Report on the GalGael-Iona Relationship 2016-2026

Alastair McIntosh, GalGael Trust

This report is intended for funders, the GalGael Trust in Govan and the Iona Community. It has several overlapping purposes. Please just skip to the section that might be most relevant to you.

The GalGael-Iona relationship with the Iona Community (IC) has built up over considerable time and especially, in the past 11 years. There had been earlier connections, for example, in 2009 members of our community attempted sailed to Iona. They were thwarted on the way by bad weather, but went on by land to mark the maritime and bardic cultural impacts of the Statutes of Iona of 1609.

To this day, it still means something to people in Govan that Iona Abbey was rebuilt by George Macleod, their minister in the 1930s, with the help of unemployed shipyard workers. The expression "Work is worship" can sometimes be heard around the GalGael workshop, and our reception area has carved in wood: "The work is the therapy". Work Weeks at the Abbey are a welcome continuation of this historical connection to Govan and its wider ethos.

In October, I was asked by the IC's Poverty and Inequality Common Concern Network to speak about lessons learned to date. I'll be doing so again next month at the request of the Mull & Iona Family Group. In addition to having led weeks at the Abbey or the Mac down the years, between 1986-90 I was the community's joint business advisor. This entailed fundraising, strategic planning, management advice and computerisation under the leadership of Ron Fergusson, John Harvey and the late Margaret Stewart. This meant being on most of the committees, lending what one community member recently described as a measure of "institutional memory". I learnt much practical theology from this experience, and have been an Associate Member ever since.

The past year has seen a mainstreaming of volunteer relationships between the GalGael Trust and the IC. It has been wonderful to witness with both sides testifying to the benefits it has brought. To keep it going, I raise modest funds from sources that would not otherwise clash with the GalGael's or the IC's fundraising. This report is how I typically report to funders, but it is a little more because following on from the meeting with the Common Concern Network I've taken the opportunity for some deeper reporting on our people's Work Week experience and wider reflection. Please just skip to whatever part might be of most interest to you, as follows:

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1. Purpose & History, 2016 to 2024

Over 7 years 2016 – 2024 (with a hiatus during Covid) we had 141 GalGael volunteers go to Iona for a long weekend and stay at John Maclean's hostel, The Green Shed. Average group size of 20. These were enormously successful, funded mostly by individual donors and the John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust of the Scottish Quakers. The Wighams were a large family, initially involved in cotton manufacturing. They played leading roles in such movements as the Glasgow Anti-Slavery Society and the Edinburgh Ladies Emancipation Society, even drawing a response from the House of Commons: "We know how to manage any other opposition in the House or in the country, but this is very awkward for us, this revolt of women"!

The purpose of our long weekend Iona trips was very loosely to explore "*what spirituality might or might not mean for you*". We'd typically arrive on a Friday with a meal and mutual sharing. On the Saturday we'd see round the Abbey, the stones in the museum and the Oran Chapel, then down to St Columba's Bay, with a further sharing in the Michael Chapel in the evening and/or a fire on the beach. After a closing sharing on the Sunday we'd climb Dun I for a suitably pagan splash in the Well of Eternal Youth, and back to Glasgow that evening. A photo essay from these is Seven Trips 2016-24, the final slide of which has links to the reports on each one, each with distinctive themes and reflections.

GalGael is not a religious organisation. I have organised this programme with the support of GalGael colleagues but slightly at arm's length institutionally. The greater part of our community are people coming from backgrounds of multiple deprivation. Spiritual life may or may not be part of their recovery process. The Iona connection is offered, as are many other activities, but not as a core part of our programme, and I take responsibility for it.

2. The 1st Work Week, November 2024

In the early years we had an edgy relationship with the Abbey. Some of our community have suffered difficult relationships with anything deemed "religion". An early attempt to join an Abbey service seriously backfired. We were not ready for them, and a new staff group with only one Scot amongst them were not ready for us. As one of our people summed up, "It was very middle class ... cold, remote, and you'd never have known that this place is the heart of Celtic Christianity."

However, both the IC and the GalGael took this as a learning experience. The Abbey invited us for tea and cakes, and we started to swap with each other for the Saturday meal. When Covid hit, John Maclean realised that he could not carry on with the Green Shed as a hostel, and converted it to self-catering pending putting it on the market. My former GalGael colleague David Lees and the IC's leader Ruth Harvey developed a good relationship, and we decided to dip a toe in the water by experimentally sending two of our seasoned volunteers to what became the 1st Work Week, November 2024, Lynn McCambridge and Maureen Gilmour volunteering. Caro the Abbey Warden made this easy by giving these places free. Thereafter, we have been given 50% bursary discounts when Work Week is already 50% discounted, so the cost to the GalGael per person when travel, meals on the ferry and an "out-of-pocket expenses allowance" is factored in comes in usually under £400.

3. The 2nd to 4th Work Weeks up to March 2026

The riotous success of the 1st week for both Lynn and Maureen and the Abbey helped to break the ice back at GalGael around the notion of "staying in an abbey". The 2nd Work Week, March 2025, with Frank Mathieson, Paul Hamilton and Vic(toria) Brown, see the report here. Because funding for the 3rd Work Week came from an IC-connected individual who knew the work very well, no report was needed for the 3rd Work Week that saw Michelle Chisholm, Danny Connoly, Helga McBurney and David Robertson have an experience that saw Helga later become a seasonal volunteer and David considering the possibility. The 4th week is reported on as it was funded by a Quaker trust, the Southall Trust, that Caro had connected us with. That in March 2026 gave the opportunity to Janet Eastwood, Joan Phillipsz and Jim Rae. A further person had to pull out at the last minute, but the Abbey kindly didn't charge us, and we carried over the place as a down-payment on the 5th Work Week. The report to Southall is here.

4. Further Development - Volunteering on the Abbey Staff

Such was the enthusiasm of response both from our GalGael volunteers and the Abbey staff and guests, that the Abbey encouraged applications for seasonal volunteering posts. These are normally for a 6 week minimum period, but Dot and Caro allowed flexibility to help experiment, permitting shorter stays on an infill basis in their "volunteer matrix".

But it backfired! Lynn went up in April and ended up staying for 10 weeks, mainly in the bookshop. Helga mainly in the kitchen went for 3 weeks in April, extended for a further 2, and was called back again to fill a gap for 3 weeks in July. Paul went up initially just for a few weeks in March on the maintenance and the housekeeping teams, kept extending, is still there, is applying again for next year (as are Lynn and Helga).

I say, "it backfired", because Kevin back in the GalGael kitchen is complaining that "ever since they went to clean the kitchens on Iona, our kitchen's been manky!"

Both Paul and Lynn have led services at the Abbey, and the IC's Rev John Bell was so impressed that he interviewed them both for the BBC Radio 4 Holy Coasts programme – they're on from about 12 minutes in to the programme until about 18 mins in.

5. Guest Week 2026 with the Oregon Group

It's is one thing to go to the Abbey on Work Week or as a seasonal volunteer; quite another to experience it as a guest. I had been invited to lead the first week in October. I'd been asked to theme it on "hope", and took as my title *Hopeful Imagination*, drawing on Walter Brueggemann's work on prophetic hope in his book of that title, on the Celtic spirituality of the *Carmina Gadelica* and Kenneth Macleod of Eigg (see below), and on the Islamic mystic Ibn Arabi's understanding of the deep "creative imagination" as the human-divine meeting point.

Fully half of the 40 or so guests were from one group, the First Presbyterian Church of Bend, Oregon in the USA, led by the Rev Sharon Edwards who I already knew from her time on the Abbey staff. A large group like this can create its own dynamic. I was a little uneasy as to how it would work having once had the experience of a church group just not gelling with radical theology. However, this is a progressive church involved in activities like ethnic minority support in the face of Trump's ICE, and when 3 spaces came free due to a family having to pull out they donated them to GalGael, and even sorted them out to join boat trip to Staffa.

For Helga, Lynn and Vic, all of whom had done work week or seasonal volunteering, it was a joy to experience the Abbey from the angle of a guest. Paul was also there on the volunteer staff, so that made for a week with 5 of us GalGaels present. But how to weave them together? I tweaked the programme and instead of drilling into too much Brueggemann, showed the showed the BBCs documentary about Colin Macleod of the GalGael, *The Birdman of Pollok*, followed by a discussion panel facilitated by Sarah the programme worker that explored where hope, not hopium, can come from through creative imagination exercised even from out of the despair of environmental destruction and the death of a prophetic figure.

The richness that followed underscored the value of having a social class and cultural mix in the experience of *community* that happens in a week at the Abbey. That "richness" proved to be both literal as well as metaphorical. One of the American guests was so moved, that they are sending the GalGael $5,000. This helps to fill a desperate gap in our programme funding. Earlier in the year, an IC member gave a large donation to help sustain the trips to Iona. Moreover, the Mull & Iona Family Group have twice sent contributions, IC staff members have privately contributed, St Stephen's University in Canada were generous after a tour around GalGael, and the Glasgow Quakers have an annual collection. So far, we've broken even and are currently OK up to and covering the 4 Work Week places reserved for March 2027 – always remembering the considerable bursary support built in from the IC itself. It's not cheap to run an abbey and meet contemporary requirements.

For me, such support and especially the contribution to our general funds is hugely helpful. It means that the next time Kevin complains of a manky kitchen due to "Iona stealing our volunteers", I can tell him that Iona's helping us to wash our face! From the Abbey, I've heard nothing but praise for the contributions of our folk, both in what they do and what they bring as people. So the cycles of grace are sustained.

6. Review of Work Week – the 5th, October 2026

Work week at the end of October into November this year was lined up for a foursome, Nadia Murchie, Niki McManus, Kenny Baldwin and Ryan Robison. Who gets to go is based on signing up, and final selection by our staff. In the week. In the week they were due to leave, I happened to have a meeting with my colleague, Maria Latumahina of West Papua, who is married in Glasgow and was just back from an exhausting tour of duty dealing with difficult issues in Indonesia. She was known to GalGael having spoken on some of our platforms, and at very short notice the John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust agreed to fund her joining them, and happily Dot responded that the Abbey had just had a cancellation. Her in-depth report to the JWET forms Appendix 1 of this report.

On their return, I held reviews with all 5 across 3 separate meetings. To keep the show on the road it's important to let funders see what these experiences mean, also for the GalGael and the IC. Without exception or reservation, they reported a wonderful and even a life-changing experience. It's true that one or two found that the vegetarian food took a little getting used to, but a sprinkling of cheese in the soup made all the difference, and the beds were so comfortable that, on the final morning they circulated a photo of the labels on the mattresses because they'd given such a good night's sleep. Kudos, the housekeepers!

I am very deaf indeed, and recently have started using an app on my phone that gives a running transcript. From these 3 meetings, two at GalGael and one online, I temporarily saved and selected these quotations. They have been lightly anonymised and lightly edited. All five have read them and approved them for sharing – often enthusiastically so. They may be used by the IC if helpful. As the most edgy part of it all has been coming to an abbey with its religious side, I have disproportionately selected quotes that reflect on that. They very much affirm the Abbey's optional approach.

The environment and its Abbey

"I just felt so relaxed. The whole environment was relaxing, and the fresh air was wonderful."

"The whole place was such a change of pace from normal life. I didn't realise I needed it, but being away was so recharging."

"I've been going to Iona for 20 years, and I was always looking after my children or an elderly friend, so that was the first time I seen Columba's Bay. I was blown away."

"You have time to think and the quiet to think. People talk to you, they actually listen to you, and they understand you."

"Iona is totally different. It's one of a kind in the sense that it's a Christian organisation, but it doesn't intimidate you."

The work side of Work Week

"Even though you're working, it does still feel like a holiday. It feels rewarding."

"Kenny came up with an idea to make a ramp from different bits of wood. I came up with the idea of emptying the fridge out, taking the boards off and the shelves out from inside. It was so much lighter, and we got it done with four people instead of eight."

"When I touched the soil, I remembered everything we've been doing in West Papua about going back to the land. It starts with very simple things: get your hands in the soil."

"You actually feel that even if you're doing a small task, the work you've done might still be helping someone in the months and years to come."

"It's so chill. You can go and do what you can […] there's no pressure to finish anything."

“When you do it together, while having a conversation and working with your hands, that’s where you learn about things you’ve lost—and really get the meaning of it.”

“It was always a smile and a ‘How you doing?’ […] Everyone was just a lovely person.”

The Abbey services

“I was worried about it being a little bit overbearing, and it wasn’t at all. Very, very gentle.”

“There was no pressure from anybody to have to stand up or participate. You could just be there and enjoy it.”

“I went to 3, 4 services, I think, and it was something I’ve never experienced before. I’m not inclined in any religion at all. I just wanted to go and experience what it’s like.”

“I liked the candle-lighting because they were made available for everyone who wanted to do that.”

“I totally respect people that are religious, but I’m not religious in the slightest. [But] I felt certain things getting through, and I didn’t expect that at all..

“I’m a very, ‘If I can’t see it, I don’t believe it,’ kind of person. But from what you can take from the saints, if you take out the God and the religion, there are still lessons in the words - so you can still take stuff from it.”

“I’m not religious at all, but I found myself crying in the church. Certain things people were saying were getting through, and I didn’t expect that at all. I learned I'm still very much open to things I didn't know I was open to."

“If you weren’t comfortable with the situation, you could have just left if you wanted to. You could just be there and enjoy it, which I found was really, really nice.”

“It wasn’t intimidating at all. It let your spirit talk to you.”

“It makes your spiritual experience really fun and light.”

“They have grace before the meals. I laughed because they said things like: “Lord, sometimes two words are better than ten. Tuck in. Amen.”

“The reason I went there is that I had dreams about the place.... So I went there and ... I’ll forever be grateful for that. I’m like, ‘Is this a socio-psychological thing, or is it a spiritual thing?’”

“I was waking up at silly hours of the morning, on the dot at 3.00 a.m. nearly every night. And every night I got up, and then I'm like: ‘Oh, that looks lovely. They've left a light on in the nightstand [the side stairs down into the Abbey].’ And there's a wee plaque, and it says the monks used to get up in the night. And I was like, ‘I'm just going to sneak out, and I'm going to go to the nave, and then I'm going to pray.’ And I don't pray out loud. I don't pray with my mouth in case anybody hears me. I pray with my internal voice. So only heaven can hear me.

And then I'd sit there in silence for a while, and then I'd walk around the cloisters, and then I'd go out to see the St John's Cross, that's my favourite."

"They held this service… and you were invited to light the candles for the loss of your families. I decided to come because I lost my mom last year… I didn't have the space to really grieve. I found I could really sit in a very contained kind of space and environment to remember, and to pray for her. That was really good."

"I'd sit there and just say, 'I'm really thankful.' It's been an absolutely horrendous year, but I'm still thankful because there's still good things happening."

"I didn't follow the prayers. At the end of it, it was: 'Thanks for having me here.'"

Looking back

"I have never met such a group of people that all get on. All of them were lovely."

"Seeing other people get helped by the place was really nice."

"At the end of it, on the ramp when we were waiting on the ferry, I don't think I missed anyone, I just remember giving them cuddles."

"I would advise everybody not to look back and to take that opportunity. It's totally head-refreshing."

"It was just a great experience."

And one last one. After seeing these one of our people sent a WhatsApp to the group about their words being shared, saying, "I like that you seen some value in it because I meant it 👌" Here is what they said; and following that, Maria's testimony that she is happy to be shared:

"Galgael and the Iona community are directly responsible for helping me get myself up off the floor and appreciate things again, appreciate people, kindness, care, being human 🤷 to think I was "content" or otherwise, hiding in my flat, avoiding everyone so as not to be a bother them or be a burden just seems like such a waste of my time now. No idea what would have been in-store for me if GAMH hadn't steered me towards Galgael doesn't bear thinking about. I have many mountains still to climb, but since Galgael, and Iona, I might just be able to climb them. I'm so glad to see how it's touched Maria and us all, in our own ways. Iona offered us all something to take home, and I think at its core that thing is simply some peace in such an unpredictable and often unkind world. If I ever win the lottery you guys are in for a treat!😅 ✌ thanks again to all of you, for all you do 👍 some of the best people I've ever met are in Galgael and on Iona, no question. I hope the bond between the two stays forever and I hope Galgael is somewhere I can always call my home away from home. Only saddens me I didn't find Galgael before I needed to look for help but I'm there now 👌 for as long as yous will have me 👍"

7. Sharing Insights with the Iona Community

The IC's Common Concern Network (Poverty & Inequality) and the Mull & Iona Family Group especially wanted to know what had been learned from the GalGael-Iona relationship to date. Much of this is implicit above. However, looking back over the past 40 years since I was the community's business advisor and throughout the fundraising for the Macleod centre and then for Cul Shuna and an earlier wave of Abbey and Shop & Welcome Centre refurbishments, I make these observations.

The Problem: the wider social dynamics that made older models work have radically changed, in my perception for reasons, including:

- Back in the 1980s, there were "Iona men in many a parish deemed "areas of priority treatment". Increasingly they were joined by Iona women, such as the Rev Catherine Hepburn of Gargunnock (who was raised in Malawi), the Rev Kathy Galloway (raised in Oxgangs) and Revd Kate McIlhagga (in England, who had started out in youth work). Ron Fergusson and John Harvey who succeeded him as leader lived next door to each other in Ibrox Terrace at the back of the GalGael Trust and raised their families there, not least Ruth Harvey the current IC leader. However, the decline of the institutional church means that there is no longer the same prominence. It's not been for a lack of effort, but that affects the social mix of groups going to the islands.
- There doesn't seem to be the funding that there once was for work with young people, and more widely especially where it has a religious edge. Certainly in Govan, poverty-related groups are struggling for funding in a way that we just didn't have to around the turn of the millennium.
- A teacher or youth group leader can no longer raise a bit of cash and fill a minibus with young folks. Out of sad necessity, today's safeguarding and perhaps insurance requirements demand a higher staff-participant ratio in most organisations (though I am told that private schools seem to be more relaxed about it).
- The good news of disability legislation, as we have seen with Camas, requires costly upgrades but without the funding being in place to facilitate this for groups that are not well-endowed.
- Students now have mortgage-sized loans to pay off, and unless they are supported by well-heeled families, often have to do paid work during term time and holidays. This reduces the flow of such volunteers to island centres and with it, the youthful energy they bring. The experiment a few years ago with making the Abbey's evening service earlier because a more elderly staff cohort were worn out by the end of the day was testimony to that democratic shift.
- Groups that are middle-class, more elderly and more affluent have a greater capacity to plan ahead than ones drawn from circumstances of precarity. With many weeks at the Abbey booking out months in advance, this has noticeably altered the social class balance amongst guests. Whilst these will certainly include Matthew's "poor in spirit", there may be the unintended consequence of a knock-on effect on Luke's starker emphasis on material poverty (Gk. *ptōchoi*, destitute or distressed).

Possible remediation: Speaking only from our GalGael experience:

- Bringing a group of ordinary people from an area like Greater Govan to an Abbey requires a gradual building up of trust and understanding on both sides.
- It requires modest funding for folks who, for whatever reason, might be living on the edge. Notice that we provide not just travel costs, but also, decent meals in transit what we call an "out-of-pocket expenses allowance" to reduce the risks of exclusion when everybody might, say, go out for a cup of coffee as part of their work routine (but at maybe a fiver a pop).
- It requires careful briefing and support to get there. Most of our people have never been to the Hebrides. We once had one who panicked when the boat pulled away from the pier. Folks who spend a lot of time travelling may not realise what a radical experience it can be just to arrive on Iona, and this needs holding, including sorting out travel tickets, complex timetables, and contingency plans in case of getting stranded en route.
- Back to the GalGael's first experience at the Abbey that didn't work out, it requires a sensitive awareness of social class differences. It has helped us greatly to have people like Andy Evans at the Abbey mindful and able to navigate such territory in ways that have made our people comfortable, until the initial barriers have been overcome.
- Each Christmas, during what can be the lonely gap until New Year, Vérène and I put on a house party for those who have been to Iona, further to integrate their experience.

The bottom line, is that the GalGael and IC over these past 11 years have found that reconnection with places like Govan can be made to work. That's why I so welcome the Common Concern Network and any Family Groups who might be interested wanting to learn from our experience, all the while recognising that what has been perceived and what works for us might not apply in other contexts.

Appendix 1 - Maria Latumahina's Report to John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust

For background: In the 1970s and 1980s I (Alastair) was for 4 years a volunteer in Papua New Guinea (VSO etc.). In 2010, when running a course on land reform at Schumacher College in Devon, I met Maria who was working for the British Embassy in Jakarta. She was wanting to get into grassroots community empowerment work in her home province of West Papua, the Indonesian controlled western half of New Guinea.

Through Seventythree Foundation this has led to extensive collaboration and mutual learning between Scotland and West Papua. Both have devolved forms of governance, which has been of considerable interest especially to Papuans with government connections, including elected parliamentarians and senior civil servants.

Initially through my wife Vérène Nicolas' links with The Grail Centre in South Africa and the work of Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, Maria introduced the liberation theology-based TfT programme into Papua, helped by Ma Ntombi Nyathi the former director of The Grail. Maria founded Training for Transformation Papua to develop grassroots leadership, and the training booklet that I have written with her and her sister - *Community Theology for Papua: Land, Conflict and Leadership* - can be viewed at a stable link here in English, or in Indonesian Bahasa. I hereby affirm that the £300 given by the JWET via the GalGael Trust has been fully expended, and here is Maria's report.

Report to the Trustees of JWET by Maria Latumahina

I am from West Papua, Indonesia. The intertwining of Christianity and Indigenous Spirituality has historically and personally shaped my belief system. As a person of faith, I believe that things happen for a reason; nothing is by coincidence. That anchors how I perceive my participation in the work week programme at Iona Abbey. It happened for a reason!

I was assigned to a task team that cleaned the bathrooms for half an hour after breakfast, and to a work team that did gardening afterwards. I left the week's programme with takeaways of the following:

It's the work that serves a purpose.

As the only person of colour, the one-week immersion into the Iona community and being held so compassionately is the embodiment of the belief that every human being is made in the image of God. When cleaning the bathrooms and out in the garden, digging and planting, I did it with others. As I moved, I paid attention to my surroundings, the group I was in, and the other members of the team. I cultivated a sense of belonging to a community.

A Spiritual Being is A Free Being

I was brought up imprisoned by the belief that God punishes. The fear of God restricts creativity and imprisons the soul. In the Morning Worship and Evening Service, I noticed several versions of the Lord's Prayer, which, in the Calvinist tradition where I was brought up, is something beyond my imagination. It was a practice I never thought possible. Experiencing this at Iona Abbey reaffirmed what I understand as freedom of meaning-making and freedom of expression as spiritual beings.

Dogma, rules, and bureaucracy do not make us spiritual beings. My mother always complained that I did not go to church and did not pray as much as she thought I should. Prayer as it was practised by the Dutch Reformed Church, was a burden to me.

My experience at Iona Abbey taught me to free myself from rules that restricted my communication with God. One morning, as we said grace before the food, the one leading the prayer said, "Thank you, God. Amen". That was it. Again, it struck me. How simple and straightforward it was.

Soon after arriving from Iona, I found myself sitting and saying a few words of prayer before bed, and I did the same when I woke up. I say a short prayer before and after meals. From time to time, I pause for just a few minutes to call God's name. It has become my routine and my way of connecting with God.

It is the Work of Justice

As part of the gardening work team, I worked in the vegetable garden and in the garden of George MacLeod's summer house. When my hand touched the soil, I connected to the very essence of being one of the creations. As the scripture says, "…For dust you are, and to dust you shall return". While digging and planting, I had an inspiring conversation with Rachel, one of the Abbey team members responsible for gardening. We talked about the sacredness of the soil. Rachel suggested that we take a few minutes in silence. She said we should start with a short meditation before we do our work in the garden.

My mother belonged to a Marind tribal community in southern West Papua. Soon after she was born, she was named "mboke", a species of bat that the indigenous Marind believe they are reincarnated from. I am from a place and community of origin where the relationship with land and nature is sacred, yet those beliefs and relationships have been swept away by new waves of practice that see land as nothing else but a commodity. Indigenous people are displaced and disconnected from the land they have psychologically and spiritually connected with. Some can no longer recognise or speak to their ancestors who have returned to the land (i.e. after death).

The work in the garden on Iona allowed me to recall the meaning of relating to land. Cultivating the right relationship to land is foundational to rebuilding the right relationship with God and with one another. From the time in the refectory, cleaning the bathrooms with my task team, working on the land with the gardening team, and spending leisure time in the common, I learned to be present and take responsibility as part of the community.

I learned to work together, communicate with others and accept others for who they are, as much as I was accepted. I was the only woman of colour among all participants. I did not feel othered, not even for a second, not by other participants nor by my Galgael team.

My work week programme strengthens my faith in the work I am called to: standing on the side of, working with and for, the community whose humanity has been taken away by the practice of injustices.

I realised that my short pilgrimage to Iona would not have been possible without the generous support of the John Wigham Trust and Alastair McIntosh, who pulled everything together in such a short time. Saying "Thank you" may not be enough to express how deeply grateful I am.

Appendix 2 – Theological Training Discussions

During Peter Macdonald's leadership of the IC, I was the Quaker representative on the Iona Community Board. In October, I mentioned to Chris Mannell Peter's vision of integrating theological training in with the staff/volunteer experience at Iona. Afterwards, I drew from email the considerable correspondence and thinking around that at the time, also discussing it with John and Molly Harvey and Alison and Robert Swinfen, and that unearthing material like a report that Alison had written at the time. Chris shared what I sent him with Caro, and this resulted in gentle encouragement from all sides to brainstorm further on the idea – not as something university accredited such as Peter had explored with UHI, but something very much more simple and orientated towards deeper reflection and recognition of community (or practical) theology. I mention this here only in passing, but it is part of a wider framework of thinking that the GalGael interactions have contributed to.

Appendix 3 - Kenneth Macleod collaboration with Wild Goose Publications

The original work and ongoing vision of the Iona Community did not come out of nowhere. In the latter quarter of the 20th c. the community's liturgists – most prominetly John Bell, Graeme Maule,

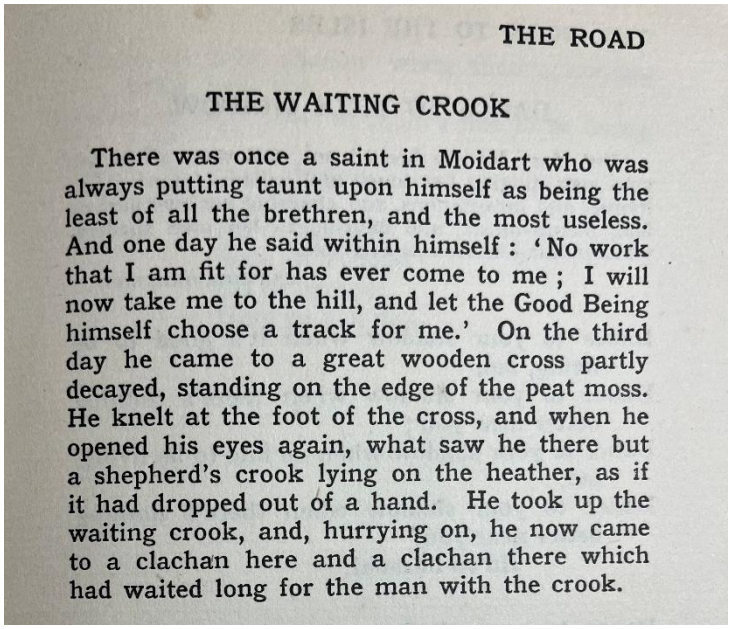
Ian and Kathy Galloway – were exercising a contextual theology by drawing on Gaelic and wider Scottish folksong to weave in to contemporary and often urban settings and social issues. George Macleod's family was itself deeply rooted in the indigenous Celtic spirituality of the Highlands and Islands. Unsurprisingly, this found resonance in an area like Govan, with so many of its population having originally been refugees from the Highland Clearances and the Irish Famine.

In GalGael, we see that these traditions are roots that still give life. Go into our workshop, and it's replete with Celtic knotwork, crosses and mythical creatures. Similarly, when we celebrate the quarter-day festivals or St Bride's Eve.

In 1927 the Rev Kenneth Macleod of Eigg, who was a friend and distant relative of George Macleod and a very close friend of Alexander Carmichael of the *Carmina Gadelica* from the tradition, wrote a beautiful little book of Hebridean spirituality called *The Road to the Isles*. To cut the story short, the IC's team at Wild Goose Publications has agreed to publish a near-replica Centenary Edition, with a Foreword and a scholarly Afterword by Dr Iain Mackinnon a scholar based at the archive centre in Skye, Camille Dressler the Eigg historian, and myself.

To make this possible we have raised £5,000, and a further £11,000 to put on *The Festival of Kenneth Macleod* on Eigg over the May holiday, 29 April to 2 May 2027. This will involve scholarly talks with experts such as the Revd Prof Ian Bradley of St Andrews, interpretations form musicians such as Mairi Campbell of Lismore and perhaps Allan Macdonald of Glenuig, and pilgrimage (or interpretative walks) led by Eigg residents, all under the auspices of Solas Eige, the island heritage group that recently acquired the former St Columba's Church from the C of S. We have not yet made a public announcement about all this, but a fledgling web page is at this link, together with images of the two stained glass windows in memory of Kenneth Macleod, one in the parish church on Gigha and the other, in the north transept of Iona Abbey.

This, too, has come about from the contexts created by the richness of the GalGael-Iona collaboration. I am, with my colleagues at GalGael, so grateful to all who have made it possible, especially our funders and the Iona Community staff. The IC has been having a hard time, but this work to us underscores its importance, and may it flourish.



THE ROAD

THE WAITING CROOK

There was once a saint in Moidart who was always putting taunt upon himself as being the least of all the brethren, and the most useless. And one day he said within himself : 'No work that I am fit for has ever come to me ; I will now take me to the hill, and let the Good Being himself choose a track for me.' On the third day he came to a great wooden cross partly decayed, standing on the edge of the peat moss. He knelt at the foot of the cross, and when he opened his eyes again, what saw he there but a shepherd's crook lying on the heather, as if it had dropped out of a hand. He took up the waiting crook, and, hurrying on, he now came to a clachan here and a clachan there which had waited long for the man with the crook.

I end with one of Kenneth Macleod's stories from *The Road to the Isles*. Perhaps consider: *What, might have been our "uselessness"? What, is the cross "partly decayed" today? What, the shepherd's crook that replaced it on the moor? And where, the clachans waiting for the message carried with it?*

Short URL for this report: https://tinyurl.com/GG-Iona-26



Oscar and Laurel, who couldn't come to Iona but who gave the room they'd booked to the GalGael. Pictured with the tea-towel that the GalGael folks bought them as a thank-you.



Picking up guests from the pier. Paul from the GalGael Trust is now a seasonal volunteer on Iona after first experiencing a Work Week. Spot the Abbey through the window behind him.



The GalGael's Helga, Lynn and Vic. A member of the Iona Community staff said to me of their impact: "It's a joy. The people who are here this week are privileged. Heaven! This is what heaven is. They bring it here."



The 5th Work Week – Kenny, Ryan, Nadia, Maria and Niki.



Maria at St Columba's Bay, from where if you look with Second Sight, you can just see West Papua.



Abbey Guests at the well just below the summit of Iona's highest mountain, Dun I, from where if you look with Second Sight, you can just see Govan ... and a little further round the Bend, Oregon.