sup>18</sup> After three days, St. Columba had the face of St. Oran uncovered and St. Oran spoke these words to him, "Heaven is not as it has been written; neither is Hell as commonly supposed."<sup>19</sup> It is said that St. Columba was so upset that he quickly covered the face over and left St. Oran buried and the foundation remains the same today,<sup>20</sup> giving the faithful testament to their belief in Iona as a thin place.

Though the island lore of St. Oran may or may not stray from fact, it is firmly fixed in the island's oral tradition. It seems to have the right mix of mystery, death, self-sacrifice, and religion to pique the interest of any visitor.

Continuing from St. Oran's Chapel to the main Abbey, one becomes amazed by both the size and beauty of the ancient Abbey complex. The Abbey's Church is open to all who wish to enter. Any time, day or night, the Abbey is open for prayer. Morning and evening prayers are led there each day by the Iona Community. The original Abbey, built by St. Columba and his followers after arriving on Iona in 563 A.D.<sup>21</sup>, was restored by

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18. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 113.

19. Ibid.

20. Dr. Nicki Scott, *Iona Abbey and Nunnery* (Edinburgh: Historical Scotland, 2012), 32.

21. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 110.

Reverend George MacLeod after arriving in 1938,<sup>22</sup> and today, has but one remaining original stone transept separating the public nave from the choir area as an example of the unique work from the 1200s.<sup>23</sup> The massive stone work and masonry provides the Abbey with an impressive medieval atmosphere. Though the original stone was reused throughout the restoration of the Abbey, the arched transept is intact with a statue pedestal in the center, which only has the weathered feet of a statue still attached.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 4. Philip Gould, "Saint Martin's Cross Stands in Front of the Cathedral, Iona Island, Scotland" (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

The more striking symbols of the island's Christianity are the two large Celtic crosses standing outside the entrance to the Abbey. They are evidence of the endurance of human spirituality over the ages. It is St. Martin's Cross, which is most significant because it is one of the oldest standing crosses in Europe and is a memorial to St. Martin,

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22. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 122.

23. Dr. Nicki Scott, *Iona Abbey and Nunnery* (Edinburgh: Historical Scotland, 2012), 18.

24. *Ibid.*

the Roman-born pagan who converted to Christianity.<sup>25</sup> Remarkably, the cross has fared much better than St. John's Cross, which is positioned at St Columba's Shrine and closer to the Abbey complex. The St. John's cross was blown down so many times that it was removed and placed in the museum for safe keeping.<sup>26</sup> A replica now stands before the Abbey.



Figure 5. The Iona Community, "Around the Abbey, Iona, Scotland" (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

Upon entering the Abbey, one descends several stone steps into the peace and quiet atmosphere of the Abbey. Walking toward the altar, one becomes aware of the simplicity within the grandeur of the immense space. The altar, hand-carved from native green Iona marble, which was quarried at the southern end of the island, displays a simple brass cross situated in the center of the altar. The choir stalls invite one to sit where hundreds of thousands of pilgrims have sat before in the stillness of prayer. There

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25. Celtic Oral Tradition, Iona Community.

26. Dr. Nicki Scott, *Iona Abbey and Nunnery* (Edinburgh: Historical Scotland, 2012), 2.

are several side alters that the Iona Community refers to as Chapels for individual prayer and contemplation.

It is widely thought that the Eighth Duke and Duchess of Argyll are laid to rest in white marble sarcophaguses placed along the back wall of the Abbey. Many visitors stop by to say a prayer while they marvel at the intricate carving. However, is only the Duchess, Ina MacNeil who is interred there because the Duke rests in a family plot in Argyll.<sup>27</sup> The cloisters, connected to the Abbey, which are built around a beautiful courtyard is a wonderful place to gather in order to meet other pilgrims, explore meditation or walk the beautifully carved columns that line the covered walk-way. In the middle of the courtyard is a very profound statue, Descent of the Spirit, which was sculpted and donated by Jacques Lipchitz in 1959<sup>28</sup> with an inscription that reads, “Jacob Lipchitz, Jew, faithful to the religion of his ancestors, has made this Virgin for the better understanding of human beings on this earth so that the Spirit may prevail.”<sup>29</sup>

A few feet from the crosses, a small rocky hill called Tor Abb, small hill of the abbot, rises and it is believed that St. Columba had his prayer cell, the hut that he resided within, placed on that hill next to the Abbey.<sup>30</sup> As one leaves the Abbey area to explore the rest of the island, the beauty becomes mixed with sad history.

Walking back down the hill toward the jetty, one takes a pathway through Martyr’s Bay, a beautiful white sand beach, which is believed to be the monk’s last stand against the invading Vikings in 806 A.D., where sixty-eight monks were killed trying to

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27. Dr. Nicki Scott, *Iona Abbey and Nunnery* (Edinburgh: Historical Scotland, 2012), 19.

28. Alba Aosmhor, *Historic Scotland, Iona* (Edinburgh: Historic Scotland, Crown Copyright) <http://www.ionahistory.org.uk/iona/ionahome/ionaexplore/ionaabbey/cloister.htm> (accessed 8-27-13).

29. Ibid.

30. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995), 199.



protect the order's religious treasures from the westward movement of the plundering Norsemen.<sup>31</sup> There were so many attacks on the monks of Iona that eventually, they left Iona.



Figure 6. Reverend Matilda Chase, "Columba's Bay, Iona, Scotland" (2013).

Many pilgrims walk to Columba's Bay where there are two very different places to visit. The first place is a gorgeous, rocky bay where St. Columba and his followers first stepped onto the island. The other is the modern-day Iona golf course, which can be seen as a symbol of the Iona Community's belief that life should always be balanced between the sacred and common life because in Scotland, where golf was invented, playing golf is a common part of sporting life. Even more common, is having to move the grazing sheep in order to find one's golf ball or make a shot.

The Island of Iona belongs to the National Trust of Scotland and is proclaimed as such by signage near the Abbey. For the approximately one hundred villagers who live on the island all year round, Iona is their home and has been for many generations of their

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31. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 119.

families. Most of the inhabitants make their living as fisherman or raising sheep and cattle. During the tourist season, which runs from May through October, many of them will make extra income by working in the shops and in the hotels. Many visitors believe the members of the Iona Community, which was founded by Reverend George MacLeod, actually live on the island, but they do not. The Iona Community has a community Center, which is staffed during the summer months. The Abbey Warden, now referred to as the Island Director is responsible for the Abbey programs. The person holding this position was traditionally called the Abbot prior to the Reformation period. There are Iona Community staff and volunteers who live and work on the island only during the tourist season. Though the Abbey is owned and maintained by the Scottish government, the Iona Community has the use of the Abbey for services, year-round.



Figure 7. Reverend Matilda Chase, “MacLean’s Cross & Village, Iona, Scotland” (2013).



The large amounts of tourists who travel to Iona are both a blessing and a concern. They bring needed funding and interest in the community and island, but they also use the islands fragile resources. Both the villagers and the Iona Community leaders work very hard to protect the fragility of the environment.

The Abbey is not the only worship center on the island of Iona. There is the Catholic Retreat Center, an Episcopal Church, the Pilgrim House, and an Island Community Church, which are separate from the Iona Community. Service times are coordinated among the Churches so they are not in competition, but are open and welcoming to all pilgrims, regardless of denomination because Iona is a thin place that welcomes all.

In discussing visitors to the Iona Community, it is important to make distinction among them. There are those who come as volunteers to work for the Iona Community in the Abbey, books store, and the Macleod Center. Others come, who are full Iona Community members, attend the Community Week activities. Still, others come to be part of the programs offered by the Abbey and Macleod Center, which are one-week programs run throughout the summer. These programs offer structured programs with varying themes. The modern day Iona Community, in spirit, is still very connected to St. Columba. This devotion is evidenced by the “office” of the Iona Community:

#### PRAYER FOR THE IONA COMMUNITY (ALL)

O God, who gave to your servant Columba  
the gifts of courage, faith and cheerfulness,  
and sent people out from Iona  
to carry the word of your gospel to every creature,  
grant, we pray, a like spirit to your church,  
even at this present time.  
Further in all things the purpose of our Community,  
that hidden things may be revealed to us,

and new ways found to touch the lives of all.  
 May we preserve with each other  
 sincere charity and peace,  
 and if it be your holy will,  
 grant that a place of your abiding be continued  
 still to be a sanctuary and a light.  
 Through Jesus Christ, Amen.<sup>32</sup>

The bulk of visitors are pilgrims and tourist who stay in the hotels or bed and breakfast establishments located along the main road, which begins just off of the dock where the ferry comes and goes depending on the weather and number of tourists needing transfer to and from the sister island of Mull. The reasons that people visit Iona are varied and personal to the individual, whether it is as a pilgrimage of spiritual quest or a family vacation to soak up local history, each person brings their own expectations to Iona and leaves with their own imprint of Iona on their soul.



Figure 8. Reverend Matilda Chase, “North Shore Beach, Iona, Scotland” (2013).

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32. Iona Community, *Iona Community Prayer Book* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2012), 6.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**HISTORY OF IONA**  
**ST. COLUMBA AND REVEREND GEORGE MACLEOD**



Figure 9. Reverend Matilda Chase, “Celtic Cross on Iona” (2013).

The Island of Iona is steeped in historical legends and facts, but unfortunately, there are periods where the story of Iona can only be indirectly inferred by the movement of other cultures, such as the Vikings and Picts. Be that as it may, there are two historical figures that can be truly credited for making Iona what it is today. St. Columba and Reverend George MacLeod left legacies that had life beyond their passing. Their work is set in stone as their words inhabit the hearts and minds of those followers who continue their work today on the island of Iona and around the world.

If it were not for Adamnan MacRonan,<sup>1</sup> the history of St. Columba might have been lost or left strictly to verbal legend had it not been for Adamnan, the Ninth Abbot of Iona, who served on the island of Iona for twenty-six years until 697 A.D.<sup>2</sup> Adamnan took it upon himself to recount the amazing life of Columba in his book, *Vita Columbae*.<sup>3</sup> He returned to Iona in 704 A. D. so that he could rest eternally with his beloved St. Columba.<sup>4</sup> Adamnan's death, on September 23, 704 A.D. is verified by its recording in *The Annals of the Four Masters*<sup>5</sup>, which is the oldest surviving compiled year-by-year timeline of Irish history from 2242 A.M. until 1616 A.D.<sup>6</sup> Adamnan's *Vita Columbae*, constitutes the earliest and definitive source of the life of St. Columba in existence today.<sup>7</sup> All other sources mainly derive their information from the writings of Adamnan,<sup>8</sup> and the various translations thereof.

St. Columba was born on December 7, 521 A.D. at Gartan of Donegal, Ireland.<sup>9</sup> Columba's father, Fedilmith, was the son of Fergus<sup>10</sup> whose clan held Gartan as its

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1. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995),13.

2. Ibid., 24.

3. Ibid., 9.

4. Ibid., 22.

5. Ibid., 22.

6. Royal Irish Academy, Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, *Annals Of The Four Masters* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2013) <https://www.ria.ie/library/special-collections/manuscripts/annals-of-the-four-masters.aspx> (accessed 9-6-2013).

7. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995), 28.

8. Ibid., 25.

9. Adamnan, ed. William Reeves, DD, MRIA, Rector of Tynan, and Canon of Armagh, *Life of Saint Columba, Founder of Hy (Iona)* (Scotland: Llanerch Enterprises, 1988), 19.

10. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995), 50.

stronghold and were members of the ruling families of both Ireland and Britain.<sup>11</sup> His mother, Aethne<sup>12</sup>, was descended from previous kings, which put St. Columba in the royal lineage of Ireland while bringing both territories together in one birth.<sup>13</sup> Baptized as Colum, also spelled Colm, the Gaelic term, cille, was added to his name to his name,<sup>14</sup> making his name Columcille, which in Latin means, Column of the Church.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 10. Kay Atherton, “St. Columba,” A stained glass window in the porch of Leitir Beara Church depicting St. Colmcille. (2008).

As was the custom of the day, young St. Columba was sent to be educated at the Moville monastery and upon leaving the monastery, he was ordained as a Deacon by the

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11. Adamnan, ed. William Reeves, DD, MRIA, Rector of Tynan, and Canon of Armagh, *Life of Saint Columba, Founder of Hy (Iona)* (Scotland: Llanerch Enterprises, 1988), 19.

12. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995), 50.

13. Adamnan, ed. William Reeves, DD, MRIA, Rector of Tynan, and Canon of Armagh, *Life of Saint Columba, Founder of Hy (Iona)* (Scotland: Llanerch Enterprises, 1988), 19.

14. Ibid.

15. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995), 33.

Bishop, St. Finnian.<sup>16</sup> St. Columba went on to Mobhi Claraineach, a monastery near Dublin but local violence, disease, and the death of Mobhi drove him north to establish the church at Derry when St. Columba was twenty-five years old.<sup>17</sup> However, it was the founding of the monastery at Durrow in 553 A.D. that eventually lead to his life of exile on Iona, which at the time was named Hy.<sup>18</sup>

Although Adamnan's account of the life of Columba speaks only about St. Columba being censured by the Church,<sup>19</sup> the *Betha Colaim Chille*, Book of Columba, written by Manus O'Donnell, recounts the story of the battle of Cul-Dreimhne, modern day Culdrenvy, where over three thousand people lost their lives when the world's first copyright trial ruled in the favor of St. Finnian, proclaiming him the rightful owner of the book of psalms that St. Columba had copied during a visit with St. Finnian of Moville.<sup>20</sup> The judge ruled that St. Columba was to return the copy made of St. Finnian's book to St. Finnian stating that, "To every cow belongs its calf."<sup>21</sup>

St. Finnian had reportedly brought St. Jerome's newest Latin translation of the Gospels and Psalms all the way back from Rome.<sup>22</sup> St. Finnian demanded the copy back, but St. Columba refused, even disobeying the court, and the battle at Culdrenvy ensued after St. Columba returned north with the book and gained support of the Fergus and

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16. Adamnan, ed. William Reeves, DD, MRIA, Rector of Tynan, and Canon of Armagh, *Life of Saint Columba, Founder of Hy (Iona)* (Scotland: Llanerch Enterprises, 1988), 20.

17. Ibid., 21.

18. Ibid., 21.

19. Ibid., 22.

20. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995), 36-37.

21. Ibid., 37.

22. R. W. Tucker, Columba & Battle of Culdrenvy (CELTIC-L - The Celtic Culture List, 1995) <https://listserv.heanet.ie/cgi-bin/wa?A2=celtic-l;ESKeKA;199504070235430400> (accessed 9-6-2013).

Domnall clans.<sup>23</sup> It is believed that the battle became all out warfare between the northern and southern clans, religious followers St. Columba and St. Finnian respectively, when the northern clans killed the son of a southern Irish king<sup>24</sup> while he was under the protection of St. Columba's sanctuary.<sup>25</sup> It is held in tradition that the original copy of the manuscript that St. Columba made, called *Cathach of Saint Columba*, St. Columba's Battle Book, is still cared for by the O'Donnell clan today.<sup>26</sup> In his account of St. Columba's life, Manus O'Donnell states that the Battle Book is "the chief relic of St. Columba in the territory of the Cindel Conaill Gulban. It is in a silver-gilt box which must not be opened. And each time it has been carried three times, turning towards the right, around the army before battle, the army came back victorious."<sup>27</sup>

St. Columba vowed to exile himself from his beloved Ireland and to go to the pagans to lead as many of their souls to God as had died in the battle of Culdrenvy. Though sporadic first-hand sources of the period mention St. Columba traveling Scotland for two years and founding the monastery at Hinba,<sup>28</sup> it is likely that he needed to familiarize himself with Scotland in order to choose his exile with the best political circumstances of the time.

In 563 A.D, St. Columba and twelve of his followers got into a boat and set sail

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23. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995), 37.

24. *Ibid.*, 37-40.

25. Ian Finlay, *Columba* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1979), 99.

26. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995), 37.

27. Ian Finlay, *Columba* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1979), 84.

28. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995), 50.

for the desolate islands west of the northern Spine of Britain.<sup>29</sup> St. Columba believed that the Holy Spirit took him and his twelve disciples to Iona. The names of the followers with St. Columba were discovered in the appendix of Adamnan's original manuscript of *Vita Columbae* and among them were St. Columba's uncle, and the man who would eventually become St. Columba's successor, Baithene, also referred to as Conin.<sup>30</sup> Upon landing in Iona, St. Columba's first act was to make sure that Ireland was not visible from anywhere on the island. St. Columba sealed his solitude when his men buried the boat so they could not return to Ireland. Thus, he made good on his leading proclamation of the Columban Rule which reads:

Be alone in a separate place near a chief city, if thy conscience  
is not prepared to be in common with the crowd.<sup>31</sup>

In 564 A.D., St. Columba traveled to the castle of the Pictish King Brude, near Inverness, in a diplomatic undertaking to win over King Brude so he would allow St. Columba to build his monastery on Iona.<sup>32</sup> St. Columba had to compete with King Brude's druid equivalent of a priest to see who could perform the best miracles.<sup>33</sup> Apparently, St. Columba impressed King Brude well enough to win his favor and was able to build the monastery on the island of Iona. St. Columba built the monastery on the island of Iona with the main Church building where the Abbey now stands, founding the Celtic (Columban) Church on the island of Iona.

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29. John Marsden, *The Illustrated Life of Columba* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1995), 46.

30. *Ibid.*, 50.

31. *Ibid.*, 43.

32. *Ibid.*, 46.

33. *Ibid.*, 43



Using Iona as a home base, he traveled to the Isle of Skye, a Pict territory and it is believed that he used King Brude's conversion to Christianity by St. Columba's miracles as the means to increase his flock.<sup>34</sup> The pagan druids were slow to be convinced, but when St. Columba commanded that a charging boar fall dead at his command<sup>35</sup>, the Picts began to come around. Not all pagans were Picts, so St. Columba had to travel the Scottish countryside in order to bring the people to Christ.

After crossing the Ness River, while travelling the Scottish mainland, a group of people were found burying a man who had been killed by the Loch Ness monster.<sup>36</sup> When St. Columba asked one of his companion monks to swim across the lake to retrieve the small fishing boat beached on the shore, the monk only made it a short way before the monster raised her head in the water and was about to eat the monk.<sup>37</sup> St. Columba walked to the edge of the water and made the sign of the cross, ordered the monster to leave, and it did.<sup>38</sup> Saving the monk from sure death by making the sign of the cross was enough to convince scores of "barbarous heathens"<sup>39</sup> that the Christian God is indeed powerful. Since belief in water horses and Nessy-like monsters is common even today throughout Eastern Europe, this became one of St. Columba's best known miracles.

Adaman lists volumes of miracles and deeds performed by St. Columba, which is probably why he had great success in bringing so many to Christianity. Therefore,

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34. Ian Finlay, *Columba* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1979), 126-127.

35. *Ibid.*, 128.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

upon St. Columba's passing, it must have been with a heavy heart that Adamnan wrote, "On Saturday the eighth, and Sunday the ninth of June, in the year 597, while on his knees at the altar, without aches or struggling, his spirit gently took its flight."<sup>40</sup>

St. Columba's time with the Picts is evidenced on Iona by virtue of the stone carvings left behind. St. Columba passed on a great legacy of courage and learning as detailed when Dr. D'Aubigne wrote in his *History of the Reformation*:

The King of the Picts was converted, as were also many of his people: precious manuscripts were conveyed to Iona, a school of theology was founded there, in which the Word was studied... Ere long a missionary spirit breathed over this ocean rock so justly named the 'light of the western world.'<sup>41</sup>

Most manuscripts and religious relics were lost in the Viking raids, though some survived when monks rescued artifacts while finally abandoning the island of Iona in 986 A.D.<sup>42</sup> The Book of Kells is an illustrated manuscript containing the four books of the Gospel based on the Vulgate text and was created by the scribes at the monastery on Iona.<sup>43</sup> It is often referred to as the Gospel of St. Columba.<sup>44</sup> During the exodus from

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40. Adamnan, ed. William Reeves, DD, MRIA, Rector of Tynan, and Canon of Armagh, *Life of Saint Columba, Founder of Hy (Iona)* (Scotland: Llanerch Enterprises, 1988), 19.

41. Peter McNab, *Mull and Iona Highways & Byways* (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited, 1999), 117.

42. *Ibid.*, 119.

43. Trinity College Dublin, *The Book of Kells* (Dublin: The University of Dublin, 2011) <http://www.tcd.ie/Library/bookofkells/book-of-kells/> (accessed 9-10-13).

44. Kevin Knight, *The Book of Kells* (New Advent, Catholic Encyclopedia, 2009) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08614b.htm> (accessed 9-10-13).

Iona, some Columban monks took refuge at the Kells monastery<sup>45</sup> where the book is said to have been completed in 800 A.D.,<sup>46</sup> though some of the writing in the Book of Kells is attributed to St. Columba himself.<sup>47</sup> Today the Book of Kells is cared for and is on display by the Old Library at Trinity College Dublin.<sup>48</sup> It is a precious artifact of St. Columba and a national treasure left by one of Ireland's three cherished patron saints.



Figure 11. Lee Kindness, "Monymusk Reliquary," Located in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. Thought to be where St. Columba's bones rested ca. 750. Made of wood, silver and cooper. (2010).

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45. Trinity College Dublin, *The Book of Kells* (Dublin: The University of Dublin, 2011) <http://www.tcd.ie/Library/bookofkells/book-of-kells/> (accessed 9-10-13).

46. Ibid.

47. Kevin Knight, *The Book of Kells* (New Advent, Catholic Encyclopedia, 2009) <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08614b.htm> (accessed 9-10-13).

48. Trinity College Dublin, *The Book of Kells* (Dublin: The University of Dublin, 2011) <http://www.tcd.ie/Library/bookofkells/book-of-kells/> (accessed 9-10-13).



Figure 12. The Iona Community, “George MacLeod, 1947” (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

One thousand two hundred ninety eight years after St. Columba’s passing, George Fielden MacLeod was born in 1895<sup>49</sup> into the house of MacLeod. The MacLeod Family stronghold in the middle-ages was Dunvegan Castle on the Isle of Skye and even into modern times the MacLeods were an influential force with which to be reckoned.<sup>50</sup> With five hundred fifty years of ordained family service<sup>51</sup> to the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, or Kirk Auld, which was the name given to the established national church,<sup>52</sup> preceding young George’s first steps as an infant, he had a very large legacy to continue. The strict Victorian environment in which George was raised is best evidenced by the scroll given to George and his brother at Christmas in 1901:

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3. 49. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990),

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., 7.

### Do Your Duty

Come wealth or want, come good or ill,  
 Let Young and old accept their part,  
 And bow before the awful Will,  
 And bear it with an honest heart.  
 Who misses, or who wins the prize?  
 Go, lose or conquer as you can;  
 But if you fail or if you rise  
 Be each, pray God, a gentleman.<sup>53</sup>

Educated at the College of St. Mary's at Winchester, it is said that his aversion to the Anglican influence of the time helped him withstand conversion to Catholicism when he and his brother visited the magnificent Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral.<sup>54</sup> Though exposed to rogues, scoundrels and ruffians at college, George MacLeod could not indulge the uncivilized side of his college buddies for too long and looked forward to trips back home where hunting, fishing, the arts, and religion were the focus of spare time, which was only afforded by the well-rounded upper-class house.<sup>55</sup> George was sympathetic to the plight of the poor,<sup>56</sup> and began to question the status quo of the time. Born of legendary leaders and men of God, George knew he was born to lead and serve, so in 1913 he enrolled in legal studies at Oriel College in Oxford. He began to see the excitement of new ideas that could be delivered to the public with persuasion and confidence, but eleven days after his nineteenth birthday, which was on June 17, 1914, World War I began.<sup>57</sup>

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53. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 23.

54. *Ibid.*, 26.

55. *Ibid.*, 26-27.

56. *Ibid.*, 28.

57. *Ibid.*, 30-31.

With his father, John MacLeod in charge of recruitment for West Scotland, George signed up with the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders at Stirling Castle, which was part of “Kitchner’s Army,” a small group of volunteers who assisted the British army in heading off Kaiser Wilhelm’s march through Belgium and Paris.<sup>58</sup> As a Second Lieutenant, he trained young soldiers in combat, warfare, and firearms.<sup>59</sup> A moral and patriotic man, he wrote, “Who dies if England lives?...About every 100 years humanity, unless it is checked, triumphs in the fact that it is running itself so well without any divine aid, or it imagines it does and then when the limit is about to be reached there’s a jolly good smash-up and we happen to be living in it, that’s all!”<sup>60</sup> He talked of mud, rain, battles, bombardments, and bravery in letters to his family, knowing how his father had wished to serve and his mother worried, but always it seemed he maintained optimism and enthusiasm for God and country in all he wrote as if the MacLeod family pride were pinned to his words.

When the flu waylaid George and his men, he insisted that whiskey was the thing to help them sweat it out and since nothing else was available, God, George, and Johnny Walker got his men back into action.<sup>61</sup> The Scottish led the attack on the Germans, at the battle at Villemantiere and Buzancy on August 3, 1918, a high rocky terrain that the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were well prepared for and coordinated the surge with

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58. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 31-32.

59. *Ibid.*, 33.

60. *Ibid.*, 30-31

61. *Ibid.*, 45.

the French.<sup>62</sup> Though outnumbered by the Germans, Captain George Macleod and the Scottish clansmen took the battlefield and handled the rocky heights and slopes with ease without even waiting for the French to fall in behind them and he and several of his men were honored with the Military Cross by the British Army and the *Croix de Guerre avec palmes* by the French government.<sup>63</sup>

At 11:00 am on November 11, 1918 the war was over and like St. Columba, who preceded George MacLeod on Iona by over a millennium, Captain George MacLeod was so changed by the brutal battles that he and his men fought in WWI that he dedicate the rest of his life to the betterment of humanity. Fearful that he was “going to hell”<sup>64</sup> for the acts and activities partaken in during the war, George gave up his pursuit of a legal career to become a minister and help the world with a “moral and spiritual reconstruction.”<sup>65</sup>

Though George studied theology at Edinburgh University from 1919 until 1921, it seemed to lack the fire that his previous studies had invoked or perhaps it was the extreme poverty of the starving children just outside the university walls that bothered him and distracted him until he could contain his compassion no longer. He thought that preaching in America would be a way that he could preach without his family’s reputation preceding him to the pulpit.<sup>66</sup>

Reverend George MacLeod toured the United States in 1921, going to Harvard in Boston, Philadelphia, Atlantic City, and Charleston, while preaching, debating, and

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62. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 45.

63. *Ibid.*, 45-46.

64. *Ibid.*, 52-53.

65. *Ibid.*, 52.

66. *Ibid.*, 59.

learning about American generosity, especially with respect to their churches. He thought it amazing that a minister would tell his congregation of the financial needs of the church and the people would make sure that those needs were met.<sup>67</sup>

In a meeting in New York, in 1922, George Macleod discussed his dream of rebuilding the Iona Abbey with P. B. (Tubby) Clayton, the founder of the Talbot House hostel in 1915 in Ypres. As luck would have it, George had joined the Toc H, which was the Morse Code Signaler's shortened version of Talbot House movement, as a member in Scotland during the war. He had been impressed with the motto, "Abandon rank all ye who enter here," and he found the cooperative work among people of all different classes within the movement had been admirable.<sup>68</sup> Clayton arranged for other clergymen to attend the meeting and hear this impressive Scottish minister. George was eloquent in communicating his vision and the meeting laid out the beginning strategy for the fundraising that would pay for the reconstruction project on Iona from 1938 through 1967.<sup>69</sup> Clayton said that not only did a Talbot House need to be started in America, but he also wanted George to open a Talbot House in Glasgow.<sup>70</sup> It is thought that Clayton's Talbot House movement influenced George so much, that it ultimately led Reverend George MacLeod to the founding of the Iona Community.<sup>71</sup>

Rather than stay in America, George continued on to British Columbia, Canada, to what he thought would be another preaching opportunity where no one knew the

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67. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 60.

68. *Ibid.*, 60-61.

69. *Ibid.*, 61.

70. *Ibid.*, 60-61.

71. *Ibid.*, 60.



MacLeod name.<sup>72</sup> When he arrived, he saw the local newspaper had written a huge article about how his grandfather had preached there seventy years earlier and many of the parishioners had known his grandfather.<sup>73</sup> The Presbyterian community at Nakusp was poor, but happy. George lived in a forest hut among a Scottish community of lumberjacks and found the simple act of survival to be exhausting, but at the same time he found the way the community related to each other as equals, regardless of their societal jobs, fascinating. The young George MacLeod practically ran circles around the slower paced community, so it was no surprise that he left to return to Scotland as a “wiser, invigorated, more confident - and full of ideas and New World slang.”<sup>74</sup> His next job awaited his return to Scotland where the Reverend George MacLeod would become High Kirk of St. Giles, Edinburgh.<sup>75</sup>

It was no shock to those who knew George MacLeod that he left St. Giles to become Talbot House Padre in Glasgow in 1924 to take part in what he considered to be a “living religion, simple doctrine, doing rather than saying, fellowship which broke through class barriers, and working together.”<sup>76</sup> When the Anglicans instituted separate rules and worship houses for Anglicans and Presbyterians, George moved onto St. Cuthbert’s and captivated Edinburgh’s West End with riveting sermons. Though the politics of Talbot House drove him from them, the movement’s foundation needed

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72. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 63.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid., 64.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 70.

expanding and rules against allowing the exception of a few at the expense of the whole group.

An experiment in a social religion was pulling him west from St. Cuthbert's to St. Govan's Parish. The depression of the early 1930's wore on George and he felt that people and their lives were "as depressed as the trolley grooves in the street."<sup>77</sup> The world had become depressed and overcrowded with mass socialist and Marxist public meetings. There was division among the people, conflict around the church and the secular life soured the prospects of church recruiting.<sup>78</sup> He believed that the church of Jesus Christ had lost touch with the common person and was in no way in touch with the problems and concerns of the common people. He believed that the clergy had become their own isolated, elite group and could no longer communicate with everyday people. He became deeply concerned as to how to meet the needs of the children and how to bring people back to the church. He knew that change could only come out of a new vision of life, so in April of 1933, he and his father, John, set sail for Jerusalem.<sup>79</sup>

Witnessing acts of pure devotion to the truth of Jesus Christ through Orthodox worship, on Easter 1933 at a sermon in Israel, and at the construction of the local YMCA gave George the vision he was seeking.<sup>80</sup> The YMCA cared for the body, health and social activities of the youth of Jerusalem, while the church guided the spirituality and it was this new-found combination of body, mind, and soul enthusiasm that he brought back to the Govan Parish. By 1934, the Iona Community was beginning to take shape in

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77. George MacLeod, *Sermon in Stone*, DVD-ROM (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

78. Ibid.

79. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 109.

80. Ibid., 111.

his mind and the first experiment consisted of refurbishing the old Fingalton Mill and turning it into a camp for children. The children of the Govan community would be fed, educated and physically fit. In June of 1935, the mill was opened for all of the people in Govan, not just the church members, and George was thrilled that church membership increased by seven hundred members thanks to his diligent team of donors and volunteers.<sup>81</sup> He began to see how the youth would lead the way to a return to the principals of the Celtic Church of St. Columba on Iona. He had long believed that the island of Iona was a very special place, a thin place, where the space between heaven and earth was so thin, that it was as if only tissue paper separated the two.<sup>82</sup>

In October 1935, George MacLeod's proposal to restore the dilapidated buildings adjoining the Iona Abbey<sup>83</sup> was reviewed by the Iona Cathedral Trustees and the knowledge of the old Fingalton Mill success helped the Trustees realize that it was George MacLeod who had already raised a community from the ruins of depression and that he was the one who could rebuild the Iona Abbey cloisters and monastic buildings for the family of God.<sup>84</sup> By 1950, the Abbey itself had already been restored to what it is today.<sup>85</sup>

In the spring of 1938, the Reverend George MacLeod, with six ministers and six craftsmen, set sail for Iona with enough donated money to get down to the business of the

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81. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 125.

82. George MacLeod, *Sermon in Stone*, DVD-ROM (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

83. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 149.

84. *Ibid.*, 146.

85. Dr. Nicki Scott, *Iona Abbey and Nunnery* (Edinburgh: Historical Scotland, 2012), 10-13.

first year's work. Only men and clergy who could live and work cooperatively were invited on the first journey because it would take an understanding and willingness to participate fully in the problems and solutions for there to be success. In George's mind, cooperation was the key to this world's survival.<sup>86</sup>

In 1939, the work on the Abbey buildings began in earnest and it happened one day that a man landed on the island and was in need of a place to stay for the night. George MacLeod stood looking out at the Atlantic and said that he was in need of a master mason to do the difficult restoration job that was needed to restore the Abbey complex. Fate is not without a sense of irony, because the man looked at George and told him that he was a master mason and could begin work immediately. George showed him to his bunk.<sup>87</sup>

The ministers worked as laborers alongside the craftsmen and learned the trades with almost spiritual purpose, such as when they were instructed to never throw a stone off the scaffolding because you'll need it soon enough.<sup>88</sup> Islanders were very curious and not so sure of the construction project, but they came to worship with George and his men on their first night on Iona, which reassured George in "the truth that this was no 'community apart' but an experiment within the world community as it is."<sup>89</sup>

The islanders began helping as they could as word spread of the great feat they were accomplishing on Iona. Norway donated the wood for the roof as reparations

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86. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 149.

87. George MacLeod, *Sermon in Stone*, DVD-ROM (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

88. Ibid.

89. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 159.



Figure 13. The Iona Community, “Roof Construction at the Iona Abbey Complex” (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

for the Norsemen of the middle-ages who tore down the original Abbey.<sup>90</sup> The bell used to call to prayer had been dug out of a local farmer’s field, which George felt probably went a long way toward preserving the great sound. He was delighted by the ingenuity of all the volunteers and the ways they found to repurpose what they had at hand.

Because George had been very burdened by the plight of the dockworkers and steelworkers, he had spent a great deal of time among those men on the mainland, befriending them and understanding their concerns. So it was natural that he invited them to come, live and work on the island together with the clergy he had invited from far and wide. He made it very clear that there would be no difference between the workers and clergy. They would eat the same food, do manual labor together, sleep in the quarters, and share Bible study and prayer every morning and evening. He did not allow any wives, mothers, or daughters to be included in this experiment, much like how St. Columba forbade women to be with them. This was the beginning of the Iona

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90. George MacLeod, *Sermon in Stone*, DVD-ROM (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

Community. They lived by the Rule of the future Iona Community, which had been formed by the Iona Fellowship, a group of people who had gone with George on a retreat to Iona in 1929.<sup>91</sup>

Throughout the time of reconstruction, the clergy began to realize that they had been out of touch with the common person and that the Gospel they preached was not relevant to the working man. With the weaving in of Bible study and prayer with the daily activities, a new vision of spirituality was forged. Due to the weather on the island, they could only work for several months throughout the year. As the years passed, the theology began to be one of work and spirituality, giving life to the Iona Rule, which still remains part of the Iona Community today.

In 1954, George returned to America to work as a lecturer at the Union Theological Seminary in New York and brought his wife,<sup>92</sup> Lorna, whom he had married in 1948,<sup>93</sup> and their children with him. While in New York, he took a trip to the Kirkridge Center to visit his old friend, John Oliver Nelson, who had founded the Kirkridge Center in Bangor, Pennsylvania with a devoted and dedicated group of people.<sup>94</sup> Kirkridge had been modeled after the Iona Community.<sup>95</sup> George led a retreat at Kirkridge and he thought it admirable that the American perception of religion was one completely

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91. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 144.

92. *Ibid.*, 261.

93. Barbara Millar, "The War Hero Who Fell to His Knees and Surrendered to Christ", *Scottish Review*, under Life & Letters, <http://www.scottishreview.net/Backpage135.shtml> (accessed 9-16-13).

94. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 263.

95. *Ibid.*

compatible with one's own individualistic views of government and pursuit of the American dream.



Figure 14. Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, "Retreat Led by George MacLeod, Kirkridge," George MacLeod is seated at center. (Bangor: Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, 1992).

Reverend George MacLeod and the Iona Community ran seasonal retreats, radio shows, Bible study and a myriad of spiritual pursuits which gave Iona life by reaching out to the public at large. The Iona Community diligently cared for the Abbey and the grounds in order to preserve the experience for generations to come.

On Christmas Day, 1958, the statue by Jewish sculptor Jacob Lipshitz, *The Descent of Spirit*, arrived to be placed in the center courtyard of the cloisters.<sup>96</sup> To the Presbyterians, it was not practical to erect a statue of the Virgin Mary within the walls of the ancient monks' cloisters because it was thought to be offensive, but George was ecstatic, because there would be a public opening of the cloisters and the statue would be indicative of the generosity of the American donors to the Iona Abbey through the Trustees. During a televised event, in the summer of 1959, the cloisters were officially

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96. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 296.

opened.<sup>97</sup> The cloisters represented the place of the weekday where the common man could keep with God in daily life, not just inside of a church.<sup>98</sup>



Figure 15. Reverend Matilda Chase, “Descent of Spirit at the Cloisters on Iona” (2013).

In 1968, Queen Elizabeth became the first monarch to visit the island of Iona since the 1100s. The Queen attended the service at the Abbey and visited the graves of the kings and queens that had preceded her.<sup>99</sup> Luckily, George and his family had returned home from guiding a pilgrimage to the Holy Land just in time to lead the Queen’s tour.<sup>100</sup> The queen’s visit brought great attention to Iona and it put Iona on the

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97. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 300.

98. George MacLeod, *Sermon in Stone*, DVD-ROM (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

99. *Ibid.*

100. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 371.



public tour map of spiritual pilgrimages, while the preaching of Reverend Macleod gave many pilgrims a voice to follow.

The weekly pilgrimage that George took around Iona to all the same places that modern pilgrims go today, gave him and anyone else who came along, the opportunity to renew and invigorate oneself with the “memorable experience of physical and spiritual journeying.”<sup>101</sup> It is a path that carried him for ninety-six years until Reverend George MacLeod passed away on June 27, 1991.<sup>102</sup>

Walking the Iona pilgrim’s way today, it would be impossible to imagine that St. Columba’s Iona could rise from the rubble without the lifetime of dedication to humanity that led Reverend George MacLeod to find the Iona Abbey and complex to be the physical place where his spiritual aspiration would rise to meet the will of his maker. Iona is the spiritual home of the community he founded and the Iona Community is the embodiment of divine insight given to the Reverend George MacLeod by his willingness to go where the Word of God took him to do the work that needed to be done.

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101. Ronald Ferguson, *George MacLeod, Founder of the Iona Community* (London: Collins, 1990), 303.

102. Associated Press Release, “Rev. Lord MacLeod, 96, Founder of Church Community in Scotland,” *New York Times*, June 29, 1991, under Obituaries, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/06/29/obituaries/rev-lord-macleod-96-founder-of-church-community-in-scotland.html> (accessed 9-16-13).

### CHAPTER 3

## THE IONA COMMUNITY AND FAMILY GROUPS



Figure 16. The Iona Community, “Wild Goose” (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

The northern Atlantic climate of Iona is such that the Iona Community plans activities in the late spring and summer months as it had been with Reverend George MacLeod. Due to this shortened time, the Iona Community has become a community dispersed across the Scottish mainland and beyond, and relies on the resourceful employment of a very special tactic for maintaining cohesion as a group and ensuring adherence to the Iona Rule. The Iona Family Groups have become the unifying factor which allows Full community members to keep the Iona Rule and maintain oneness of spiritual purpose and devotion.

According to Reverend Kathy Galloway in her book, *Living by the Rule*, this is the five-fold Rule of Life as it is practiced by the members of the Iona Community:

- Daily prayer and Bible-reading
- Sharing and accounting for the use of our resources, including money
- Planning and accounting for the use of our time
- Action for justice and peace in society
- Meeting with and accounting to each other

The Iona Community of today is quite different than the Iona Community as it was when Reverend George MacLeod lived with the men who worked with him to build the Abbey's monastic buildings each summer. Yet, the Iona Rule is organic to the spiritual culture that George began on the island with the first twelve men. George and the entire group of clergy and craftsmen lived together and worked together as equals and put the Iona Rule into practice by beginning and ending each day in communal prayer and Bible-reading. They made themselves accountable to each other for use of their time and resources because accounting for time was a way of respecting the efforts of each other and accounting for resources was a way to not take for granted anything they had to use in their noble endeavor. The act of rebuilding was the embodiment of the action for justice and peace that resided within the heart of the Iona community they were establishing. MacLeod hoped that each volunteer would bring to the work his own denomination's orientation to peace and justice. In turn, this would strengthen the community's goal of rebuilding a tradition of Christ in the life of every man involved.<sup>1</sup>

Through those who met George MacLeod, we understand now that he may not have seen how large the Iona Community was destined to become today, just as the members of the community today can hardly imagine how vast his vision will have become by the next jubilee.

The Iona Community abides by essentially the same rules as George MacLeod and his followers used. However, the practice of the Rule together each day is no longer possible, as the community is spread out around the globe. Iona is the home of the Iona Community religious movement but when the members return to the Scottish mainland, or to wherever they travel, they follow the Rule within Family Groups, which are usually

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1. George MacLeod, *Sermon in Stone* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

made up of members who generally live close enough to get together and account to each other according to the full five-fold Rule.<sup>2</sup> The Family Group then reports to the Leader of the Iona Community once a year.<sup>3</sup>

Within the Iona Community, there are Full members and there are Associate members. Full members are required to return to Iona for Member's week each summer and are also required to send a full accounting of their year to the Leader of the Iona Community. Whereas, Associate members have no obligation to return to Iona, but most Associate members make a pilgrimage or holiday visit whenever able.

While the Full members are held accountable according to the full Rule, the Associate member is only required to adhere to daily prayer and Bible-reading.<sup>4</sup> Aside from the devotional discipline, it is up to the individual Associate member to hold themselves accountable or to devise an accounting system of their own. One might think that with great distance from Iona and Scotland, would come separation from dedication of accounting to a Family Group. Yet it does seem to many Associate members, who live outside of Scotland, that this inability to form recognized Family Groups leaves Associate members wanting Family Groups of their own. To follow a religious movement without this most brilliant support feature to the expansion of the movement beyond its spiritual home may lead Associate members to eventually leave the movement. Even though membership must be intentionally renewed each year, Family Groups in America would keep the American Associate members engaged as fully as

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2. Kathy Galloway, *Living by the Rule, The Rule of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2010), 19.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., 19.

their Full member Scottish counterparts. It is the belief of the doctoral candidate that American Family Groups would be a successful asset to the Iona Community because spiritually oriented Americans tend to be extremely resourceful, tolerant, and open to individual ideas without personally feeling threatened because the First Amendment of the American Constitution has ingrained the right to the freedom of speech into to each and every American. Americans do not indulge or legally allow public expressions of religious intolerance and thus, may feel less threatened and less likely to adopt any religious intolerance expressed and even embraced in some other countries.

The rule about becoming a Full member originally stemmed from allowing any clergy to become Full members in order to train them to deal with problems within their congregations on the mainland. Likewise, any craftsman who lived on the island and worked on the reconstruction of the monastic buildings could be full members, too. There was no way, at the time, for George MacLeod to foresee that clergy membership would grow to such a large size that membership began to be dominated by clergy.<sup>5</sup> Since the number of jobs could only accommodate a specific number of craftsmen, the clergy began to outnumber the craftsmen by so many that the practice of freely training clergy had to be curtailed.<sup>6</sup> The need to recruit other members, who were not craftsmen or clergy evolved.<sup>7</sup>

George MacLeod's vision was to build a community where everyone could be equal regardless of their level of education or financial status. They would learn to share

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5. Ronald Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose, The Story of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2006), 80.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

a common life for the few months each year that they were on the island by sharing responsibility of manual labor on the buildings, living and working, eating and worshipping together. They would emulate Jesus, the carpenter, who built life, with his body, mind, and soul. George had hoped that the Iona Community experiment would become a model for solving the problems of society that would spread through educated clergy and the dedicated craftsmen who would pass their experience on to other tradesmen. “The problem facing the church was similar to that confronting the world: how to live corporately, sharing life and its resources in a spirit of independence, while preserving the rights of the individual.”<sup>8</sup> The experience for those who worked with George MacLeod proved to be so powerful that the Iona Community was borne out of the need to have Iona as a home and for the original members to go out, disperse or go home, much the way St. Columba and his monks did, and take part in everyday life to share the learning and spirituality that came with being a member of the Iona Community.<sup>9</sup>

In the beginning, the community consisted of all white, mostly Presbyterian Scottish, males. However, today, women are an integral part of the community, as are people of all races and religious backgrounds. Women refused to be rebuffed as their interest in the Iona Community grew and they desperately wanted to become a part of the spiritual practice that seemed to make their men whole. Kathy Galloway, whose father was one of the original members of the Iona Community who worked on the reconstruction with George MacLeod, walked into a community meeting, which in those days was all male. She made herself present and George MacLeod had her removed. It

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8. Ronald Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose, The Story of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2006), 55.

9. Norman Shanks, *Iona, God's Energy* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2009), 17.

was a bold move that is recounted by members even today because it was a turning point in attitude. Women could no longer be denied and Kathy Galloway eventually became the first female Warden of the Abbey,<sup>10</sup> but she served with her husband as a team.<sup>11</sup> As Abbey Warden, she presided over the funeral service of Reverend George MacLeod in 1991. She then went on to become the first female<sup>12</sup> Leader of the Iona Community, serving from 2002 through 2009<sup>13</sup> and wrote the book, *Living by the Rule*, during that time.

Undoubtedly, change was daunting, exciting and confusing. So, to keep with the commitment to worship that would encompass and keep the spiritual significance of worship at the forefront of the integrated, yet dispersed, community, Family Groups took over the organization of keeping the Iona Rule in daily life. Many understand that this was a direct result of expanding the membership through the admission of women.<sup>14</sup> More presence and attention to the Rule allowed the eighty Full members in the 1950s<sup>15</sup> to break into Family Groups and handle the day to day business of keeping the Rule and reporting to the Iona Community Leader while on the Scottish mainland.<sup>16</sup> Family Groups facilitate the integration of social concerns with spiritual life and provide the

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10. Peter MacDonald, Leader of the Iona Community, Skype interview with author, Glasgow, Scotland, October 1, 2013.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Kathy Galloway, *Living by the Rule, The Rule of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2010), Back Cover.

14. Iona Community, *Iona Community – Family Groups* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2013), 1.

15. Ibid.

16. Ronald Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose, The Story of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1998), 82.

essential pillar of support to link individual spirituality with the relevance of the Gospel to the common, greater good of society and politics.<sup>17</sup> The Iona Community deliberately keeps spiritual life and everyday life as one whole life experience, by living George MacLeod's belief that "God's Spirit permeates 'every blessed thing'."<sup>18</sup>

There are "now 35 groups in Britain - 20 in Scotland, 15 in England and in Wales. There is one Family Group in Germany and Switzerland, and one in the Netherlands. The membership stands currently at around 270."<sup>19</sup> It is reported that the Iona Community is unable to expand further at this time to areas that are even farther away from Iona.<sup>20</sup> It is believed that expansion would be possible with Full membership Family Groups in America. The gap of great distance is closed with technology every day in America and around the world.

The most essential ingredient in order for a Family Group to function effectively is trust. It is this trust that fosters the particulars of what goes on in a Family Group meeting as described by the Iona Community:

There are also variations in what happens when a group meets. All will include, at or near the start of proceedings, the Community's "office," the short act of worship that is printed in the Members book, the elements of which correspond to part of the daily morning service in Iona Abbey. Thereafter there is likely to be a sharing of news and concerns, and some groups at some of their meetings may not go beyond this - because sometimes there may be much to share, personal, social and political. Then there may be the main item for discussion, whether accounting for some aspect of the Rule, or a paper referred to Family Groups for discussion. Many groups celebrate Communion together, some at the end of each meeting, some less frequently. And for almost every group an

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17. Norman Shanks, *Iona, God's Energy* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2009), 17.

18. *Ibid.*, 19.

19. Iona Community, *Iona Community - Family Groups* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2013), 2.

20. *Ibid.*



important part of the belonging together is the shared hospitality, whether the kind of “pot luck” meal that some groups have, the informal discussion over coffee and biscuits or wine and cheese, or the annual Christmas parties and summer picnics that many arrange.<sup>21</sup>

The individuals who make up a group will change from time to time, but change is better than stagnation or boredom because a lack of stimulating conversation or debate may lead to attrition from the groups. The New Member initiative, which is currently being developed, will help those in a well-established Family Group accept new members and overcome the apprehension of building trust with new individuals.<sup>22</sup>

Every Family Group has a Convener, the person who calls the group together to convene the meetings and will serve the Family Group for three years.<sup>23</sup> Once a year, the Conveners of the Family Groups meet at the annual Plenary meeting to share ideas and issues and become non-voting Board members of the Iona Community.<sup>24</sup>

The experience of being a member of a Family Group seems to fulfill something that might otherwise be lacking in one’s spiritual life, as evidenced by the following first-hand accounts of experiences in Family Groups:

### **Katherine’s Story**

I have been in three Family Groups since I became a Member of the Iona Community in 2005 - one in England and two in Scotland. They have all functioned in slightly different ways, but with the same basic ethos.

I see the Family Groups as the lynchpin of the Iona Community. They provide the means whereby members can meet regularly to discuss local issues, to share news, to share burdens and joys, to worship together and to be the channel through which the leadership and Council can

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21. Iona Community, *Iona Community - Family Groups* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2013), 3.

22. *Ibid.*, 4.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

consult the membership. This method of consultation ensures that individual members have an opportunity to put forward their views on major matters that affect the Community.

I have found that in sharing the above, a sense of trust and fellowship develops and it is as a result of this trust that the mutual accounting, which is one of the most important functions of the Family Groups, is possible. I share the view of many Members that accounting together does not involve causing shame or embarrassment to each other, but rather to encourage and help each other.

*Katherine Rennie*

Family Group Convener

Council Member of The Iona Community<sup>25</sup>

### **Peter's Story**

As a dispersed community, members live out and account for their keeping of the Rule with others in their local Family Group. Being part of a Family Group has been both a support and a challenge in my thirty (30) years of membership. Primarily, this is related to faith and the concerns of the Community, but it has also been 'whole life' sharing. For example, my first Family Group consisted of a few single people of differing ages, including those widowed, a young couple (Lesley and me), a couple with young kids, a couple whose children were leaving home and a couple with grown up children and grandchildren. All of life was there, and I remember noting how each life stage affected family finances, use of time and faith journeys. Family Group, and to some extent local church, provided inter-generational learning, which is a rare and precious thing in our mobile, homogenous world.

Family Group has been so important that whenever it was not working for me and for others, we changed it. Groups that were too large and too formal, we divided so that relationships and sharing could deepen. Family Group is not something I could take or leave, it was vital and I have always looked forward with eagerness to the next meeting. I write this, yet know that for a couple of years after becoming Leader, that Family Group was difficult because it felt like work. For many years Family Group was part of my personal and professional support structure, then with my change of role, it no longer fulfilled that role. After a few adjustments in my pattern of working and discussion within Family Group this has been addressed and I feel 'held' once more.

Love and peace,

*Reverend Peter Macdonald*

Leader of the Iona Community<sup>26</sup>

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25. Katherine Rennie, account submitted to author, Glasgow, October 19, 2012.

26. Peter Macdonald, account submitted to the author, Glasgow, October 22, 2012.

## John's Story

A Family Group takes time. It takes time to establish trust. It takes time to get to know the others. It takes time to get up the courage to share, to open up, and to find the words. Although with practice and our common commitment to the Iona Community Rule, it gets easier, even if you find a new member in the group or find yourself as the new one.

I never found anyone in an Iona Community Family Group who would not trust another member, but sometimes, if you were new it took a little longer to lower self-defense mechanisms.

Most of the time as we discuss issues, common passions, plan separate or joint actions, listen to one another share our feelings, hopes and fears for work or family or careers, or social or political issues, the Family Group functions somewhere between a support group, a really loving family or group of friends, and therapy. It is a safe place to bear your soul.

However, when it gets scary and most supportive is when we "account to one another for the Rule." Time management, social action and personal spiritual development are fairly "easy." I always appreciated the discipline of actually taking the time to self-evaluate and to consider if I was using my time wisely, not married to the job/cause at the expense of my family, or vice versa.

The hard one was the Economic discussion. To actually discuss with someone else how much you earn, how you spend it, decisions you have made, your lack of economic self-control, or over conservative "hoarding" was the worst and the best. I believe the Economic Witness is (almost) the last taboo. Before I was a pastor the guys at the office would frankly (sometimes too frankly) talk about politics, sex, cheating on their wives, lust, sports, etc. *But*, not one of them would tell you how much they earned, paid for a new car, saved, or anything like that.

At Family Group we did and wonderfully it was like salvation.

Fear of the Economic Witness delayed my joining by two or three years because I thought, "I can't do that!" But it turned out to be the best Rule of all. Did I lie sometimes out of embarrassment and fear of judgment? Yes! But when I did, I learned, I was ashamed and I changed my ways and I think at least some, if not all, knew I was hiding something and loved me still.

It also gave me a wonderful way to walk in someone else's shoes and the lives of others. I remember one meeting when one member's ten percent (10%) was more than another's entire income!

The ministry can be a very, very lonely path and I miss my Family Group greatly.

Being a member of a Family Group humbled me, supported me, challenged me, gave me courage, showed me that "little people can do big Things," and gave me a sense of belonging.

*Reverend John Dillon*  
 Board Member Iona Community  
 President, New World Foundation<sup>27</sup>

Regarding peace and justice issues, the Iona Community Family Groups support each other in various areas ranging from challenging biased immigration laws, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, to marching for peace. Although, members do follow their own heart with regard to taking up a cause, it is discussion within the Family Groups that can strengthen one's personal conviction to take action in whatever way is most appropriate within the interests of the Community. The motivation for action toward peace and justice is best described as follows:

The doctrine most emphasized by the Community was that of the Incarnation - the coming of God to humanity in the shape of Jesus Christ. God, in love, had entered the human situation in all its mess and glory. Humanity had thus been dignified and ennobled. The spiritual had been joined to the material in Jesus Christ, and the material could therefore never be despised. Since the face of Jesus was to be discerned in the poor, the hungry, the prisoners and the victims, social and political action could never be divorced from spirituality.<sup>28</sup>

According to George MacLeod, the Incarnation applied to living one's faith and not necessarily following a theology, but more a way of life that should be expressed through worship, which is the central premise to the Iona Community.<sup>29</sup> In his *Sermon of Stone*, George himself spoke that everything in this world is of light-energy and that Jesus Christ is the light, and therefore the source of all things,<sup>30</sup> as he made clear in the following sermon given in the Iona Abbey:

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27. Reverend John Dillon, account submitted to the author, Chicago, October 22, 2012.

28. Ronald Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose, The Story of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1998), 72.

29. *Ibid.*, 74.

30. George MacLeod, *Sermon in Stone* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

Christ is the light of the World and the life of the World. He is the light-energy for our individual needs because He is the key to the ultimate nature of all existence. And it is He that has made us ‘modern men’ (and women) and brought us into this wilderness, that we may drink new streams of ‘the rock that is Christ,’ and learn again the meaning of His cosmic presence.

He is the only interpreter but the quite sufficient interpreter of our modern impasse. He must somehow be declared again to the physical consciousness, the scientific inquiry and the social passions of the modern man (and woman).

It was God who made man (and woman) a materialistic creature: and that far from stultifying our witness, materialism opens a new and effectual door if only we preach the full old Gospel.<sup>31</sup>

It is in this creed that resources are evident as an important part in expanding the doctrine of returning to the Christ foundation of life; and Family Groups prove to be the facilitating factor to promoting the cohesive and ultimate expansion of the Iona Community.



Figure 17. Reverend Matilda Chase, “Jubilee 2013 on Iona, Scotland” Pictured left to right, Rev. Kathleen L. Roney, Iona Community Leader, Rev. Peter Macdonald, Rev. Matilda Chase (2013). Rev. Roney and Rev. Chase were invited to take part in the 1,450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Columba’s landing on Iona. Rev. Roney led a pilgrimage from the Kirkridge Retreat Center to Iona for the Jubilee. The entire island of Iona participated in the Jubilee and there were many receptions held throughout the island. This picture was taken on Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 2013, outside of one of the receptions prior to attending the Jubilee service at the Iona Abbey.

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31. Ronald Ferguson, *Chasing the Wild Goose, The Story of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1998), 74.

## CHAPTER 4

### KIRKRIDGE AND THE IONA - NEW WORLD FOUNDATION

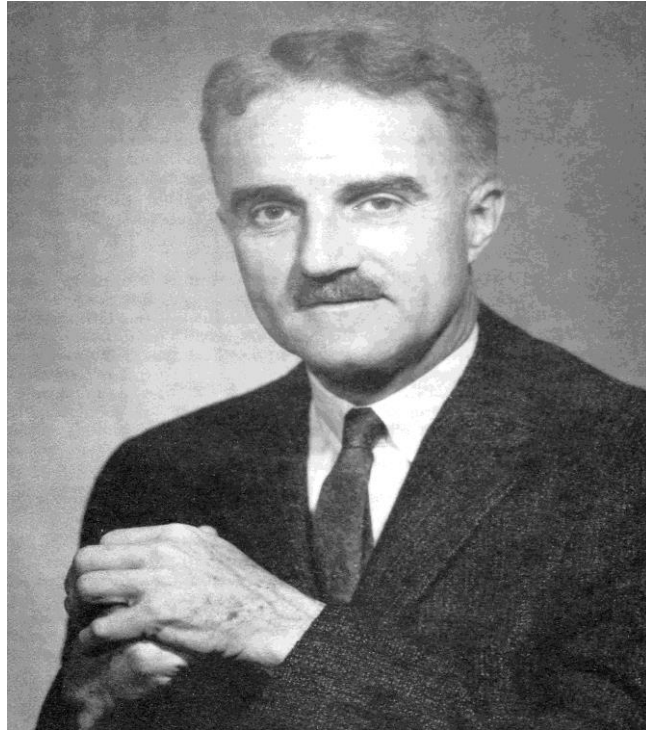


Figure 18. Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, “Reverend John Oliver Nelson (1909-1990) Founder of Kirkridge” (Bangor: Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, 1992).

John Oliver Nelson, the founder of Kirkridge, was born on May 14, 1909.

According to Sister Rita Yeasted, in her biographical book, *JON*, he was the grandson of Ambrose Nelson, a stone cutter, missionary, and street preacher, who immigrated to America from Scotland in 1880. His father, John Evon Nelson, was Andrew Mellon’s personal secretary, and then later went on to become Gulf Oil’s Vice-President,

Treasurer, and board member.<sup>1</sup> John Oliver benefited from the family's status and attended Princeton University from 1926 through 1930.<sup>2</sup> In 1931, John Oliver Nelson met Reverend George MacLeod while attending the New College, University of Edinburgh.<sup>3</sup> Although John was the grandson of two ministers and was part of the Campus Crusaders while at Princeton, most family thought he would be a journalist instead of following the ministry, that is, until he met George MacLeod.<sup>4</sup> John finished his year in Edinburgh and then received his divinity degree at McCormick Seminary in Chicago in 1933.<sup>5</sup> From 1933 through 1935, he attended Yale Divinity School to complete his doctorate and in 1935, was ordained as Pastor of the Brentwood Presbyterian Church in Brentwood, Pennsylvania, which was the Nelson Family church.<sup>6</sup>

After meeting George MacLeod in 1931, his thoughts on spiritual life evolved considerably and he spoke of the movement to “revitalize” the church in Europe during an interview.<sup>7</sup> George had introduced John to Talbot House (TOC H) and he became a member, pledging to uphold their goal of “building a fairer society by working with communities to promote friendship and service, confront prejudice, and practice reconciliation.”<sup>8</sup> It was George's vision of Iona that really captured John's heart, and

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1. Rita M. Yeasted, SFCC, *JON, John Oliver Nelson And The Movement For Power In The Church* (Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc., 2012), 2.

2. Ibid., 5.

3. Ibid., 7.

4. Ibid., 8.

5. Ibid., 9.

6. Ibid., 10.

7. Ibid., 14.

8. Ibid., 7.

which ultimately led John to go to Iona in those early years of reconstruction<sup>9</sup> to help lay the slate roof on the dining hall.<sup>10</sup> John saw the beginning Iona Community's commitment as four-fold:

- Common life - several months of experience working at the Abbey and at least one week together each year on the island.
- Common discipline - daily reading of the Scripture and at least a half hour of prayer at set morning and evening times.
- Participation at meetings - regional meetings and the one annual meeting at Iona itself.
- Commitment to peace and non-violence - a remarkable decision since the community was founded during World War II.<sup>11</sup>

The nondenominational, all-inclusive nature of the Iona reconstruction undertaking was perfect for a church that every Christian would be able to call "Home." Reverend John Oliver Nelson wanted to create the same feeling in a community in Pennsylvania and began by taking the job in Philadelphia at the Department of Student Relations for the Presbyterian Board of Christian Education in 1940.<sup>12</sup> He took long drives up to the Poconos, looking for his island home for Kirkridge and by 1941 he began looking for the property in earnest. He put a down payment of five hundred dollars using "thrift stamps from my kindergarten days during the First World War"<sup>13</sup> on the property and Kirkridge became "an educational and religious corporation"<sup>14</sup> on December 21,

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9. Rita M. Yeasted, SFCC, *JON, John Oliver Nelson And The Movement For Power In The Church* (Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc., 2012), 15.

10. *Ibid.*, 8.

11. *Ibid.*, 8-9.

12. *Ibid.*, 8.

13. *Ibid.*, 16.

14. Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, *Go Tell It On The Mountain, Stories of Kirkridge, 1942-1992* (Bangor: Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, 1992), 8.



1942. They had a \$1,500 cash operating budget<sup>15</sup> to run the two hundred seventy acre parcel, which consisted of the farmhouse, a barn, a pasture for the two lambs and acres of rugged, rocky terrain. On his thirty-third birthday in 1942, John met with eleven kindred souls and began to focus on what John believed to be the will of God<sup>16</sup> with respect to his goals for the new community at Kirkridge:

- We reaffirm our faith in God's will as it is fully revealed in Christ.
- We declare that the power of that will is among us and in us thwarted and unrealized because it is imperfectly channeled.
- We seek earnestly to rediscover ways of making God's power effective through us, in the explicit situation in which he places us: the historic Christian tradition, the Reformed faith in America, the ministry, and the intimate company of friends.<sup>17</sup>

In the beginning, the single farmhouse that had already existed on the land was the first building to be expanded. The first retreats were three-day working retreats,<sup>18</sup> where seminary students and others came to gather around the very large hearth at the end of each day to pray together over the work they had done, both physically and spiritually. Conditions were communal and best described in the Kirkridge Paper of May 1943:

No one should "visit" without serious intent to share the discipline there. Anyone in earnest is warmly welcome (with wife if she can rough it) for not less than three days. Meals will be ample but frugal; there will be no charge for living expenses. Bring ration book, work clothes, flashlight.<sup>19</sup>

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15. Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, *Go Tell It On The Mountain, Stories of Kirkridge, 1942-1992* (Bangor: Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, 1992), 8.

16. Rita M. Yeasted, SFCC, *JON, John Oliver Nelson And The Movement For Power In The Church* (Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc., 2012), 17.

17. Ibid.

18. Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, *Go Tell It On The Mountain, Stories of Kirkridge, 1942-1992* (Bangor: Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, 1992), 24.

19. Ibid., 11.

There was a budget of \$1,000 a year to be spent, and though building the lodge went slowly, every stone, tile, and timber was placed with the care and dignity of the work ethic brought to Kirkridge through the Iona example. On one of George MacLeod's visits to Kirkridge, he brought a couple of stone masons with him. One of the masons enjoyed his visit so much that he stayed on at Kirkridge, living in Bangor. He passed away this last year in 2013.

Situated at an altitude of one thousand five hundred forty feet above sea level, the lodge building has a magnificent view of the surrounding Pocono Mountains and Lehigh Valley and was built right along the original Appalachian Trail.<sup>20</sup> The dormitory, which was to house up to twenty guests at a time, was originally called Mull in honor of the large island next to Iona.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 19. Nancy Schreirer, “Bell at Kirkridge Turning Point Overlook” (2012).

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20. Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, *Go Tell It On The Mountain, Stories of Kirkridge, 1942-1992* (Bangor: Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, 1992), 12.

21. *Ibid.*

Kirkridge expanded, even carrying livestock. The chickens were housed in the Hermitage, which was built on a large sturdy foundation in a “location with a big view, allowing the chickens whatever opportunity they could use to expand their consciousness.”<sup>22</sup> When Edith Platt found two little lambs cowering in the corner of a cabin, she wrote, “I shall have to study the Gospel better. It is the only book on lambs we have.”<sup>23</sup> It was Joe and Edith Platt who became the resident couple who ran the day to day workings of Kirkridge, writing correspondence, welcoming retreat participants and explaining the Kirkridge mission.<sup>24</sup> Joe had retired from working with the YMCA in China<sup>25</sup> and the Quaker couple gave Kirkridge a deeply “reflective approach to life.”<sup>26</sup> They helped John introduce new attendees to The Discipline as outlined in the introductory pamphlet:

Kirkridge is a Christian group under a discipline, a retreat-and-study center in the Pennsylvania Appalachians, and a movement for the power within the Church. It lays quiet emphasis on “Christian revolution,” by deepened devotion and prayer cells, new evangelism and awakened social concern and action.<sup>27</sup>

### THE DISCIPLINE

To deepen their common intention, subjecting their spirits to the Spirit of God in Christ and quickening their response to human need, a company of spiritually hungry men and women are committed to this discipline. It is not something imposed or external; each uses helpful portions of it, experimenting with other forms of growth and obedience. The attached

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22. Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, *Go Tell It On The Mountain, Stories of Kirkridge, 1942-1992* (Bangor: Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, 1992), 27.

23. *Ibid.*, 19.

24. Rita M. Yeasted, SFCC, *JON, John Oliver Nelson And The Movement For Power In The Church* (Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc., 2012), 40.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. Kirkridge, *Kirkridge – 1953-1954, Devotional Pamphlet* (Kirkridge: 1953).

report sheet may be mailed to Kirkridge, Bangor, Pa., sharing with the whole group our relative success or failure and our responsibility to each other.

1. To keep daily a half hour of devotion at a set time.
2. To read the agreed lectionary and use the agreed hymns.
3. To express my Christian vocation in specific social action.
4. To share the life of a Christian cell.
5. To make retreat personally six hours monthly.
6. To make retreat with other Kirkridgers once yearly.
7. To tithe consistently.
8. To offer grace at each meal.
9. To share worship: daily with my household, weekly in church, at least quarterly in some inter-denominational activity.
10. To carry out these further intentions, each as important as those listed above, but none more difficult to report on:
  - a. We seek to live frugally, practicing simplicity in our spending, eating, keeping fit, sleeping enough, using our surplus for others.
  - b. We seek to grow intellectually as Christians, reading a solid book at least monthly in Christian biography, doctrine, devotion, Christian history or emotional problems.
  - c. We seek to practice Christian reconciliation and redemptive non-violence in our whole relation to others, family, neighbors, and people around the world.<sup>28</sup>

**QUARTERLY REPORT SHEET**  
on the Kirkridge Discipline

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Three-month period: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_

This accompanies the folder, The Kirkridge Discipline, which gives rules and intentions agreed upon year by year at The Gathering (of those most earnestly concerned) at Kirkridge. Marking this sheet and mailing it to Kirkridge, Bangor, Pennsylvania means not "Look at what I have achieved" but "Here is a token that I still seek to be part of our shared Christian Fellowship under discipline." Another sheet will be sent you when this comes in.

Circle the days of the month when you have fulfilled the Rule.

**I. To keep a daily half-hour of devotion before 9:00 a.m. these days:**  
(If it is kept after 9:00, cross out the day.)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31									

**II. To read the agreed lectionary and use the agreed hymns these days:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31									

**III. To offer grace at each meal on these days:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31									

**IV. To pray at the day's end on these days:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31									

**V. To make a personal retreat each month**

First Month \_\_\_\_\_ Second Month \_\_\_\_\_ Third Month \_\_\_\_\_

**VI. To tithe scrupulously during this quarter (Check fulfillment \_\_\_\_\_)**

**VII. To work for growth of a Christian cell (Jot down a sentence on the reverse side of this sheet describing how.)**

**VIII. To live frugally (Jot down a sentence on the reverse side of this sheet giving some instances)**

**IX. To make a retreat with other Kirkridge members once yearly (Check if during this quarter \_\_\_\_\_)**

PLEASE append some message overleaf before you mail this, telling what your current largest concern is, or how you have fulfilled Kirkridge Intentions as well as Rules, or anything else you want to share with the whole group at the mountain or through issues of the occasional Ridgeleaf.

Figure 20. Kirkridge, Quarterly Report Sheet on the Kirkridge Discipline (Kirkridge: 1953-57).

28. Kirkridge, "Kirkridge - 1953-1954, Devotional Pamphlet" (Kirkridge: 1953).

The beginning years of Kirkridge represent Reverend John Oliver Nelson's best interpretation of the Iona Community and how it could function as an American establishment. Though his travels and involvement with various groups took him all over the world, he remained steadfast in his friendship and admiration of Reverend George MacLeod and the Iona Community.

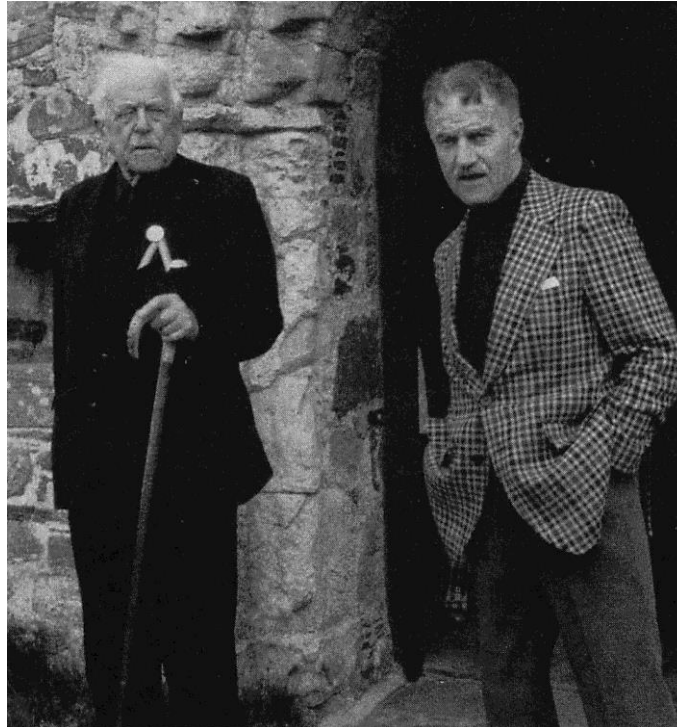


Figure 21. Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, "Reverend George MacLeod and Reverend John Oliver Nelson at the Iona Abbey" Pictured left to right, Rev. MacLeod, Rev. Nelson. (1983).

After a period of approximately ten years, John's absence from Kirkridge led to the appointment of a new Director at Kirkridge and Kirkridge began to function more as a retreat center for hire than the communal and spiritual workplace that John had begun. Any organization in America, whether it is for religious purposes, profit or not, is a business and has payroll, maintenance and all of the other normal business expenses to cover if it is to survive. Kirkridge, like Iona, was built to survive. However, Reverend

John Oliver Nelson passed away on April 9, 1990 in State College<sup>29</sup>, Pennsylvania, far away from his beloved Kirkridge and even farther away from his spiritual home on Iona.

The Iona Community and Kirkridge functioned as two separate entities until a way to officially link the two was initiated in May of 2011 by the doctoral candidate, Reverend Kathleen L. Roney. In 2009, Kathleen went to Canada in order to meet Kathy Galloway, the first female Leader of the Iona Community, in person and to ask for her assistance in facilitating a way for Kathleen to meet the new Leader of the Iona Community during her upcoming visit to Iona in the following year. Kathy graciously offered to contact the new Leader, Reverend Peter Macdonald, which paved the way for Kathleen to meet with him. It was a simple intention that Kathleen held in her heart. She hoped to somehow be able to help the Iona Community and Kirkridge draw closer together because in knowing both John Oliver Nelson and George MacLeod, she felt the spiritual connection between the communities founded by these two men went far beyond anything the stone walls they built could contain.

In 2010, Kathleen met the Leader of the Iona Community, Peter Macdonald, in the Glasgow office that the Iona Community maintains as a home for Wild Goose Publications and where the everyday business is conducted. After spending time with Peter in Glasgow and then again on the island of Iona with the pilgrim group she was leading at the time, Peter Macdonald began to understand the connections between Reverend John Oliver Nelson's dream of an American Iona and the teachings of Reverend George MacLeod.

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29. Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, *Go Tell It On The Mountain, Stories of Kirkridge, 1942-1992* (Bangor: Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center, 1992), 76.

Reverend Matilda Chase joined Reverend Kathleen Roney on Iona with the pilgrim tour. Kathleen and Matilda had brought with them a great deal of material about Kirkridge and John Oliver Nelson. They also carried with them a sealed box from Kirkridge, which contained personal items of John Oliver Nelson's given to them by Reverend Jean Richardson, the Director of Kirkridge, so that the box could be buried on Iona, where John's heart intended to rest. Peter Macdonald and Matilda's husband dug the hole next to the Statue of the Fallen Christ just outside of the MacLeod Center. People from the pilgrimage group and Iona Community members, helped Reverends Macdonald, Roney, and Chase commit what remained of Reverend John Oliver Nelson to the sacred soil of Iona.



Figure 22. Reverend Matilda Chase, "Fallen Christ Statue on Iona, Scotland" (2011).

Upon Kathleen's arrival back in America, Reverend Jean Richardson, the Director of Kirkridge, called to inform her that Reverend Peter Macdonald, the Leader of the Iona Community had called from Scotland and requested to visit Kirkridge in the following

January of 2011. When that January arrived, Kathleen and Matilda met Peter Macdonald at the train station in Newark, New Jersey. Once he settled into the ride to Kirkridge, Peter asked, “How would you like Kirkridge to be a part of the Iona Community?”

The four Reverends, Peter, Jean, Matilda and Kathleen spent the next few days at Kirkridge discussing how the two communities could work together and how it would function with the Board of Directors of Kirkridge. The Board of Directors voted on the resolution to go ahead with the plans. It was decided that Matilda would be the paid staff person at Kirkridge to be the membership chairperson for the Iona - New World Foundation. The Iona Community created the Iona - New World Foundation as a means to help the Iona Community function with people in America. Kathleen was placed in charge of the programming for the Wild Goose Program as an unpaid volunteer. The Wild Goose programming would replicate the idea of the Iona Rule within common themes as reflected in so many of the Kirkridge retreats. It was further decided that Jean, Kathleen and Matilda would sit on the Board of Directors of the Iona - New World Foundation.

Peter took the resolution back to the Iona Community, which voted to adopt Kirkridge into the Iona-New World Foundation. Peter returned to Kirkridge later that year in June of 2011 for the signing of the legal agreements and to hold the first meeting of the Iona - New World Foundation. Members, Associate members, and friends of the Iona Community were invited to attend along with the board members and friends of Kirkridge.

The Iona - New World Foundation has their board meetings via Skype several times a year along with bi-annual community meetings at Kirkridge. The Foundation has



Wild Goose retreats that are open to any who wish to participate in order to explore the elements of the Rule and how it enriches one's life experience.

The first Kirkridge retreat to explore the possibility of allowing the formation of Family Groups in America, the We Are Family Retreat, was conducted by Reverend Kathleen L. Roney on March 11 through 13, 2013.



Figure 23. Reverend Matilda Chase, "Iona -New World Foundation Signing at Kirkridge," Pictured left to right, Rev. Matilda Chase, Rev. Peter Macdonald, Rev. Kathleen Roney, and Rev. Jean Richardson. (2011).

## CHAPTER 5

### WE ARE FAMILY RETREAT



Figure 24. Nancy Schreier, “Welcome To Kirkridge” (2012).

With the advent of the Iona - New World Foundation and knowledge that the Iona Family Groups were the vehicle by which the Iona Community expands, it became necessary to gauge just how Family Groups would be formed in America and how they would function in the American setting. The American anchor of the Iona - New World Foundation is the Kirkridge Retreat Center. In keeping with the tradition of holding retreats to express new ideas and to develop interest in a concept, it was theorized by the candidate that conducting a retreat called We Are Family at the Kirkridge Retreat Center would be the best way to explore the prospect of and find the reactions to forming Family

Groups in America. The retreat would seek answers to some important questions. Would American Family Group members be able to build their own self-reinforcing system through practice of the Iona Rule through Family Groups in order to help its members live out their Christian commitment throughout the world? Would there even be interest in the dedication to spirituality required within the Family Group model in the American Setting?

The candidate has a deeply held conviction that the retreat design should be compatible with the New Testament witness. Jesus ushered in a new Kingdom of God, which is reflected in the Iona Rule, the guide by which the Iona Community organizes its life and ministry. Central to the Iona Rule is the study of the scriptures, worship, meditation, peace and justice activities, and accounting for resources including money and time which is practiced in the Iona Community and is central to its Family Groups. These practices prepare Christians for hands-on service to each other and to others in the real world. The retreat described below was aimed at exploring the potential of this faith formation through Family Groups established in America by the Iona - New World Foundation. The retreat would include presentations by a number of qualified persons who would provide substance for reflections on the nature of Family Groups and the possibility and viability of creating American Iona Family Groups. These presentations would detail the history of the founding of Iona and define the five-fold Iona Rule for practical use by identifying the following: how commitment to one's Family Group would work within an individual's Christian faith; explore the criteria of who would make up Family Groups in America; promote understanding of how the American culture influences these Family Groups; clarify what it would take to form Family Groups; and

stimulate thinking about how the Family Group would look in an American setting and culture.

The We Are Family Retreat had to be rescheduled from October 29th through the 31<sup>st</sup> in 2012 due to Super Storm Sandy hitting the Kirkridge Retreat Center. Most of the participants were able to reschedule and attend from March 11<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> in 2013. Reverend Katherine Rennie had flown in from Scotland for the October retreat dates but could not come back in March, so her Family Group presentations were done via Skype.

### **Lay Advisory Committee**

The Lay Advisory Committee, which was formed for the purpose of developing and conducting the We Are Family Retreat, supported and participated in everything from assisting in forming retreat concepts to developing an aspect of the Iona Rule as a presentation topic. They helped in advertising and recruitment of participants, contributing input to participant information packets, and presenting retreat workshops on their Iona Rule topic in lecture format along with supporting handouts and personal exercises. Every member of the Lay Advisory Committee was an essential part of testing the theory that American Family Groups would be a resilient addition to the growth of the Iona Community Family Groups in American. As is true to the Family Group format of worshipping, participating, and learning together, each of the presenters also participated in every other presenter's workshop. Their expertise and creativity were essential to the success of the retreat and they each deserve recognition. The personal information that follows was supplied to the candidate by each presenter so their biographies could be included in the We Are Family Retreat booklet.

## Presenters

Reverend Dr. Jean Richardson conducted the “Welcome to Kirkridge” introduction and gave a “Short History of Kirkridge” along with leading the “Meaning of Community and The Importance of Community in Our Lives” workshop. She has been the Kirkridge Retreat Center Director since 2005. She is a trained facilitator of the Center for Courage and Renewal and an ordained Presbyterian minister. She has worked the last fifteen years in retreat ministry and is an Iona - New World Foundation Board member.

Reverend Katherine Rennie presented “Family Groups and How They Work,” along with “Family Groups and The Iona Rule.” Her presentations were done from Scotland via Skype and were co-presented and supported by the candidate, Reverend Kathleen Roney, who was able to pass out the handouts and lead the discussion groups. Reverend Rennie was born and brought up in Glasgow, Scotland. She spent her working life in England practicing as a solicitor. She specialized in family and mental health matters, but is also a trained mediator. As a Member of the Iona Community since 2005, Reverend Rennie has worked on Iona as a volunteer and as a resident staff member. She has served on a number of Iona committees, including the Iona Committee which oversees the island centers. She is currently serving as a local Preacher with the Methodist Church and is a sitting member on the Council of the Iona Community as a Family Group Convener Representative.

Reverend Matilda Chase presented “Mutual Accountability for Use of Time and Money in Our Lives” and led the Opening and Closing Worship in the Worship Center each morning and evening during the retreat. She is a Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church, currently serving as a temporary Preacher at the Olivet United Presbyterian

Church in Easton, Pennsylvania. Before answering God's call to ordained ministry as a Teaching Elder, Reverend Chase worked in the corporate world of banking, finance, computer systems design, and installation. She is on the Board of the Kirkridge Retreat Center as their Treasurer and as Moderator of Lehigh Presbytery's Lead Team. She also works part-time for the Iona - New World Foundation at Kirkridge and is also an Associate member of the Iona Community.

Reverend Cindy Garis, M. Div., presented the "Personal Spirituality - Bible Study and Prayer" workshop. She also co-led the Closing Worship on the last evening with Reverend Chase. Reverend Garis is the Executive Director of the Oasis Ministries and serves Oasis as her primary call to ministry, encouraging all to explore a deepening spiritual life. She is a graduate of Oasis' Spiritual Direction for Spiritual Guides program. She has a Master's degree in Divinity from Lancaster Theological Seminary, and is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Prior to Oasis, Reverend Garis served as a co-pastor for six years to a congregation in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. She has visited Iona and is very interested in living out the Iona Rule.

Reverend Robert G. Coombe conducted the "Peace and Justice in Your local Community and The International Community" workshop. He has a Master of Divinity degree from Wesley Theological Seminary and has been the Pastor of the Yardley United Methodist Church since 2005. He works with the Ecumenical Working Group for Middle East Peace and the Interfaith Community for Middle East Peace. He enjoys the diversity that his travel brings to his spiritual life. Currently, Bob is the Treasurer and Membership Secretary for the Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the Methodist Federation for Social Action. He serves as a Board Member for several organizations including the Methodist

Services for Children and Families, the Philadelphia Unemployment Project, and the Kirkridge Retreat Center.

Reverend Dr. Cynthia Alloway, RN, MSN, M. Div., served as a Lay Advisory Committee person. She was originally going to present the topic of “Peace and Justice in Your Local Community” with Reverend Bob Coombe, but rescheduling left her unable to attend in March. Her presentation materials were used by Reverend Coombe. Reverend Alloway has been a minister at The Presbyterian Church in Morristown since 2006. She received her Master’s degree in Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2003 and became certified as a forensic nurse in 2004. She has a Master’s degree in Mental Health from UCSF in San Francisco and a Doctorate of Ministry in Science and Theology from the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Providing healthcare and advocacy for the oppressed and victimized people in our world has been a life-long calling. She continues her work in The Foundation for Peace, which she co-founded, and she is also an Associate member of the Iona Community.

Dr. William Presnell, D. Min., served as Doctoral Advisor to Reverend Roney. He conducted the Final Retreat Personal Evaluation, Overall Retreat Analysis, and Doctoral Candidate Survey period on the final morning of the retreat and he led the final Group Discussion. He is an Adjunct Professor at Drew University and served four years as Associate Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program. He is an ordained United Methodist Minister and licensed Marital and Family Therapist, Trainer, Pastoral Counselor, and seminary teacher. He serves as Consultant to churches, educational institutions, businesses and community groups and has an office in Madison, New Jersey. Dr. Presnell is interested in the advocacy of faith-based initiatives for sustainable care of

the environment, and is a member of the “Green Committee” at Stanley Congregational Church. In addition to other published articles and manuals, Dr. Presnell is co-author of *Narrative Research in Ministry* with Carl Savage, Wayne Oates Institute, 2008; and “Getting the Idea of Narrative,” *Wayne Oates Online Journal*, 2010.

Reverend Kathleen L. Roney created and led the We Are Family Retreat for the purpose of exploring the possibility of having Family Groups in America and determining how they might look in the American setting. She co-presented “Family Groups and How They Work,” along with “Family Groups and The Iona Rule” with Reverend Rennie. She also conducted all discussion groups with topic presenters immediately following each presentation. Reverend Roney is a candidate for a Doctor of Ministry degree in Spirituality from the Theological School of Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. She is an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches, USA. She has been the Director of Chaplains for the Somerset County Jail since 1985 and has been the Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Morristown for the last five years. She is a graduate of Oasis' program, Spiritual Direction for Spiritual Guides. She is in charge of the Wild Goose Programming of the Iona - New World Foundation and in that position she recruits speakers, workshop leaders, and helps with setting up the workshops and publicity. Reverend Roney is currently an Associate member of the Iona Community. She serves on the Board of both, the Kirkridge Retreat Center and the Iona - New World Foundation.

### **Recruiting and Orienting Participants**

Having secured these professionals and determined their topics, it was essential to advertise to solicit retreat participants. The retreat was publicized through the Kirkridge



Retreat Center and Oasis Ministries' mailing and email lists through the use of flyers.

The retreat also received postings in the Kirkridge and Oasis Ministries' newsletters. The Iona - New World Foundation sent emails to the American Associate members of the Iona Community. This effort resulted in a total of thirteen attendees, plus the faculty advisor and the candidate.

Each participant received a packet through the mail, which contained a spiral-bound booklet with its usage explained in the following letter:

Welcome to the We Are Family Retreat!

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your participation in my Doctoral Study in this retreat. We are going to explore the concept of the Iona Family Groups and how they may function in America. The enclosed packet will provide you with the following information:

- Retreat Flyer
- A letter from Jean Richardson, the Director of Kirkridge, welcoming you to the retreat
- The Participation Consent Form, please mail back to me using SASE enclosed
- Participant Questionnaire
- Study Guide to *Living By The Rule* by Kathy Galloway
- The devotional section of the Iona Prayer Book

In order for you to get the most benefit from this workshop, I'm asking that you begin by reading the Study Guide to *Living By The Rule* by Kathy Galloway and please pay particular attention to the Iona Rule, which is the main component of the Family Groups. It is through the Family Groups that the Iona Community shares and learns the joys and difficulty of living by the Rule. I have developed the study guide to go with the book, *Living by the Rule*, by Kathy Galloway. It would be most helpful if you can acquire a copy of the book through [www.IonaBooks.com](http://www.IonaBooks.com) (search *Living by the Rule* by Kathy Galloway) or [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com).

Prior to attending the retreat, I ask that you try to practice the Rule in your own life, if only for a few days. That way, you will better understand the concepts that you will experience at the retreat. Also, you may have noticed the Predictive Questionnaire. I ask that you fill this out to the best of your ability prior to arriving at the retreat, but after you have practiced the Rule on your own.

The Iona Prayer Book is a pillar of the Iona Community. "Gathered and scattered, it is the custom of reading the Iona Prayer Book, morning and evening, that helps keep us together as a community and

closer to God.” I have included the devotional section of the Prayer Book so you may look over the prayers and use them in your own way, if desired.

On the last day of the retreat, after morning Worship, my professor, who will be in attendance, will help us conduct the final evaluation of the retreat.

I am looking forward to meeting you and journeying together as we learn about Family Groups. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me anytime.

Reverend Dr. Jean Richardson also welcomed the retreat participants with this letter on the first page of the booklet:

I want to take a few moments to thank you for your participation in this retreat. As you know, the concept of Family Groups is very important to Iona and to Kirkridge and their connection to Iona. This retreat is an important step for Reverend Kathleen Roney. She is conducting her Doctoral Project, which requires her to undertake a collaborative ministry with a project team. As attendees, you are a part of that project team. All of your questionnaires will be anonymous with only a group and participant number assigned to the information you provide. The responses to the questionnaires, as well as your participation and closing interview are an integral part of discovering the viability of Family Groups in America. Reverend Roney’s research will also play a major role in helping Kirkridge determine the steps needed to bring about Family Groups for their members. Thank you for joining us on this journey.

The Participant Consent Form made it clear to the participants that they were participating in a doctoral study and giving permission for Reverend Roney to use their anonymous answers in her thesis. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was provided to each participant for mailing convenience.

A Study Guide Companion to Kathy Galloway’s book, *Living by the Rule*, was created with the author’s permission. It was included in the booklet to prepare the participants to learn and experience an Iona Family Group in the American setting of Kirkridge with a basic understanding of the Iona Rule and how it is reinforced and accomplished through Iona Family Groups. It was a good decision because Amazon

stopped selling the book and ordering it from Scotland came with a much higher price tag and lengthy shipping time. The candidate ordered twenty copies from a Canadian distributor for the Kirkridge bookstore and offered the books to participants upon arrival at the Kirkridge Retreat Center for a small donation to Kirkridge or whatever the individual thought was appropriate.

The Participants were asked to practice the elements of the Iona Rule in their own lives in order to fill out the Predictive Questionnaire, which would be collected upon arrival at Kirkridge. They were instructed to envision any club, association, or Church that they might belong to as a Family Group and be mindful of their current religious practice as they answered the questions.

Permission was received from the Iona Community Leader, Reverend Peter Macdonald, to give the participants the devotional section of the Iona Prayer Book so they could read and be spiritually connected to the Iona Community through prayer, if so desired. Permission was required as one must be a Member or Associate member of the Iona Community to have the Iona Prayer Book, which is updated and reissued every January.

The booklets were sent out via the US Postal Service. Booklets were also sent as a PDF attachment to an email letting them know that the hard copy of the booklet was on its way to them. The participants were welcome to call Reverend Roney if they had any questions or comments. Each participant verified receipt of their packet via email.

It took significant collaboration among the Lay Advisory Committee to perfect the three-day retreat schedule, paying close attention to the needs of Reverend Rennie, who was coming into the presentation via Skype from Scotland and would be unable to

do her presentation after 11:00 pm, Scottish time. The candidate, Reverend Roney, practiced the use of Skype with Reverend Rennie so opening their presentation would go without a hitch. Meals, breaks, and topics were scheduled to reflect a communal atmosphere. On the day of the We Are Family Retreat, the candidate met with her presenters over lunch to make sure everyone had received copies of their handouts and were ready for the participants to arrive.

### **The Retreat Experience**



Figure 25. Nancy Schreier, “Reading on the Deck” (2012).

The participants were greeted by Reverend Roney and Reverend Richardson as they handed in their Predictive Questionnaires, which were immediately attached to their Participant Consent Form and assigned a Participant Number. The participants were gracious and enthusiastic, and let Reverend Roney know that they were fully committed to the project. Each person was given a Welcome Packet with their anonymous alphanumeric identifier on the survey pages of their new spiral-bound booklet, which included:

(1) a welcome letter to Kirkridge with a map so participants could take advantage of scenic walks, meditation areas and spiritual growth opportunities, (2) retreat schedule, (3) a short bio about the retreat presenters, 4) articles from the Ridgeleaf, the Kirkridge newsletter, (5) the personal accounts regarding participation in Family Groups by Reverends Rennie, Macdonald, and Dillon, (6) an article about the Iona Community from the Glasgow office, (7) “Rebuilding Our Common Life”, explaining the Iona Rule in Family Groups, (8) the Iona Prayer Book, (9) Doctoral Candidate Survey, (10) Final Retreat Personal Evaluation, and (11) Final Overall Retreat Analysis.

The We Are Family Retreat began in the Turning Point Conference Room with a short meet and greet period with refreshments and snacks for the participants. At 2:15 pm on March 11, 2013, Reverend Jean Richardson officially opened the retreat and welcomed everyone by presenting a “Short History of Kirkridge.” The introduction was followed by Reverend Chase and Reverend Roney giving a “Brief History of the Relationship between Kirkridge and Iona.”



Figure 26. Nancy Schreirer, “Turning Point Conference Room” (2012).

By 3:30 pm, the participants were ready to learn about the “History of Iona” from Reverend Katherine Rennie who spoke to them from Scotland via Skype. It was a new concept to the Iona Community to use Skype for meetings but it was important to be able to use it, especially when considering Family Groups in America. Reverend Roney assisted Reverend Rennie in the presentation of “Family Groups and How They Work” by distributing the handouts and explaining the need for having Family Groups in America in order for the Iona Community to expand through the Iona – New World Foundation. Reverend Rennie’s thick Scottish brogue and enthusiasm was comically shocking to some of the participants, who must have assumed that all of the presenters were American, but once she got going, they seemed to understand everything she said and thoroughly enjoyed the authenticity of her speaking from Scotland. She discussed how Family Groups were set up in geographical areas so it was easier for people to get together at each other’s homes and how food was usually provided with everyone contributing to a common meal. She talked about what it meant to her to be a part of an Iona Family Group, which was very similar to her write-up. She stressed the care and bond that Family Group members had for one another.

The group had a period of open discussion led by Reverend Roney before going into the “Family Groups and the Iona Rule” presentation, which was also presented by Reverends Rennie and Roney. Reverend Rennie explained that some Iona Community Members were uncomfortable with the strict interpretation of Bible-reading only and so that rule was expanded to include other types of inspirational readings and meditation. The session ended in time for a short break before gathering at 5:00 pm for the retreat’s Opening Worship in the Worship Center led by Reverend Matilda Chase.

Worship was followed by dinner in the Turning Point dining room at 6:00 pm. Dinner was served family-style and conversation almost kept participants from tasting their food. Everyone was looking forward to the open discussion on “Family Groups and the Iona Rule” led by Reverend Roney, which was to follow dinner at 7:30 pm. It was a question and answer session that Reverend Roney was well prepared for, especially since she knew that many Associate members of the Iona Community had recently felt left out of the spiritual loop by not being allowed to have Family Groups in America. It was time for the Iona Community to change and the participants who were Associate members of the Iona Community made that loud and clear. Luckily, the path was being laid at their feet through the cooperation of Kirkridge with the Iona - New World Foundation and the information collected in the retreat would be used to help ascertain the best way to proceed, if at all.

At 9:00 pm, the day’s Closing Worship was led by Reverend Chase and Reverend Roney so that each participant could feel what it was like to practice the daily devotion in a communal setting twice daily as was done by St. Columba and MacLeod. Exhausted from a day of travel and introduction, the participants retired for the evening.

The second day, March 12, 2013, began with breakfast in the Turning Point dining room, followed by worship led by Reverend Chase. This day followed a slightly different format. Each presentation was followed by the participants breaking into Family Groups for group discussions and then they came back together for open discussion led by Reverend Roney. The purpose of the Family Group discussion format was to allow each participant to discuss how they felt when they practiced the Rule, what part of the Rule helped them and what part of the Rule might hinder their ability to practice the Rule

within their daily lives. They all seemed to have many different definitions of the Rule as it applied to each individual and how it assisted them in their daily spiritual life.

At 9:30 am, Reverend Chase presented “Mutual Accountability for Use of Time and Money.” The participants were given a worksheet so they could see how the Family Groups in Scotland looked at the breakdown of use of time and money. It was helpful to many to see the structural guide in order to relate it to their own personal finances and use of personal time. Initially, participants felt that accounting to one another in a Family Group would be very restrictive, yet upon learning more, it became evident that consensus within a Family Group led to having more freedom with respect to choices as to how money and resources should be allocated among societal or Family Group needs.

After breaking for lunch at 12:30, the afternoon began at 2:00 pm with Reverend Cindy Garis presenting “Personal Spirituality - Bible Study and Prayer.” Reverend Garis proved to be the most animated speaker with body movements to go with prayer in order to emphasize a holistic focus on spirituality. She illustrated some motivational points by showing how important it is to incorporate body, mind and spirit in an individual’s spiritual walk through life.

After a short break, Reverend Dr. Jean Richardson presented “Community - The Meaning of Community and The Importance of Community in Our Lives.” She used the power of story-telling to tell the story of a small town in the slate belt of Pennsylvania and how community played such a vital part in their physical and mental wellbeing. It was a moving story and emphasized that we have lost the sense of community as a society by moving apart from each other spiritually and physically. Reverend Richardson



led and had everyone join an Irish Pub song as an example of community at the end of her talk. It was a real fun way to make a very clear point.

At 6:30 pm, everyone was seated for dinner and people were tired, but there was much conversation about how participants were going to be able to integrate the Rule and some of the new ideas into their own lives when they got home. They all seemed to have a joyful laughter in their voices along with serious contemplation of their ability to organically form a sense of community. In that setting, they were very open and honest in discussing their own lives in a way that did not occur at the meal on the first night.

Reverend Bob Coombe presented “Peace and Justice in Your local Community and The International Community” at 7:45 pm that evening. He used the wealth of personal experience that he had from serving with peace and justice organizations throughout his life. His first-hand experience was invaluable and inspiring. He challenged everyone to look beyond their comfort zone to find ways to work for peace and justice that were radically different from their normal activities and that might truly make a difference in their own lives as well as the lives of others. This was the final presentation where the participants broke into Family Groups before returning together for open discussion. Many pointed out that some of his ideas would work well in the loosely associated groups that they were a part of back home. They were all hoping that the Iona Community would very seriously consider Family Groups in America. They appreciated being in touch with others who were not totally consumer-minded. There was comfort within this group that seemed to focus on spiritual health accompanying physical and financial well-being.

Reverend Garis led the evening worship with Reverend Chase. It was a beautifully tradition Iona Prayer service that would have been experienced inside the Iona Abbey. The worship was followed by a late-night “Wine & Cheese and Chocolate & Whiskey Night Cap” reception.

On the morning of the third day, March 13<sup>th</sup>, Reverend Chase and Reverend Roney led the Morning Worship after breakfast. Communion service was conducted to reflect the way it would be experienced in the Iona Abbey. The actual service from the Iona Prayer Book was used and seemed to be a moving experience for all involved. The Worship was followed by a short break so participants could finish packing, if so desired.

At 9:45 am, Dr. Presnell met with all participants in the Turning Point Conference Room to give the final overview and instruction to completing the questionnaires and evaluations. He opened by reintroducing himself to the group and reminded everyone of the purpose of the retreat. The papers were collected once he gave them time to finish filling out everything. He thanked everyone for their participation and collected all of the questionnaires and evaluations, which left the retreat in his possession and remained with Dr. Presnell until permission was formally given to the candidate to write this thesis. Everyone enjoyed Dr. Presnell’s patience and his openness of attitude. At all times, his demeanor expressed great interest in whatever was going on, lending a comfortable and focused atmosphere to his overall presence.

By 12:30, everyone gathered for a farewell lunch. People did not linger as many had quite a bit of travel ahead of them, but conversation did reflect the overall satisfaction and appreciation for the learning that they had experienced over the three-day retreat. Some were very enthusiastic toward the prospect of Family Groups in America and

looked forward to their participation having a hand in renewing conversations within the Iona Community about beginning Family Groups in America. Each participant thanked Reverend Roney personally for organizing the retreat. Several people inquired about future retreats and get-togethers. Every participant wanted to be personally notified if or when Iona Family Groups were approved by the Iona Community to begin in America.

Reverend Roney thanked everyone for their participation, including the presenters and the Kirkridge staff who helped the We Are Family Retreat go off without a hitch and made the entire retreat experience a worthwhile and memorable time at Kirkridge.



Figure 27. Nancy Schreier, “Reflection with Nature at Kirkridge” (2012).

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **RETREAT DISCOVERIES AND EVALUATIONS**

As a part of this doctoral project the candidate designed several evaluation instruments to be administered to retreat participants, which the Lay Advisory Committee approved for use and recommended changes as necessary. The Predictive Questionnaire was sent with retreat materials prior to the retreat and was handed back on the first day of the retreat at the Kirkridge Retreat Center. The Doctoral Candidate Survey and the Final Retreat Personal Evaluation were completed on the last day of the retreat. In addition, a free and open discussion and an Overall Retreat Analysis of the retreat experience was offered to all participants at the end of the retreat.

#### **Predictive Questionnaire**

The purpose of the Predictive Questionnaire was to help the candidate to determine if suppositions about the Family Group experience, based on the information supplied to the participants, would deviate from determinations made after practice of the information at the retreat. If there was a large gap between the expectation expressed in the Predictive Questionnaire and their answers in the Candidate Survey, Final Retreat Personal Evaluation, and Overall Retreat Analysis, then the preliminary information supplied to the We Are Family Retreat participants would need to be changed for future retreats by the Iona - New World Foundation. It is the belief of the candidate that a basic

initial understanding of the Iona Rule and Family Groups is essential to assist the participants in preparation for more in-depth learning about the Iona Rule and experiencing Family Group function at the retreat.

Participants were asked to practice the Iona Rule in their own lives until the retreat. Since none were part of an actual Iona Family Group, they were instructed to envision a club, association, or church that they may belong to as a Family Group. They were to be mindful of their current religious practice as they answered the anonymous Predictive Questionnaire and were informed that the information would be used in Reverend Kathleen Roney's thesis and by Kirkridge Retreat Center to further the investigation of Family Groups in America. The Predictive Questionnaires were attached to their signed Participant Consent Forms and each participant was given an alphanumeric identifier, 1-A, 1-B, through to 1-M for a total of thirteen participants. Two participants, 1-J and 1-L, did not complete the Predictive Questionnaire and since it was not mandatory for participation, all findings for the following questions are based on a count of eleven participants:

(1) How many days were you able to practice the Iona Rule(s)? All but one practiced what they considered to be adherence to the Rule for a minimum of one week, with a range dispersion of up to every day of their lives for a 91% practice rate.

(2) What would it be like if you were accountable for that practice to a group of people who were also working within that practice? Accountability to a group would be welcoming, helpful, and supportive for 82% of the participants, with 18% expanding the idea to be considered transformative and incentivizing to practice of the Rule, yielding a 100% overall positive response.

(3) How did this religious lifestyle fit into your current life? Daily practice was not attainable for 45% because their life schedules were inconsistent and prevented daily devotion. The other 55% felt that this religious lifestyle fit into their lives very well due to either the structure of their daily schedule or because they had the self-discipline to make the lifestyle work.

(4) What parts of the Iona Rule(s) were incorporated into your life most easily? All but one participant found daily prayer and Bible-reading to be the easiest to incorporate into their lives for a 91% majority, while only one person explained that action for peace and justice was easiest as it was the basis for this participant's ministry.

(5) Which Iona Rule(s) is the most difficult for you to follow? All participants, 100%, found it difficult to account to others, though the qualifying factors ranged from lack of time to meet with others, to finding it difficult to share intimate details of use of time and money.

(6) Was there any internal, family, or scheduling conflicts encountered when practicing the Iona Rule(s)? Only 18% had no difficulty or conflicts, but 82% cited scheduling around travel or lack of support in their family life as obstacles.

(7) Will you be able to live within the Iona Rule(s), Family Groups, and Worship at the retreat? Most, 82%, answered with a definitive "yes" and the other two, 18%, indicated that they would try and do their best.

(8) Would you be able to maintain the Iona Rule(s) and Family Group in your American household, work life, and spiritual worship? Please explain for all three settings. Three participants, 27%, wanted to learn more before making any solid judgment with regard to the three settings. Regarding the household setting, 73% of the

group, which is 100% of those who answered the question, indicated that they would be able to maintain the Iona Rule within Family Groups. Only 18% felt they could extend the practice into work life and the other 82% either skipped the answer or hedged by explaining that they might be able to do more or that it would be difficult. All but one of the eight who answered the question thought their spiritual life would foster living within the Rule for a 64% positive result for those answering the question.

Most participants were able to predict that Iona-style worship and practice of the Rule would be a welcome addition to their lives if they could practice within a Family Group. Integration of the Rule into their home life would require schedule adjustments as many lives seem to follow an inconsistent work and travel schedule. Also, overall family ideals may not match those required for the participant to bring their family into practicing the Iona Rule. Only two participants felt that they would be able to incorporate specific religious practice into a busy work life. Therefore, practice of the Iona Rule was overwhelmingly predicted to be dependent on the retreat and/or a Family Group providing the place and vehicle for practice of every part of the Rule.

Most participants were already using some sort of daily prayer and Bible-reading which allowed them to feel as though they were able to practice the Rule ahead of time. With respect to accountability, every participant felt that accounting to a group regarding adherence to the Rule would be incentivizing and helpful, but accounting within that group about the use of time and money would be the most difficult part of the Rule to follow. Their explanation seemed to be that Americans are famous for discussing even the smallest details of their personal lives with strangers, but when it comes to money, particularly how much is earned, we are taught from a very early age that the topic is

taboo in public discussions, so it would pose a hurdle for any Americans joining a Family Group.

### **Doctoral Candidate Survey**

On the last morning of the retreat, Doctoral Candidate Surveys were filled out by the participants and two participants, 1-D and 1-H, did not submit the survey. Once again, it was not a condition of their participation. Of the eleven who participated in the survey, they submitted the following answers to the evaluation questions regarding Reverend Kathleen Roney as project manager of the retreat. Two of the participants who answered the questions, did not answer all of the questions, so the percentages that follow are not perfectly consistent. They were asked to circle one rating, choosing from excellent, very good, good, somewhat poor, and very poor to supply a rating of each of the following questions:

(1) How would you rate the materials that you received prior to attending this retreat in terms of presentation, usability and topic relevancy? Regarding the presentation, 60% rated the presentation of the introductory materials as excellent, 20% as very good, and 20% as good. Regarding usability, 44% rated the usability of the introductory materials as excellent, 44% as very good, and 12% as good. Regarding topic relevancy, 60% rated the relevancy of the introductory materials as excellent, 30% as very good, and 10% as good.

(2) Upon arrival, how would you rate your reception and introduction to the retreat? Concerning the reception and introduction, 27% rated them as excellent, 45% as



very good, 22% as good, and 9%, one person, rated them as somewhat poor with a note explaining that she did not know where to go at check in.

**(3)** How would you rate Reverend Roney's ability to connect with you personally? The majority of participants, 60%, thought the candidate did an excellent job of connecting with them personally, 30% as very good, and 10% as good.

**(4)** How well do you feel the retreat was organized in terms of topic building? Most participants, 64%, rated topic building as excellent, 27% as very good, and 9% as good.

**(5)** How well versed were the presenters in their topics? Regarding the presenters, 70% felt that they were excellent in their topics, 20% rated them as very good, and only 10% gave the median rating of good.

**(6)** Please rate your overall understanding of Family Groups by the end of the retreat. In overall understanding, 36% rated their knowledge of Family Groups as excellent, while the remaining 64% were confident that their understanding was very good.

**(7)** What did you think about breaking into Family Groups for topic discussions? The participants were divided, with 36% regarded the experience as excellent, 36% felt it was very good, and 27% rated it as a good experience.

**(8)** How would you rate your relationship to other participants in your Family Groups? Even though the participants did not know each other prior to the retreat, except for one couple, 27% rated the relationship with Family Group members as excellent, 55% as very good, and 18% thought the relationships were good.

(9) Was the information shared by the presenters relevant to what you expected to learn? The results were split with 45% feeling the information presented was exactly what they expected to learn and rated it as excellent, while the other 55% gave a rating of very good, which means they got what they expected with a few surprises.

(10) How would you rate the likelihood of attending another retreat led by Reverend Roney? Every participant indicated that the likelihood was good or better with 36% indicating the prospect was excellent, 27% as very good, and 27% indicating the likelihood was good that they would attend another retreat led by the candidate.

When comparing the Predictive Questionnaire responses to the participants' responses in the first question above, there does not appear to be a need to change out any pre-retreat materials with any substitutes. The presentation, usability, and relevancy of the materials supplied were for the most part considered to be excellent, without any negative feedback. If there is additional information to add, then it should be added, but should not replace any materials existing in the packet.

The participants felt that Reverend Roney made a personal connection with each of them. The way the retreat topics built upon one another was excellent. The majority felt that the superior knowledge of the presenters within each of their topics led to a firm understanding of the Rule and Family Groups.

Regarding Family Groups, as a way of dividing the participants into smaller discussion groups, it seems to be a unique approach that was appreciated and enjoyed by the participants. Overwhelmingly, the results were positive and given future opportunities, it would be safe to draw the conclusion that the participants would attend

future retreats and continue working toward furthering the development of Family Groups in America and their own personal devotion to the Rule.

### **Final Retreat Personal Evaluation**

In the Final Retreat Personal Evaluation, participants were instructed to use the questions as a guide to their critical thinking as they practiced the Iona Rule and learned more about the Iona Family Groups and Worship. The final evaluation was each participant's personal evaluation of The Iona Rule, Family Groups, and Worship practice as experienced by each at the Kirkridge Retreat Center. They were asked to add specific detail whenever possible. Again, they were assured that their answers would be extremely helpful in determining whether or not Family Groups would be viable in the American setting. All participants completed this evaluation.

(1) Were you able to be accountable to each other within the Family Groups at the retreat? The majority, at 69%, responded with a definitive "yes" and expanded their explanations to state that the sessions were honest and it seemed that most people were open with each other. They also expressed that an enjoyable aspect of the retreat was time spent in Family Groups, which seemed to be too short. The other 31% felt that accountability required relationship history and time to develop trust. Even though they may have listened, shared, and enjoyed the time together, they thought true accountability was not possible to develop in a three-day time period.

(2) How would you be able to fit this worship practice into your current lives? Most of the participants, 77%, felt that daily devotional prayer, Bible-reading and possibly morning worship could continue as a part of the daily rhythm of their lives, but

that for the most part, it would be conducted alone unless a spouse or other like-minded individuals would join them. They felt bringing another family member on board or finding the right group might be challenging. The other 23% were not sure if it was possible and had concerns that it needed real life testing and were afraid of lapsing into mindless repetition, which is not the intended result.

(3) What are the potential conflicts that you would have in your life with the Iona Rule, Family Groups and Worship practice, if any? The responses were evenly divided by participants placing themselves among four categories of conflict with a result of 25% in each category. One participant did not respond to the question and that is the reason for the even division.

The lack of time in a hectic life with scheduling conflicts was explained as having a participant torn between family, work, and other spiritual commitments. To expect regular travel from full-time employed Americans with families for Family Group meetings or even daily worship would be too much to ask and not practical. While willingness was there, time seemed to be the major resource in short supply.

Others felt that establishing a Family Group with discipline and accountability could be difficult. Regional differences among people who might join a Family Group just because it was the only one available could cause the differences among those people to affect local practices.

Negotiating relationships, including family, when trying to encourage commitment and relationships of trust in a Family Group might be difficult. Some were not sure their families would understand and might not have the spiritual strength to stand alone. Another was not sure how to find local like-minded people in agreement with the

Rule who would be willing to be accountable and provide support. Everyone would need to be comfortable with the Rule and with each other to share financial information.

The final three seemed to fear or have a problem with commitment to a devotional group. While only one expressed doubts in personal ability, the other two had misgivings about the reliability of others to show up, be committed, or trust the ability of others to keep Family Group matters as confidential.

Overall, participants were confident in their own abilities to be intentionally devoted, but had doubts about the effects of other influencing factors that most seemed to indicate are beyond their personal control. Sometimes personal fear and the complexity of some issues can prohibit some Americans from doing anything at all.

(4) What are the practices most easily incorporated? The practices most easily incorporated into the lives of 75% of the participants are those that can be performed alone such as prayer, Bible-reading, personal spiritual practice, or devotion. The other 25% were either looking forward to incorporating peace and justice into their daily lives or already do have action for peace and justice as a part of their lives. One participant did not answer this question.

(5) Will you continue this spiritual practice beyond the Kirkridge Retreat Center? While 69% of the participants said that they would definitely continue because they are already used to using the material every day or the retreat had cemented their intentions, the other 31% said that they would try or that they would be unable at this time in their lives due to travel or time constraints.

(6) Will you have to make any significant changes in daily life or current family routines? Most would not have to change their daily prayer practices, but only two, 17%,

would not have to change anything to continue what they learned at the Kirkridge Retreat Center. The other 83% indicated that something would have to change, whether it be worshipping alone, trying to be more intentional or conscientious about personal financial accountability or peace and justice issues. One person did not give an answer.

(7) Would you be able to be accountable to a Family Group outside of this retreat setting? A remarkable 77% responded that they would be able to be accountable to a Family Group beyond the retreat if one was available within a reasonable distance. Only 23% indicated that more work is needed in laying the groundwork for Family Groups in America or that it was not possible at this time.

(8) Would you be able to be accountable to a Family Group outside of your own household? It was surprising that 85% of the participants responded that they would be able to enter into a Family Group beyond the constraints of their household. Of the 85%, only two indicated that it would be preferable to have their spouse join or that a suitable group was a qualifier. The other two, 15%, did not see it as being possible at this point in their lives.

(9) What aspects of the Family Group are you interested in keeping for daily practice? Only one participant could not think of an answer and another could not think of anything that could be done on a daily basis with a Family Group. One participant would like to be in an intentional community but did not specify keeping the Rule. Prayer and Bible-reading, along with general spirituality and devotional practices such as meditation and taking walks seemed to have the majority at 77%. These ideas were expanded by a sort of romance with the idea of trust and honesty within a community for

the purpose of mutual support as if it were what was missing in the participants' current practices.

**(10)** Do you feel that you now have a working knowledge of Family Groups?

Affirmatively, 100% said that they did now have a working knowledge of Family Groups. Although some had a working knowledge prior to attendance, splitting up into Family Groups to discuss each rule gave each one a sense of what a real Family Group would look and feel like.

**(11)** Do you think an American Iona Community would be successful here in the USA? A majority of the participants, 67%, felt that an American Iona Community would definitely be successful and 33% expressed some doubt and felt that it might be successful. Almost all of their answers were centered on membership in Family Groups. One participant did not answer the question.

The overall theme expressed by those who thought an American Iona Community would be successful was that a spiritual yearning exists in this country that can be felt throughout today's society. Many sensed that the discipline of devotion was waning in the busy lives of most Americans and that having a safe place via an Iona Family Group with the spiritual support of like-minded individuals would go a long way to restoring devotional worship and personal relationships with God and Christ. Although membership in Family Groups would not require too much adjustment for the retreat participants themselves, bringing family and significant relations into the fold would need work. Since Family Groups were not seen to be culturally specific to Scotland, the value of Family Groups in education alone would assist the American journey toward spiritual growth.

In terms of preparation for Family Groups in American, it was thought that bringing together Associate members in order to survey how they thought Family Groups could be organized according to region, specific structure, and spiritual priorities would be important. American Associate members are thought to have specific knowledge as to how regional Family Groups would work because they are the ones who know what's missing in their practice. Of course, any Associate member who has been to Iona understands the yearning for the realness that accompanies the Iona experience. Even if regional Family Groups could only meet once a year due to distance travel, the Iona Rule allows for the deeper connection to happen in constructive and creative ways.

Of the participants who were not sure of the success of an American Iona Community, there was an overriding sense that distance could pose a problem to the formation of Family Groups. Scotland is comparable to the size to only one small state in this very large country of fifty states. The difficulties that distance could cause might impede the face-to-face function of Family Groups in America. The distance problem may justify the hesitancy on the part of the Iona Community Leader, Reverend Peter Macdonald, to authorize American Family Groups right away. Everyone felt that face-to-face contact within the Family Group was critical to developing trust, which most did feel was essential to a successful Family Group. Because of distances issues, it might be difficult to maintain a similar level of attendance commitment that they have attained in Scotland. This question of commitment led one participant to ask if an Iona franchise was necessary in America at all. Perhaps a homegrown movement might work better. As one participant described it, the intentional community concept of Iona seemed to be counter-cultural to the American experience.



An initial Mid-Atlantic Family Group was suggested, with smaller regional groups voluntarily adhering to the five-fold Rule. This would enable a smaller, more controlled beginning as Associate members are only required to participate in the daily devotion. There was concern expressed that training connected to living out the Iona Rule would be centered around a place in America and that distance and money would be a constant concern when planning meetings for regional groups. Since the daily devotion is already seen as being successful for Americans, small steps were preferred to the ambition of a nation-wide rollout.

**(12)** What do you think Family Groups practiced in America would look like? How would you overcome obstacles or take advantage of technology? Please detail your vision. You may use any other cultural/religious practices that you have knowledge of as a reference in your explanation.

It was suggested that practice of the Iona Rule and membership in Family Groups might have to be attached to a ministry, which would impose a hierarchical structure. It was that participant's experience that intentional communities would only last as long as the ongoing learning. Learning and training could come through the Family Groups and be reinforced with quarterly regional meetings pertaining more to the ministry. Webinars and retreats as part of a curriculum-based model were suggested and seen as a great way to reinforce learning and answer general questions.

In order to balance the ministry and Family Groups, the creation of safe space would be critical, but unfortunately, people's definition of safe space often differs. This feeling was continued by another participant who said that participation in a small group for nine years led to tremendous caring for one another within the group. Family Group

would strengthen personal bonds by forming small faith-based support groups that meet once a month for meals and sharing. Adding accountability would be new, but ultimately would be helpful to a trusting group.

The overall sense that technology could not replace the integrity of the face-to-face contact needed to promote and keep trust among a Family Group was evident. Some felt that technology might make people lazy and hurt the effort, while others felt that meetings could be enhanced by people staying connected via a Facebook group or email. Not allowing technology use at meeting might cause a problem for some people. Whereas others felt that technology would definitely detract from a feeling that Family Group was a safe place. The need to maintain contact between monthly meetings in order to build and keep trust enough to share financial accountability was important to most. In America, contact is primarily kept through email, Facebook, and phone calls at present. One participant suggested that meeting face-to-face should be mandatory for the first meeting, but Skype could be used for those who could not travel due to time, money or distance after that. Another participant insisted that they would not be able to trust people enough to fully share information through electronic contact and insisted that making personal eye contact and reading body movements in all conversation was essential.

Monthly Family Group meetings was the consensus, and although it might not be exactly like Family Groups in Scotland, the Iona Rule was seen to provide enough structure without imposing too much rigidity for Americans to adapt. One participant felt that overthinking a Family Group was not required as the Holy Spirit will shape the movement. There might not even be a need to adapt Family Groups to America. It was explained that when a person adopts a religious belief or becomes part of a movement,

they learn, train, and immerse themselves in the discipline in order to adapt their education to fit their cultural lifestyle. Monthly Family Group meetings could work in America as long as the proper accounting is made within the Family Groups and to the Iona Community. The accounting process is the connection that would make it less likely that the Family Groups would become unresponsive to the movement as a whole, which is a common phenomenon in many church communities in America today.

Because of the immense size of America, advertising was thought to be needed in order to recruit like-minded people, which many did acknowledge would be a big challenge. Unfortunately, people often think they are like-minded until some act is required of them. Peace and justice activities would sort most of them out. One must also consider that advertising religious movements in America can be tricky and would require political correctness. Advertising would need to be kept within established faith-based channels. Affiliation with Iona was attractive to most participants and mandatory for others. The Iona connection is what led the participants to the retreat in the first place, so specifically being part of the Iona Community would be paramount to the success in even recruiting for future retreats regarding forming Iona Family Groups in America.

### **Overall Retreat Analysis**

(1) Was the study packet that you received prior to the retreat, foundation enough to create an interest in learning more about Family Groups and the Iona Rule? Twelve of the participants that answered the question indicated that the study packet received prior to the retreat was a good resource, informative, and very helpful for a 100% positive response. Kathy Galloway's book, *Living by the Rule*, and the study guide were

supportive, too. One participant did add that the rescheduling of the retreat due to Super Storm Sandy was a disadvantage but that person would have been even more disadvantaged by being in the path of falling trees. The completeness of the information was what made another participant willing to reschedule.

(2) Did the retreat satisfy the expectation that you had, prior to arrival, regarding the level of understanding that you expected to receive about Family Groups? All of the participants, 100%, were satisfied with the retreat meeting their expectations. Again, one answer was missing. Most reported that the retreat exceeded their expectation with the high level of organization and committed participation in learning that they had experienced. The leader and presenters were very knowledgeable. The model used for learning, using a large group and then transitioning into smaller groups, was well liked. More down time to allow participants to process the learning might be a consideration in the future. It pulled Iona, Family Groups, and spirituality together for those who could not quite put it all together in their own mind prior to the retreat.

(3) Were the retreat ideas and materials introduced in a way that allowed you to build understanding for practice of the Iona Rule? Every participant responded to this question and 100% indicated that they were able to build understanding for practicing the Iona Rule. The affirmations were expanded with helpful comments. A couple participants thought it was understandably pressed for time given the three-day period but that practice time should be expanded somehow. One believed that it might be beneficial to offer a series of retreats for each rule, which would give space and time for more digestion of the ideas, practice and questions. Others felt they now had a very clear idea

of how to use the Rule and thoroughly enjoyed the presentations with the integration of the workshops.

(4) Did any particular presentation resonate more strongly with you? The variety of presentation styles made the overall retreat very interesting and several participants felt that every presentation resonated strongly with them. Reverend Dr. Jean Richardson's presentation on "Meaning of Community and The Importance of Community in Our Lives" was mentioned as one of the best by eight of the participants. The storytelling method that she used was very much appreciated and engaging. Reverend Bob Coombe's "Peace and Justice in Your local Community and The International Community" talk came in second with six participants mentioning his as one of the best. One participant felt Reverend Coombe was straight forward but powerful. Reverend Katherine Rennie's appearance from Scotland via Skype for her presentations on "Family Groups and How They Work," and "Family Groups and The Iona Rule." was extremely interesting and gave a perspective of how Family Groups have impacted an individual's life. Reverend Cindy Garis's actual experience for use of prayers was welcome and very well liked in her workshop on "Personal Spirituality - Bible Study and Prayer." One participant expressed that Reverend Matilda Chase's "Mutual Accountability for Use of Time and Money in Our Lives" presentation made the accountability, spiritual, and personal disciplines she discussed feel almost tailored to that participant's specific needs. All participants were on a first-name basis with the presenters as they really seemed to have made personal connections.

(5) What were the influencing factors of your favorite presentation? For most, 61%, storytelling and real life lessons made the information easy to remember and

enabled participants to relate it to their own lives. They felt that the lessons were far-reaching and applicable outside of the Iona Rule and Family Groups. Some participants, 23% felt that it was difficult to pinpoint any one presentation as having the influencing factor. Every presentation had important topics that influenced them and got them thinking in new directions. The final 16% found the full participation in prayer and the Family Group modeling to be the most stimulating factor.

(6) Did you feel the process of listening to a topic presentation and then breaking into Family Groups for group reflection was a good method for learning the principals and how a Family Group uses time together? All participants, 100% found breaking into Family Groups to be a good opportunity to practice and discuss what they had just heard in the presentation. It was a good method of experiencing Family Groups, and it served as a very useful way to explore topics together in a more intimate setting. The participants enjoyed the practice of what Family Groups may have to offer by way of encouragement, mentoring, and accountability. It put realness into the meaning of Family Groups and allowed for more participation by individuals who brought up important and pertinent questions in each session.

(7) If the Iona - New World Foundation (American Iona) were to run this workshop again for the purpose of implementing Family Groups in America, is there anything you would do differently? The consensus held by 61% of the participants was that they needed more time to process the information they were learning. They felt they needed to walk, pray and have more time to read the material being introduced. Adding an extra day, having more Family Group time, and more Family Group sessions were

suggested. It was acknowledged by one participant that the retreat presenters held and stimulated attention and ideas far better than other all-day retreats attended in the past.

Now that the initial Family Group retreat had been completed, it was suggested by 39% that there be less paper and more singing, have more American Associate members attend to begin regional Family Groups, and have more definitive objectives as to the expectation of the Family Groups to be formed. Clear parameters regarding distance driving, attendance, and accountability requirements for American Family Groups will allow for more practice in action to take place at future retreats.

The overall judgment was that the participants came to this retreat with the full expectation of forming Family Groups in America. Their suggestions were in line with moving forward in their expectations and looking forward to future retreats accommodating the formation of Family Groups in America, whether centralized or regionalized, across the entire USA.

### **Lay Advisory Committee Review**

After the We Are Family retreat, the Lay Advisory Committee was asked to evaluate the candidate. The questions, along with the answers are detailed in the following:

1) Do you feel that all participants were properly prepared for the We Are Family retreat by the candidate? The candidate did an excellent job of providing us with the materials we needed to prepare for the retreat. She also included us in discussions about how we should approach the retreat as leaders so that we would all be clear about our responsibilities. The candidate did a great job in communicating with attendees and making sure that every participant had a packet of information in advance. The candidate

was well organized and very clear in what she was asking the Lay Advisory Committee, presenters, and participants to do. She gave the essential information in a timely manner, which enabled committee members, presenters, and participants to be adequately prepared for the tasks she had planned for us to do.

2) Do you think that you were properly included in the retreat preparation? The candidate worked to include each committee member in not only our specific presentations and roles, but also in the layout and plan for the entire retreat. She met with us in person, on the phone, and via email. The candidate invited LAC members to help her do some of the set up before the retreat began which was also helpful. One LAC member went to Kirkridge and tested the connections for the Skype session with the candidate prior to the retreat so that we all could be confident that everything would work well. The candidate made it clear that everyone was to have a hand in the scheduling and activities beyond the specific topic that was presented and was precise as to what that would entail. She left no doubts that we were all essential to a successful retreat in total, and not just the part for which we had responsibility.

3) What are your thoughts on the leadership ability of the candidate as experienced by you at the We Are Family retreat? The candidate is very gifted at leading retreats and other sessions involving group work along with give and take in learning sessions. She does a beautiful job of making people feel welcomed and included. She led the retreat in a way that balanced all of the aspects of the retreat (separate presentations and leaders, small group break-out times, social times, hospitality welcome baskets, etc.) as well as holding an event that represented the Kirkridge Retreat Center, the Iona Community, Family Groups, Drew University and her doctoral work in the best possible



light. It could not have been easy to balance all of those things so well, but she made it look easy. The candidate was well prepared. She had a very clear objective and organized approach. Her leadership was very helpful, clear, and flexible as she had so many changes due to situations beyond her control, for which she had to make adjustments. She is well qualified to continue leading retreats.

4) How was the candidate's conduct throughout the three-day retreat? The candidate was relaxed, professional, and welcoming. She listened and responded appropriately during the retreat. She was very compassionate, responsible, and a little nervous at the very beginning of the retreat, but always gracious. Again, the candidate represented various groups very professionally. She was involved and engaged throughout the three-day retreat and was always prepared for the next step. She considered the comfort of the participants and presenters at all times.

5) Any comments that you wish to make that are not addressed in the above questions, please make them here. The candidate did several things above and beyond what the Kirkridge Retreat Center usually does for one of their retreats, including welcome gifts in each room for the participants, materials for note taking, and packets that could be used to collect and organize handouts that people received during the retreat. All of these efforts together enhanced everyone's experience. She is very intelligent and articulate. She always works to be very inclusive and to help for understanding to happen for everyone involved. Even as presenters, we felt like a fundamental part of the process and consideration in forming intentional family circles. We appreciated the opportunity to participate in this Iona-style of community building and accountability. We all thought the candidate, Reverend Roney, brought together her

experiences, ideas, and vision for what is possible to be established here in the United States.

### **Lay Advisory Committee Chair Evaluation**

Reverend Matilda Chase was the Lay Advisory Committee Chair and she submitted a summary on the candidate's Doctor of Ministry project to the candidate's faculty advisor, Dr. Presnell. Regarding the Predictive Questionnaire, Reverend Chase felt that most of the participants made an effort to practice the Iona Rule prior to attending the retreat. While all were able to practice daily prayer and Bible-reading, the rule relating to peace and justice was more difficult. Others were already practicing the disciplines in their own lives and could report the practice as doable. Accountability to a group seemed to be the most difficult rule to accomplish, which extended to some resistance in the accountability for use of money.

The evaluations with respect to the Doctoral Candidate Survey were centered on excellent and very good responses with very few responses below very good. One thing that might be improved for the future is the signage for the Kirkridge reception area, which could be a little more prominent, but Kirkridge was still making ongoing repairs due to Super Storm Sandy.

Regarding the Final Retreat Personal Evaluation, even though participants found it relatively easy to be accountable to each other in Family Group practice sessions, several participants did indicate that it would take more time to be truly honest and accountable to one another. Also, participants felt that prayer and Bible-reading were the disciplines that would be the easiest to maintain beyond the retreat as many had time and constraints in their daily lives. Though all agreed that they had a good understanding of

Family Groups after attending the retreat, they felt that finding the like-minded individuals required for starting and establishing a Family Group would be difficult. They all seemed to find being a part of a Family Group and following the Iona Rule as an attractive way of life as evidenced by their detailed and thoughtful answers. The answers reflected that those who thought Iona Community Family Groups in America would be very effective had been to Iona or were planning a trip in the future. Those who had not visited Iona were more neutral and having an Iona franchise seemed less important to reaping the overall benefits that could be found in Family Groups in America.

The Overall Retreat Analysis had been directed more toward the mechanics than the content of the retreat. Most found the study packet sent prior to the retreat to be very useful. Overall expectations of those attending the retreat had been met. The format of the retreat was found to be effective. When asked about future improvements, many mentioned allotting more time for Family Group sessions and free time for reflection, but there is not much that can be left to free time in a three-day retreat. Longer Family Group sessions could be accomplished in dedicated group practice sessions at a later retreat. All presentations and presenters were given good marks, which was to be expected as they were all professionals in their topics. The impressive Skype session with Reverend Rennie, the compelling “Community” presentation with storytelling by Reverend Richardson, and the “Peace and Justice” talk by Reverend Coombe were the highlights. The breakout sessions in Family Groups were most appreciated by the participants.

According to Reverend Chase, in summation, “the retreat was quite successful when one reviewed the comments in the various evaluations. There were several provocative ideas and suggestions that added real value to the responses that were given.

Clearly, the individuals who attended this retreat were very interested in the topic and came ready to fully participate in the retreat. Individuals had different specific interests, but the interrelated nature of the aspects of the Iona Rule and the process utilized in the retreat for addressing the different aspects of the Rule contributed to individuals staying engaged and attentive even to those areas that were not their primary interest.”

Reverend Chase continued her summary by asserting that “although it wasn’t specifically mentioned in any of the evaluations, I had an over-riding sense that people really yearned for an experience like the best of Family Groups, a group where an individual is held accountable for their spiritual and ministry life. However, I also had the sense that individuals expected intentional communities to be a place where like-minded people could come together and it would be safe for them to express their thoughts and feeling. It would be a place where they would not feel judged or pressured into agreeing with someone else. Creating that safe space is a delicate and important step, without which, living the Rule might not be possible.”

Reverend Chase concluded her summary by stating that “the evaluations reinforced the positive responses that were expressed at the end of the retreat as we sat in the conference room at Kirkridge before leaving to go our separate ways. Everyone seemed to have been able to take something valuable away from the retreat that was meaningful for them.”

### **Candidate’s Self-Evaluation**

The Self-Evaluation section below is a response to questions posed by my Doctor of Ministry advisor:

1) How would you assess your effectiveness as a leader and project manager for the project/retreat? I was able to provide intellectual stimulation by choosing a topic for the project that people are curious about and have an interest in learning. I gave inspirational motivation to the participants by selecting a team of presenters that are experts in their field. The presenters encouraged self-examination among the participants and delivered practical spiritual application techniques that the participants will use to support their own spiritual growth. I was able to contribute strong leadership through individualized consideration to the needs of the participants and presenters. Because God has gifted me with excellent listening skills, it enables me to identify a need and create a plan to fulfill it, which is what was accomplished at the three-day We Are Family retreat at Kirkridge Retreat Center.

2) What strengths and weaknesses as a leader became apparent to you as you directed the project? Believe it or not, I still get butterflies prior to a major presentation, which also makes me do my best. I have learned to make the butterflies fly in formation, somewhat.

My principal strength is being mentally flexible. I can be in the moment and think on my feet. It is a talent that came in handy in order to redirect and guide presenters and participants who wandered off topic. In the flow of the moment, there is no doubt in my mind that I am proceeding as planned because the plans are goal oriented. If an off topic event occurs, I am confident in my ability to gently put the group on task with little to no negative sentiment resulting. Recognizing a person's good point is important so that you can tell them that it would be a great topic for another discussion.

3) Were there mistakes or mishaps along the way? How did you deal with them?

What did you learn about yourself as a person and ministry leader? The first scheduled retreat had to be cancelled due to Super Storm Sandy. I had to re-plan several elements of the retreat including recruiting new participants because some could not reschedule and making special arrangement to accommodate presenters. Reverend Rennie could not return from Scotland for the new date so I had to learn and practice how to use Skype in order to accomplish the Family Group presentations that were planned. Also, Reverend Alloway could not reschedule so her material on “Peace and Justice in Your Local Community” were presented by Reverend Coombe. Through these happenings I learned that I could be flexible as a leader, that my planning skills were solid, and that I could learn new skills in the service of dealing with project problems.

At one point, the Iona Community Associate members began complaining about the lack of Full members in America. It was important to get them back on the subject of the Iona Rule and Family Groups. It was vital to recognize their grievance. I explained that there are ways to present the grievances to the Iona Community but that at this time, we are focusing on the Iona Rule and Family Groups.

There were complaints about not having enough free time, but I gently reminded people that we had a limited amount of time to look at the Iona Rule and discuss the formation of Family Groups in the American setting. I thanked them for the input and suggested it be made part of the retreat evaluation.

I learned to handle conflict positively because there are always ways to handle conflicts so that both parties are satisfied with the end result. It is God and Christ who guide me to these positive solutions.

4) What did you learn about leadership, ministry, and project direction? I learned that leadership is fluid and hands-on. To be the leader, one must trust their judgment in the delegation of tasks, but verify that it has been done according to the guidelines of the plan. That means one must choose the support group, in my case, the Lay Advisory Committee and retreat presenters, with an understanding of their abilities and confidence in their knowledge within their subjects. Confidence in support choices is essential to being able to trust the judgments and statements that the support group will be making on my behalf.

With respect to the ministry, I learned that when I need it most, the Spirit shows up. Perhaps that is because I am able to recognize the need for help and feel free in asking for help when the need arises.

I also learned that there is a great spiritual yearning in America for the type of support that Family Groups provide. There is an American perspective to spiritual understanding and that to be successful, setting specific ministerial goals in order to form American Iona Family Groups will be essential.

5) What was the most personally gratifying aspect of completing the project successfully? I set a goal and rose to the challenge. The benefit of setting a goal is being able to live a life filled with satisfaction regarding fulfillment of this ambition. The retreat met and satisfied the goals that I had set with respect to the doctoral project but the far-reaching results will go well beyond what my original intention could have imagined. When I achieve a goal, it gives me the sense of confidence to move on to the next goal. When I exceed a goal, gratitude becomes abundant, and that's what motivates me. When I give people more than they expect, I feel that I am walking with the spirit of Christ

because the gratitude that I feel for having been given the opportunity is so warm and compelling.

6) What change in yourself and other participants did you discern as a result of the retreat? Having successfully met my goal, it gave me a deep rooted feeling of satisfaction. For me, that was transformative and I will use the self-confidence provided by the experience to move forward with developing the format to bring Iona Family Groups to America. The participants left the retreat looking forward to other meetings, retreats, and becoming part of an American Iona Family Group. Meeting their expectation is my new goal. I do hope to exceed it.

7) Did you discern the Spirit's presence before and during the retreat? How did you see that manifest? When it was time for me to decide on a doctoral project, I believe that the Spirit led me to the project during my visit to Iona in 2010 while talking to the Iona Community Leader, Reverend Peter Macdonald. We discussed an Iona presence in America and the subject of Family Groups came up. I felt very passionately about looking into the possibility of developing Family Groups in America. I believe that conversation was Spirit directed and came at the right time in my life, when I was preparing for my doctoral thesis.

I saw the Holy Spirit manifest many times during the retreat. When participants discussed the Rule and saw the possibilities of it making a difference in their lives and communities, I could see it then. During the retreat there was a lot of deep thinking about the Iona Rule and how it could impact a life. There was a lot of open and honest sharing among participants in order to move closer to Christ and His way in an American society that seems to want to go the other way. There was a sense of togetherness as some came



to the retreat from a place of loneliness in their worship and Christian identity. The relief of having met other like-minded individuals forged some immediate bonds based on recognition of their common spiritual lifestyle.

After the retreat, the Iona - New World Foundation has now begun an Iona-style Family-like Group based from Kirkridge. In that group, based on learning from the retreat, we are exploring what it is like to live by the Iona Rule and analyze the impact on our daily lives and the people we come into contact with in our individual communities.

Also, Reverend Chase and I were asked to give a radio interview on October 18, 2013 for the Godspeed Institute to discuss the Iona Community and the way it lives out its Christian commitment. We were able to discuss my doctoral work in order to telegraph the idea of Family Groups to the American public. We discussed how we've begun a Family-like Group at the Kirkridge Retreat Center and what living the Rule in America would look like. It is now an open and ongoing conversation as to how that might be successfully accomplished. It was great to talk to others with like-minded backgrounds and we all felt that the Iona Rule was guiding people to live a more Christ-like existence. The Spirit was with me then and guides me still.



Figure 29. The Iona Community, "Wild Goose" (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications).

## CONCLUSION

### IONA COMMUNITY FAMILY GROUPS IN AMERICA



Figure 30. Nancy Schreier, “A Future in Bloom in the Kirkridge Peace Garden” (2012).

Pilgrims come to the Island of Iona, drawn by many things. Many come because of the music of Iona sung in each of the churches, which is produced annually and sold throughout the world in various religious music outlets. People hear the music and then come to Iona, often without any preconception as to what may be waiting for them there. Some people come because of Reverend George MacLeod’s assertion that Iona is a thin place, where Heaven and earth are at their closest, and they are looking for a certain feeling or religious experience. Others come due to the history and Celtic spirituality. All come because the spirit has beckoned them in many different ways. Once they come to

the island and have a chance to experience the worship, which is lively and yet filled with deep meaning, they begin to see that the community has deep roots in the belief of Christ. They see that Christianity is a relevant presence in our world and that the teachings of Christ can dramatically change a desperately broken world.

One cannot be on the island very long without realizing that the Iona Community is dedicated to peace and justice issues through the spirit of Christ. It teaches that to follow Christ, is to follow his mandate of caring for others and to live out our Christian responsibilities. This is not an easy task if one does not have a sense of community around them to help them sort through what it is like to live out a Christian life. The Iona Community's Rule of Life and Family Groups were developed to aid individuals in living a more productive, Christ-like life, and give spiritual support to each other in a consumerist's world. The whole point of the Family Group is to help a Full member take the focus off of individual gratification and redirect intentions to benefit the collective, which in turn spiritually benefits the individual. Christ teaches us to live for the sake of others as well as ourselves. Family Groups are where we learn, discuss, and struggle together with how that's accomplished and how it applies to the individual.

The Iona Rule is an integral part of the Iona Community. It is suggested by the Iona Community that those who are Associate members keep the rule of daily prayer and Bible-reading and that they may also wish to share in the economic witness, which pertains to how the Family Group shares. For those of us who live in America and have visited Iona, there is no structure to support the spiritual invigoration that has renewed our Christ-like yearnings for continuing faith formation and growth in personal Christian

conduct. Those returning pilgrims come back to America filled with inspiration but then are isolated without the support of the Iona Community structure.

The question of allowing and having Iona Family Groups in America is a very emotionally charged issue for the Iona Community Full members, Associate members, and even the Friends of the Iona Community. There are seven Full members, two-hundred twenty Associate members, and sixty Friends in America today. For many of the Associate members, they are practicing the Iona Rule as best they can in their personal lives and many have already joined together with like-minded individuals to form family-like groups. There are now several family-like groups in the New England area and a new family-like group which has just been formed at Kirkridge since the We Are Family Retreat. Previous family-like groups in other areas of America have come and gone for various reasons. This could be due to lack of communication because of distance, lack of structural support, and inability to form trust and accountability among the Associate members in America, which are all potential problems discussed in the retreat.

From the questionnaires and evaluations, it was apparent that retreat participants were concerned about the structure of Family Groups in America and how the issues of trust, distance, place-centered activities, and even finding like-minded individuals would be handled. Participant responses suggest that any Iona-Style Family Groups developed in America will most likely not be exactly like the Iona Community structure formed in Scotland. Rather, the consensus was that they should reflect the spirit of the intentional community that St. Columba and Reverend George MacLeod introduced upon the island of Iona. It is the spiritual journey of the soul that one takes that brings the Family Group into cohesion. The Family Group is the glue that holds the ever expanding Iona

Community together. By living the Iona Rule in one's personal life, we live out the Christian mandates spoken of by Christ.

There was a lawyer who, to disconcert him, stood up and said to him, "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." "You have answered right," said Jesus, "do this and life is yours." (Luke 10:25-28, Jerusalem Bible)

Participants in the We Are Family Retreat acknowledged that it is simply too difficult for an individual to struggle with living the Iona Rule of Life alone. Some individuals have now found family-like groups, but they too may only amount to an experiment if they do not find and keep the support of the Iona Community. The structure of the Iona Community is set up to train for introduction into a Family Group. It strengthens commitment to a Family Group. It evokes acceptance of accountability to the Family Group. It strengthens the foundation of all Family Groups with annual meetings on Iona, which is something that needs to be emulated in America if family-like groups are to become full-fledged Iona Family Groups. This will be the only way by which those that hunger for the Iona Community spirituality will experience fulfillment of the wholeness of their potential.

### **The Iona Community-Kirkridge Service Agreement: The First Step**

Currently, the resolution between the Iona Community and Kirkridge as discussed in Chapter 4 is formally considered a Service Agreement between the two. It specifically provides for Kirkridge to handle administrative duties with respect to Full members, Associate members, and Friends of the Iona Community in the United States of America. It includes support for the operations of the New World Foundation of the Iona

Community, as well. Kirkridge is to act as the home base and physical address of all Iona Community activities in the United States and maintain a database for contact. Kirkridge will process American applications for Associate members and Friends and update the Iona Community Glasgow office so they can prepare and send the appropriate amount of annual Iona Community Prayer Books and Coracle Magazines for distribution, which will keep American members informed and connected. The Iona Community will also support any Iona Community-related programming conducted at Kirkridge as needed, such as the Reverend Katherine Rennie's use of Skype to address retreat participants. At the end of the Service Agreement, it is acknowledged that, "In the first few years of this partnership, we recognize that there will be a need for both organizations to review, develop and evolve the existing relationship by means of program, staffing arrangements and in other connections that might develop over the time frame."

The Service Agreement is a great start to a growing relationship between the Iona Community of Scotland and those in America who long to belong. The purpose of the resolution is to recognize the ever increasing need to fulfill the spiritual affirmation of a Christ-like existence begun so long ago by St. Columba and Reverend George MacLeod. These pioneers of faith formation built their work on the literal bedrock of humanity and its possibilities. It is a tradition that is continued today by the Iona Community.

### **Proposed Future Steps in the United States of America**

The amount of interest in having Iona Community Family Groups in America is so pervasive among the American Associate members, Friends, and interested individuals that in the future, it may be necessary to make an organizational distinction between the

Scottish Iona Community, Kirkridge, and American Iona Family Groups. The proposed plan goes beyond the resolutions of the Iona Community and Kirkridge Service Agreement for future expansion in America. One step in the right direction is always followed by another as it was with Reverend John Oliver Nelson who so longed to create an American Iona Community through Kirkridge. It is with this intention in mind that the candidate offers the following proposal.

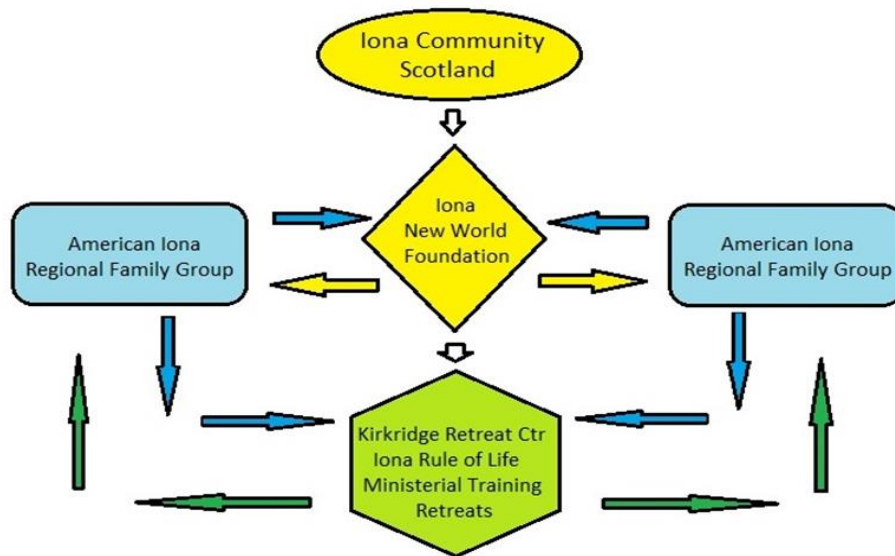


Figure 31. Reverend Kathleen L. Roney, “Proposed American Iona Regional Family Groups” (2014).

The candidate proposes consideration of the creation of American Iona Regional Family Groups in order to move toward achieving full-fledged Iona-Style Family Groups in America. The American Iona Regional Family Groups could work with and through the Kirkridge Retreat Center at the direction of the Iona - New World Foundation. The Kirkridge Retreat Center may serve as the ministerial training center for the Iona Rule of Life training since Kirkridge has the Service Agreement in place which links Kirkridge to the Iona Community through the Iona - New World Foundation. Kirkridge would

continue to receive its fees as customary for retreats hosted at Kirkridge. Planned retreats might center on the Iona Rule of Life, Iona Family Groups, and Family Group Convener training. Ongoing training retreats would serve to provide the ministerial foundation for American Iona Regional Family Groups at the direction of the Iona Community Scotland through the Iona - New World Foundation.

Once there are enough individuals who have been trained and have also become Iona Community Associate members, the existing family-like groups may begin the process of forming American Iona Regional Family Groups. At that point, the American Iona Regional Family Groups may interact directly with the staff members of the Iona - New World Foundation through a properly trained Family Group Convener. It is hoped that Full members residing in America would be interested in building and establishing Family Group relationships with the new Regional Family Groups even though the American Family Groups will, at first, be made up of mostly Iona Community Associate members.

At some point, as American Iona Regional Family Groups grow and separate Family Group meetings into more local, like-minded groups, Family Group participants may naturally move into peace and justice issues, fundraising activities, or other more public venues which may require formalizing the organization to account for income through tax identification. A future decision might have to be made as to whether the local Family Groups operate under their own tax identification or under regional group tax identification. Until that time, American Iona Regional Family Groups can easily function, even on a smaller local level, through the Iona - New World Foundation as a satellite of the Iona Community of Scotland. In the United States, individuals are already



responsible for their own donations, expenses, and taxes regardless of their spiritual activities. With Kirkridge keeping track of and in touch with Iona Community Associate members and Friends in America on behalf of the Iona Community through the Service Agreement, a tax identification decision may be postponed for years as American Iona Regional Family Groups grow and become established.

As Reverend George MacLeod so astutely observed and Reverend John Oliver Nelson professed to all who would listen, Americans are quite resourceful. So whether we use Kirkridge retreats, Facebook, Skype, GoToMeeting, face-to-face, or a combination of all, we will find a way to meet with and maintain a form of American Iona Regional Family Groups of like-minded, spiritually motivated individuals who may already consider themselves bound for an Iona Community Christ-like existence.

I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, and one shepherd. (John 10:14-16, Jerusalem Bible)

### **Some Final Words**

It is the conclusion of the candidate, as witnessed at the We Are Family Retreat, and based on the findings in this thesis project, that it is a viable proposition for Iona Family Groups to be formed in America so that clergy and sincere persons drawn to the groups can be supported in leading a more Christ-like existence. It is a spiritual yearning of many that seeks to be fulfilled, but the evolution of anything, takes time. The ideas and practices of Jesus Christ have endured and evolved for almost two thousand years. When the faithful of God who are the spiritual inheritors of Iona take even small steps towards

integrating Jesus' teachings into their lives in the mutuality of a gathered community, one would hope that the corrective action, change, and adaptation needed to facilitate integrity and cohesion in any emerging Iona Family Groups in the United States of America would happen naturally. People change the world through discerning and acting upon God's will. It is the way that He moves the individuals who will guide the movement of the Iona Community and its growing numbers. So it will be the willful, resourceful, spiritually need-based steps taken by people within the American family-like groups that will determine the future of Iona Family Groups in America. Kirkridge will facilitate this important work of God with the help of the Iona Community.

We walk upon the stones tread by our ancestors on the Island of Iona, which are sanctified by time, as we learn of the fleeting nature of a step this way or that. Though the impression of each footprint may fade, the direction of history is still visible. The strength of humanity throughout time has been dictated by the courage and conviction demonstrated by those who walked before us in the steps taken in previous lifetimes. We may learn to walk by our own motivation of purpose, but we only follow in footsteps that are worthy of the journey to our spiritual home.



Figure 32. Reverend Matilda Chase, "Mystified-2, Abbey of Iona, Scotland" (2013).

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