

## The GalGael Trust in Govan

Alastair McIntosh

As requested by the [Govan Free Church](#) newsletter, winter 2016

If you turn up at 15 Fairley Street, just along from the Ibrox subway station, around 6 pm on a Thursday night you'll find a welcome and a community meal there at the workshops of the GalGael Trust.

What's that got to do with the Free Church in Govan? Only that its founder, Colin Macleod, had Irish blood from Donegal on his mother's side, and on his father's side a Free Church background in Gravir on the Isle of Lewis.

As one of the founding directors, I too have Free Church ancestors. Although I am a Quaker by conviction, I was raised in a mainly Free Church community, also on the Isle of Lewis.

These things can carry a subtle influence. Colin and I could sit for half the night debating such texts as, "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Leviticus 25:23).

His wife, Gehan, now carries the GalGael forwards. In the Gaelic, the *Gal* is the stranger and sojourner within each one of us. The *Gael* is the heartland people. We say that in today's world, there's a little bit of the *Gal* and a little bit of the *Gael* in every one of us, and we need to connect with both.

Many people who live in poverty in Glasgow have been historically uprooted from their original communities. Landlordism and corporate greed threw them on the scrapheap.

Healing from that process can be a journey that is historical, psychological and even spiritual.

What is spirituality? It is about the inner life. About the deepest ground of our being. About joining up the inner and the outer lives, to re-member that which might have been dis-membered.

We build boats in our workshops. Boats are metaphors for the journey of life. Our boats get pushed out on the river at the start of our lives. We hit the rapids, and many of our dear people struggle not to drown.

The aim of life is to make it down to the ocean. To become more wise, and understand and nourish the community. You could call that spiritual work.

"But what about *religion*?" you might ask.

At GalGael we have people from many religious backgrounds, and none. We don't distinguish, for who are we to judge?

That said, in March, two dozen of us went for a weekend to Iona to explore what “spirituality” might mean for each of us.

Some folks were moved to tears by the power of what they felt.

Where might they follow that through?

For some, it might mean reconnecting with the Roman Catholic chapel of their youth. For others, with the Protestant faith. Indeed, our visit to Iona was blessed and assisted by the Rev Moyna McGlynn of the Govan & Linthouse Church of Scotland. She also serves on GalGael’s board.

Other people might want to explore non-Western faiths, or atheist or agnostic positions. It’s up to them. And who knows? For some, it might be the Free Church in Govan.

The minister there, the Rev Norman Mackay, has both Isle of Lewis and Irish ancestry, and having grown up in Govan has a deep understanding of many of the issues that our GalGael people face.

I believe that there are many pathways up the same mountain. What counts most is not the differences in our theologies, but what’s in the heart.

The many churches of Govan are central to its heart. While the Free Church of Scotland is not my own chosen denomination, I am glad that it a part of what is offered here, and accessible to people with being in the Pearce Institute.

*Alastair is a founding director of the GalGael Trust. He is also an honorary fellow in the School of Divinity at Edinburgh University and a visiting professor at Glasgow University.*