"You won't find your treasure at the end of the journey, rather you will find it within the journey itself."

Guests at Iona Youth Festival, 2012
Drawings of Camas life © Alice Hyde, a Camas volunteer
Cover photo © Ben Raw, Iona Community Youth resource worker

Special youth-themed edition

Work and worship, Prayer and politics, Sacred and secular …
Coracle is the magazine of the Iona Community, a
• Engaged together, and with people of goodwill
• Our work with young people
• Our association in the revitalising of worship

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The Iona Community is:
• D aily prayer and bible study
• O ur work with young people
• O ur association in the revitalising of worship

The Iona Community was founded in Glasgow in 1938 by George MacLeod, minister, visionary and prophet of hope and joy. We can change the world by seeing through the eyes of the poor, persecuted and forgotten, the young people said.

People of all ages came to the table in the crossing, with names on their invitations likeASYLUM seekers; Those in Alcoholics Anonymous; Child abusers; Homeless people; Roma people; People who try to make a difference; Tony Party fundamentalists and the unemployed; Those who lack social skills; Aggressors, bullies, persecutors and oppressors; Drug dealers.

The young people from Bellahouston were expressing the generosity, forgiveness and all-inclusive love of God and Jesus Christ. To me that is amazing – and inspiring: young people are one of the most excluded groups in the world today. If I were a young person in the UK in 2013, I’d have nothing but contempt and anger to serve up to an older generation who has shut them out of employment and affordable education, and wants to feed them on scraps of austerity for the next decades, after pigging out themselves for the last 50 years: on great gulps of gasoline, and the flesh and bones and blood of Mother earth. I wouldn’t possess that maturity; that vision and all-embracing love.

Excluding young people brings us great poverty and, as the UK ‘riots’ of 2011 revealed, great peril.

This edition of Coracle includes the voices of young people, the work of the Iona Community with young folk (on Iona and at Camas), and the work of a variety of other community groups with a deep commitment to young people, some church-based, others secular, like the grassroots network So We Stand. This vision is of a society which includes all (who are invidiously, illegally and arbitrarily treated as) young people, LGBTQQ people, poor women, disabled people, people of colour, working-class people…

God, help us to make your world as all-inclusive, as rainbow-coloured, as Kingdom-sweet as a family pack of peanut M&Ms. Jesus Christ, ready-salt-us. ◆

Neil Paynter (Ed.)


Coracle is the magazine of the Iona Community, a charity registered in Scotland No: SC028794.
Bolt FM – young people getting a voice in northeast Glasgow

Neil Young is the Director of the youth-led community radio station Bolt FM …

Back in 2001, a new parish was created in Glasgow, bringing together the communities of Blackhill/Provanmill and Royston. These were communities at war with each other, where poverty, boredom, alcohol and drugs fuelled gang violence. People as young as nine were standing with sticks, stones, bottles and the occasional knife, ready to face each other. The reason was no more than ancient traditions: Ma Da fought for this scheme an’ so will A-To go into one another’s communities would result in a near-death experience. Young people would show off their scars, mainly on the torso and head, and laugh about the time that they weren’t fast enough or were in the wrong place: ‘Y’ should see the other guy!

The two communities were undergoing substantial physical regeneration. The slum tenements of Blackhill were almost all demolished and the beginnings of replacement housing-association houses were perceived to be making a difference, at least to officials. Royston too was undergoing a change with housing: the closes that Iona Community youth worker Betty White had worked in were disappearing. But what about the people? Where was the change in their dealings with folk from other communities?

Through a newly formed arts project, the Royston Road Project, two large parks were to be designed by local people, with artists introducing various art forms into the communities. One of these was community radio, where people from the two communities would be able to work together. A short ten-day broadcast took place in a small cupboard in St Paul’s Church, where the large water tank dripped away.

The project was a success, and showed great potential. It was clear that radio captured young people’s imagination. More importantly, young people from each community could take part in the same project and both sets could have ownership, but never in the same place at the same time, unless and until they were comfortable to be. This potential for cooperative working was the inspiration behind Bolt FM being formed.

Funders and officials are keen on the name, from the point of view of bolting communities together, however the name actually came about from an alternative meaning of the word. Young people were involved in the naming of the station and were being surveyed by someone from outside Glasgow on name suggestions. One particular young person replied ‘Bolt’ to them – a term meaning ‘get lost’ – and the name was added to the list without the questioner’s knowledge of the meaning – and it stuck!

Bolt FM is now the longest-running youth radio station in Scotland. We have trained over 1000 young people to be presenters. Schools have used the radio station to develop pupils’ core presentation skills. In addition to making presentations to the rest of their class, pupils have been able to broadcast to their family and community.

Bolt FM works hard to ensure that young people are at the heart of all that happens. 90% of the Board of Bolt are under 25. It takes us five minutes to train a young person in the basics of using our studio, which is all digital and hosts over 6,000 tracks and 300 jingles. The youngest person who engineers their own show is seven. Unlike many other art forms, radio is very accessible, as any musical style and presentation style is welcome. Young people like it as they can instantly hear the results and their peers can listen wherever they are – in the park, on the street, in their homes.

A senior resident of Blackhill phoned in for a ‘shout-out’ during a Friday night dance show. I had to investigate how a septuagenarian had developed a taste for ‘electro house’. She hated the music, she said, but explained that her neighbour was one of the DJs; all she could ever do was complain about his behaviour, but his radio show gave her the opportunity to praise him for his talent. They have got on better ever since.

One of my favourite interviews was with a local community police officer, who was well known for dealing with young people hanging around the shops. He agreed to do an interview with some of the young people he often dealt with. It was a hostile beginning, with the young people asking: Why do ye always move us oan?; and the officer saying: Why do you always swear at me? I’m just trying to do my job. Over the hour, however, the young people became more aware of how intimidating they look to older residents trying to use the shops, and the officer started to work out some alternatives to hanging around shopfronts for the young people. They agreed to try to treat each other as real people, and went on to design and create an innovative youth shelter together, but that is another story.

By 2007, gang violence between the two communities had been eradicated, with Bolt FM making a significant contribution to this achievement. Instead of fighting in the streets to show dominance, young people would compete over the airways to get the most texts into their shows. Bolt’s Board had been formed from both communities, and with events and broadcasts taking place in both areas, the young people were jelling more and recognising their similar backgrounds. Politicians were now a target during interviews as the young people began to see that they could influence change in their communities.

Broadcasting on FM is very expensive. Bolt at first used a short-term restricted licence, which lasts for 28 days and costs over £5000. During these times, the staffing level to support the young people for 16 hours per day, broadcasting seven days a week, was also huge. With funders cutting back in recent years, Bolt FM had to look at other ways of sustaining itself.

Fortunately, more young people were getting the Internet on their mobile phones. Bolt FM was very wary of broadcasting solely on the Internet, due to the possibility of excluding our most disadvantaged listeners. However through surveys at local schools we were able to see that 99% of young people had access to a computer for at least an hour a day. So we are now able to broadcast all year round for just a few hundred pounds. We are now broadcasting Monday to Thursday from 4pm to 9pm.

As with all radio stations it is harder than ever to compete with the many distractions of modern life, however Bolt FM continues to inspire new generations of radio presenters and listeners, giving young people the opportunity to be heard, to learn new skills and to make decisions in their life and in the life of their community.

www.boltfm.co.uk/Home_Page.html

Neil Young has been a full-time worker with the Church of Scotland for over 15 years. Presently he is Youth Team Leader at St Paul’s Church, living and working in the Blackhill area of Glasgow, which is in the bottom 1% of the poorest communities in Scotland. Neil is a Community kid who first visited Iona when he was 6 weeks old. He’s been a volunteer with the Iona Community on Iona, a youth associate, has been taking groups to Canan and Iona for the past decade, and has sung with the Wild Goose Collective on their last three CDs.

Neil Young has been a full-time worker with the Church of Scotland for over 15 years. Presently he is Youth Team Leader at St Paul’s Church, living and working in the Blackhill area of Glasgow, which is in the bottom 1% of the poorest communities in Scotland. Neil is a Community kid who first visited Iona when he was 6 weeks old. He’s been a volunteer with the Iona Community on Iona, a youth associate, has been taking groups to Canan and Iona for the past decade, and has sung with the Wild Goose Collective on their last three CDs.
Shelly Coyne is Project Leader of Givin’ it Laldie – a community music organisation committed to creative, fun and inclusive singing sessions to transform the Gorbals into a singing community …

Have you noticed the growing number of people who are joining choirs? How community singing has become much more inclusive and moved away from just being about choral music? We are currently riding a wave in the growing popularity of singing, with even the media catching up on what singers and researchers have known for years – that community singing improves your mood, raises self-esteem and confidence, makes you feel more connected to other people and can improve both physical and mental health. But what is the impact of putting community singing at the heart of an area that experiences poverty, and what impact can it have on the children and young people in that community?

The Gorbals is an area of multiple deprivation: 9 of the 11 data zones within the parish boundaries of Gorbals Church of Scotland fall within the bottom 15% of data zones in terms of deprivation in Scotland, and 7 of these data zones occupy the bottom 5%. Life expectancy in the Gorbals is 14% below the national average and Greater Gorbals remains an area of significant need which fares worse than the Scottish average in almost every indicator presented in the community health profiles, with concentrations of homelessness, addictions and high levels of crime.1

The area has undergone large-scale demolition and rebuilding twice in the last 40 years; in fact this is still ongoing, and has led not only to the appearance of the Gorbals dramatically changing but to a wider social mix of residents making the Gorbals their home. The Old Gorbals generations live alongside New Gorbals residents; those attracted by the new private housing and the proximity to the city centre, and refugees and asylum seekers resident in the Gorbals since 2000.

This heady cultural and social mix has created an area that is cosmopolitan and vibrant but has also brought issues of lack of community cohesion and local identity and tensions. Divisions across the community are made worse by the inherent religious sectarianism.

The Gorbals, though, is most definitely a place of mutual support and friendliness: from its leper colony in the 1800s to its welcoming of refugees and persecution and seeking refuge and warmth.

**GIVIN’ IT LALDIE: MAKING MUSIC IN THE GORBALS**

Givin’ it Laldie* was established in May 2010 through Gorbals Parish Church, a lively musical congregation committed to social justice, with close ties to the Iona Community. The project was set up to address issues of poverty and deprivation, poor health, low self-esteem, sectarianism and to help aid community cohesion. A full-time community musician was employed to lead and run the project and to work across the whole community – with babies and toddlers, schoolchildren, teenagers in the youth clubs, young people and asylum seekers resident in the Gorbals since 2000.

Singers from across the project have said things like: ‘Singing helps me to forget any aches and pains.’ ‘I feel more alive and relaxed.’ ‘I get time out from the world.’ ‘I’m less anxious, more confident.’ ‘I have more self-belief.’ ‘I feel more embedded in Gorbals now.’ ‘Singing just makes me feel happier.’ ‘I have a lot more to look forward to.’ ‘It helps me get away from loneliness and depression.’ ‘I see it as a coping thing: do I go and get drunk, or do I sing?’ ‘It’s very therapeutic and spiritual.’

**WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Since its beginning, Givin’ it Laldie has had a particular commitment to working with children and young people across the community and to creating groups and choirs that respond to their needs and the local issues. Part of the passion is to create some high-quality music-making opportunities that children in more affluent areas have access to and enjoy.

We have found a range of ways to include and involve children across the Gorbals in community singing: The Gorbals Children’s Choir was one of the first groups to be established, and it has gained something of a reputation through performing in the Gorbals and across the city. The register for the choir has over 90 names on it. It was set up to bring children from two schools, St Francis Primary and Blackfriars Primary, together for an after-school club, to directly address community divisions brought about by sectarianism and to help raise the self-esteem and confidence of the children. In order not to favour one school/religion over the other, rehearsals alternate between the two schools and so that the children (and their parents for choir concerts) are stepping foot in the other’s school.

Achieving our aims at Givin’ it Laldie is a gradual process, but the feedback we receive from the children in their Choir quote book is encouraging and tells us that new friendships are being formed, that there is a huge sense of pride and achievement among choir members and that the choir is very much loved in the community.

The two singing groups set up for teenagers, The Looked After Children’s Choir (for young people in care and their carers) and The Gorbals Teenage Singing Project, are about using singing to help young people form healthy relationships and learn new skills. The choirs help create structure in the lives of the young people, and working towards performances and recording CDs provides essential focus.

Both groups go some way to challenging stereotypes of young people, and performances in the community raise their profile and maybe go some way to reducing people’s fear.

Our babies and toddlers singing group, Big Little Sing, is run in conjunction with our partner organisation Bridging the Gap. It was set up to offer Scottish and refugee and asylum-seeker families a fun and creative place to sing and play with their children and to help in children’s development of listening, language and communication skills. Singing has also proved to be a valuable tool in aiding integration of the children and parents into the community – and singing songs from different countries and using many languages is a wonderful way to introduce and explore the wealth of the cultures of the folk who attend the sessions.

By penetrating deep into each community, each choir feeds into another, with three generations of one family sometimes singing in three different groups in a week. Toddlers from Big Little Sing can eventually progress into the children’s choir, then into the teenage group and finally join the Community Choir. We do have teenagers in our Community Choir, which works both ways to challenging stereotypes: the local teenagers are viewed as valuable assets to the community – their vitality and enthusiasm is revered by the rest of the choir – and equally the young people meet and mix with people of different ages and backgrounds from their community, widening their horizons.

Givin’ it Laldie was set up to improve the lives and well-being of a whole community through singing, and the feedback we have received from members of our groups and from research carried out in the project shows that we are going some way to meeting our objectives. For every choir we set up we could easily create one more, such is the need. While we are growing and looking at introducing instrumental sessions, including drumming, to our programme, our commitment is to finding the funding to maintain existing work and to continue to support the community through song.

For more information, or to come and see our work, please contact me at: givinitlaldie@gmail.com, or see www.givinitlaldie.org.uk

1. Information from Gorbals Church of Scotland Community Profile, 2010; The Health Improvement Plan for South East Glasgow, 2009, and The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

* Laldie: ‘to do something energetically – with great energy’
When I left my position on Iona in 2008, rather than returning to my former career in counselling and social work, I took a leap of faith and followed my sense of calling into an unusual kind of ministry: building wooden boats. More to the point, community boatbuilding: working with a volunteer team to craft something that not one of us could have done on our own – and building a sense of community and personal strength right alongside.

After finishing a course on traditional small-craft construction, I was offered an internship at the Community Boat Project of the Northwest School of Wooden Boatbuilding (www.nwboatschool.org), working with high-school-aged students and a few adult volunteers. The project is the dream of educator and former tall ship captain Wayne Chimienti. Local schools got on board to provide additional education to homeschooled students, and it’s all fuelled by volunteer labour.

Run on an absolute shoestring budget, the project builds one 30-foot sailing/rowing boat each school year, which is then used by various groups for educational programming in environmental science and maritime skills. The boats are safe, functional and beautiful.

Workshops were always a hive of activity – full of excitement. Besides building a boat, we made oars, masts, sails decorated with murals, tackle blocks – almost everything a sailing boat could possibly need.

We prepared as much as possible in advance, working to match the young people with adult volunteers best suited to their learning – but things would never go according to plan and we often ended up with what I can best describe as a beautiful chaos. Not surprisingly, the teenagers loved their time in the workshop. It gave them a space where they could thrive: a place where they could share in creativity and problem-solving; learn to work their way through their frustration to communication and cooperation – and in the end they’d built something totally amazing that they could take great pride in.

One of the girls in the boatbuilding class told me that it was the most important thing she’d ever done in her life; that it had taught her confidence in herself, as well as carpentry.

For my part as an instructor, I learned that, because building a boat is complicated enough, I couldn’t ever possibly plan my way to perfection – I had to just turn up ready each day and hope for the best. I learned that I don’t need to be an expert, and in fact it often helped that I wasn’t, as students could feel empowered to step in and work together to problem solve. My team of young carpenters learned fast, worked hard, battled forward, looked out for each other, and took time to laugh – sometimes uncontrollably. The experience showed me how forgiving and able teenagers are, and it revealed to me just how much I love community boatbuilding – much more than I could ever love the simple act of building a boat on my own.

Our time in the workshop wasn’t about making everything go smoothly, or pushing students to pass exams and make grades: it was a time for learning everything you can learn, making our boat and our community the best that it could possibly be. It was about the people who built and sailed the boat just as much as it was about building the boat. It wasn’t religious in any way – but for me it was a magical slice of the Kingdom, and I watched the ‘Master Carpenter’ prayer I’d learned on Iona come alive time and time again:

Christ, the Master Carpenter, who at the last purchased our whole salvation, wields your tools in the workshop of your world, so that we who come rough-hewn to your bench may here be fashioned to a truer beauty of your hand…

When I was first just dreaming this dream – mulling over the possibilities of using handicraft and carpentry as a community-building tool – I had originally thought of the shipwright’s trade because I saw wooden boats as extraordinary soulful, beautiful, compelling. I soon found out, though, that boatbuilding actually lends itself perfectly to group work: although an individual working alone can craft furniture, or even construct a small house, it’s often said that ‘You need at least three hands to build a boat’ – not to mention a healthy amount of cooperation, patience and shared vision!

Training as a community boatbuilder was a flash of inspiration rather than a sensible career move, but I’m so glad I followed the call. It’s ministry in a secular setting, where I get to share who I am, offering love and witness to those around, in all that they bring to the task at hand.

Photos © Karen Gale. Used by permission of Karen Gale and the Northwest School of Wooden Boatbuilding

During his time in America, Simon also worked at the Carpenter’s Boat Shop in Maine, which until recently was run by Iona Community associate Bobby Ives. The Carpenter’s Boat Shop is an apprenticeship school and community for all people. Whether apprentices are between college and life careers, jobs and new directions, alcoholism and sobriety or transitioning into retirement, the Boat Shop provides a safe harbour before setting sail on a new course in life.

While considering goals and directions, apprentices live in community and learn boatbuilding, carpentry, furniture making, sailing, seamanship and perform community service. They also explore personal faith through reading, meeting and discussion (from www.carpentersboatshop.org).

Simon de Voil is currently living in Glasgow, building a 14-foot Orcadian dinghy (eventually bound for Iona) in the Galgaff workshop (www.galgaff.org). www.simondevoil.co.uk
In one way or another, most of us are like the prodigal son. So how should we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. And what about us? We have all erred and strayed like lost sheep. And if we behave in ways that others find challenging? Unemployment? And the constant blizzard of consumer advertising. What have we done to them through poverty, neglect, bad housing and crushing oppression, but have continued to act, even when they knew in their minds and hearts that they may fail. It’s about reflecting on how such a spirit has woven through each of our own histories to enable our individual and communal existence today.

Everyday, the suicide rate of young people rises. Because our spirits are crushed and we are actually dying inside. What does this say about a culture which lets this happen to its youth? The disappointment at the lack of connection for young people and the continued acknowledgement of the loss of love and empathy and a pervasive feeling of broken-heartedness has led me to think more deeply about the meaning of building real, loving relationships in our culture. To combat the root of our despair. Is love truly absent, or is true love displaced by other things? Or do we just have an inability to nourish ourselves appropriately? The lack of love, support and ultimately meaning for young people in our world continues to pierce my heart. But sometimes, in our moments of doubt and difficulty, the only solution for moving out and forward is to become more engaged in this bokers world.

Seeking out the core of why we get up in the morning to continue the fight is a start. And then reminding ourselves of our loved ones, pals and support networks. Building fierce movements for change which address the interdependent nature of our personal health and the world’s seems actually not only useful, but extremely powerful. It’s about how throughout history folk have woken every morning facing crushing oppression, but have continued to act, even when they knew in their minds and hearts that they may fail. It’s about reflecting on how such a spirit has woven through each of our own histories to enable our individual and communal existence today. This indomitable spirit which keeps us fighting all the pain inside and out. And the injustice. Onwards!

Dan Glass is a young activist with So We Stand, a grassroots UK network working to develop ideas and methods for community self-defence. The SWS summer school is a free, intensive 1-week introduction to community organising and social change. The school is designed for young people aged 16-30 who experience economic injustice, pollution and racism in their communities, and want to learn effective and creative ways of fighting for social justice …

In the summer of 2012, leading racial justice advocates and community groups from across the UK united to reflect on the legacy of the 2011 ‘riots’ and on strategies for youth resistance against an increasingly repressive state. ‘Reclaiming the Riots and Insurgencies: Legacy, Representation and Strategies of Resistance – One Year On. Where Now?’ included leading voices such as Michael La Rose from the Black Youth Movement and the George Padmore Institute,1 and Stafford Scott from the Tottenham Defence Campaign.2 The George Padmore Institute and So We Stand invited the public to this event to listen to the panel of community organisers speaking about how best to support our young people. Remi Harris, George Padmore Institute founder, said: ‘One year on from the summer riots and insurrections of 2011, we are left as a community with questions about legacy, representation and resistance. People are coming together from across London to share experiences, thoughts, ideas and to express anger as the situation for young people worsens.’

This event also served to launch the So We Stand summer school, which helps educate young people affected by the ‘riots’, poverty, racism and inequality in community-organising methods. The school has generated intense interest, and organising committees are already being built to take the school far further in 2013.

The summer school was facilitated by different groups and individuals working for social justice across the UK: the George Padmore Institute, the Newham Monitoring Project, the Alliance for Inclusive Education, the Octavia Foundation, and folk such as film-maker Asmita Chauhan, artist/performer Zena Edwards, artists from the Notting Hill Carnival, popular educator from Easterhouse Cathy McCormack, activists from Brent, Brixton, LGBTQI organisers, residents fighting against airport expansion – and many more activists and artists leading the fight on the frontlines of injustice. These activists and artists led the training and mentoring programme: Young people visited different communities across London active in organising grassroots movements in response to state repression and inequality and explored practical and creative methods of fighting for their own racial and social justice.

Rayne Pattern, a So We Stand summer school participant, said: ‘Inequality in the UK is getting worse and worse. Across the UK we are seeing our communities attacked from all angles and it is forcing us into more isolated ways of working to survive. Last summer’s riots demonstrated both the intensity of our feelings against injustice and how difficult it is to organise successfully when robbed of our political voices. That’s why we think it’s crucial to bring our stories together in order … to link up struggles and take action. People who are invisibilised, ignored and discriminated against – young people, LGBTQI people, poor people, women, disabled people, people of colour – are … going to share our stories, successes and frustrations to build stronger forces for change.

The summer school was dedicated to building the skills of women, people of colour, disabled people, working-class people, LGBTQI people … as the next generation of leaders in the social justice movement. The school was based on three pillars:

1. Learning for empowerment and community organising: to deepen the context of power and resistance in the UK and to learn how to turn marginalisation and isolation into politically powerful support systems.
2. Skills training: to learn and share tools to build power and excitement into our communities to tackle injustice.
3. Longer-term mentoring: moving on from the 1-week course, partic-
Throughout the summer school, popular education tools were critical in helping students develop their understanding of the daily lived reality of injustice and inequality. The young people also developed their ‘learning edges’ – places which push us out of our comfort zones and stretch us to be our best, or where we ‘bump up’ against people or ideas. The journey throughout the school was a continuous process of ‘unlearning,’ ‘learning’ and ‘relearning,’ reflection and evaluation, for people who historically have been disenchanted by traditional schooling. We also invited participants to get involved in our creative workshops: a fundamental aspect of changing the world is expression through art – and we encouraged the young people to become artists themselves.

In relation to the ‘riots,’ the school aimed to give participants tools to understand and challenge the stereotypes – particularly of young people and rioters – which they are presented with by the media. By providing an in-depth focus on the social issues that caused the insurgencies, we aimed to show the story that is hidden from the public eye. We invited speakers to share their knowledge of issues such as stop and search, police brutality, racism, the draconian joint enterprise laws, environmental pollution and other issues that affect BAME and working-class people in the UK. We also, of course, invited our summer school participants to share their own experiences and stories.

The picture that emerged was that these were not apolitical reactionary ‘riots,’ but insurgencies and valid responses to perpetual inequality and injustice; and that only by debating the issues that affect working-class and BAME people disproportionately can we fundamentally change the way in which society works.

At the end of the summer school, Rayne Pattern summed up the experience of many participants: ‘Many people were given the space to be listened to and supported by those who have been working for justice for a long time. The school continues to exist to harness our anger at economic, environmental, racial and social oppression, catalyse self-determination, mobilise ourselves into building strength in our communities and to defend against and confront oppression over the coming years.’

1. The George Padmore Institute is an archive, educational resource and research centre housing materials relating to the Black community of Caribbean, African and Asian descent in Britain and Continental Europe. www.georgepadmoreinstitute.org
2. See http://tottenhamdefencemovement.co.uk
3. Dan Glass blogs at: www.theglassishalffull.co.uk

THE MARKET ECONOMY UNLEASHED, by Cathy McCormack, a member of So We Stand

Cathy McCormack is an activist in Easterhouse. Following is an excerpt from her essay ‘The Price of Economic Barbarism.’

In the early 1980s the Reagan and Thatcher administrations changed their economies from industrial to ‘money market.’ Millions of families like mine were thrown onto the unemployment scrapheap and forced to live on welfare.

Gradually, the ideology underlying this model began to be exposed. In the 1980s, Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson, said in a speech that we should think about training people for jobs which are ‘not so much low-tech as no-tech’.

G.A. Cohen asked: What sort of education is contemplated in that snappy statement ‘not so much low-tech as no-tech’? Not an education that nourishes the creative powers of young people and brings forth their full capacity. Nigel Lawson is saying that it’s dangerous to educate the young too much, because then we produce cultivated people who aren’t suited to the low-grade jobs that the market will offer them.

During that time, a leaked memo from a senior official at the Department of Education and Science said something similar: ‘We are beginning to create aspirational societies which society cannot match … When young people … can’t find work which meets their abilities and expectations, then we are only creating frustration with … disturbing social consequences. We have to ration … educational opportunities so that the society can cope with the output of education. … People must be educated once more to know their place.’

This was a deliberate policy to diminish young people’s aspirations and fit them into a low-wage economy – but only certain young people.

1. Against Capitalism, G.A. Cohen, 2011
2. Ibid

To read Cathy’s essay in its entirety, go to: www.churchofscotland.org.uk

Alison Swiften

I will call him Matthew, because that is not his name

The route up Beinn Y Wrackie in Perthshire on a warm August afternoon begins in woodland, with wild raspberries. On my mind is a young person; I will call him Matthew, because that is not his name. I will tell you that he is 15 and ripe for conscription in a country with one of the largest armed forces in numbers in the world today. I will not tell you the precise name of the country he is from. It is better that way. For now. Those who know the country say that there are no young people there any more. Matthew has been on my mind and in my life for several years now. When I swim, and the light dapples the tiles in the public baths, and there is peace in my body and soul for a while, Matthew’s name swims with me.

This morning we received news. News is not easy to come by. It requires network connections across many precariously connected countries. Phone cards with improbable names – Unity, Onetel, Talk Home, where minutes are prepaid and precious – substitute where landlines are monitored by those intent on harm. It requires several intermediaries to ensure news is safely transmitted. A call from a grandfather to an uncle, a call from a son to a mother, a call from a mother to a daughter, a call from a daughter to a father – each located in a different country. Such is the scattering of refugees.

When news comes it is usually terse, practical. For months now news has been long, longing for freedom from fear of persecution and forced conscription, longing for freedom from the fear of sudden detention, consequences for the family of reluctance or refusal. Freedom from the fear of prison, of forms of torture which are well documented by Human Rights Watch, and in the Country of Origin information held by our own Home Office.

As we climb a little higher the moor opens out and is covered in heather. There is a sweetness in the air and a breeze. The news is simple. Matthew has left his country, on foot, on his own initiative. He has taken the most dangerous route – with smugglers who trade in lives of young people. He has tired of waiting for a safe passage today. He has taken the most dangerous route – with smugglers who trade in lives of young people. He has tired of waiting for a safe passage today. He has crossed the border to the north, through the Sinai and into Israel. Since the war in Libya routes to Europe have closed. Israel, with its recent policy of mass expulsion of African refugees, is now the immediate hope for many young people who have fled.

My breath is laboured now as we pass the lochan and climb the steep face of the hill. The phone rings again. We used to climb hills without a phone, and then with one just for emergencies, emergencies affecting us directly, that is. This has not been so for several years now. In fact, there have been very fewclimbs at all since our lives became deeply intertwined with young people seeking sanctuary. Most of the calls to our home come from young people who are seeking or have found sanctuary and in either case are now seeking normality. But it is also normal for the phone to ring and bring news of danger, deportation and fear. Sleepovers, film nights and popcorn and waking to find my shoes have already walked out of the door on some other, much younger, feet have been commonplace and our food and patterns of domestic life have changed. Normality includes specific ways of preparing and boiling butter for painting on to hair to give it a particular sheen. The young women who visit come with their berry smells and high heels and mobiles which bring them a little closer to the sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, parents spread out across the countries which have signed the Refugee Convention, or in ‘third countries’, where they wait in hope for a number in the international refugee resettlement lottery.

Travelling home recently from one such ‘third country,’ I sat soaking in
the hope and expectation of a family of seven whose fortunes had changed and who were decked out in thick coats and NGO-bolstered bags, with huge fearfully joyful smiles at the prospect of life in Canada, the country which had done the paperwork and agreed to take them in.

The route facing Matthew now is not this one. If handed on to the Sinai smugglers then there is a now well-documented danger of him being held hostage in the desert for vast sums of money and, if this is not forthcoming, for him to have his organs harvested for hospitals, and to perish as others have done already. In a recent report on the Sinai smuggling The Guardian published the following quote and eyewitness description: ‘We are not humans to the smugglers – they treat the weapons with more respect’ … Once inside the Sinai smugglers’ camps, only those who can be of service to their captors are spared daily torture, including being hung upside down for hours, rape and burning with electric cables. In the darkness of the lorry’s interior torchlight picks up brightly painted graphics: words and symbols representing and remembering the plight of people who are and have been trafficked for sexual or domestic slavery around the world. The teenagers who constructed the lorry lead people through. There is a pride in what they have made, and a seriousness about the message.

Junior Youth Festival 2012 was made up of a group of 15 girls and 1 boy, aged 11 to 14, from in and around Dunoon, and they spent the week talking about what it meant ‘to be the change they wanted to see in the world’ (Gandhi). The group wrestled with the idea that people as young as themselves could make an impact on the world around them, through looking at stories of inspiration found in the lives of ‘world changers’, different individuals and communities across the globe. There were discussions about which pop star was, or wasn’t, a good example in the world, and pre-teen rants about ‘the mess that is Argyle and Bute Council’ (their views).

As we built on the values and stories of the ‘world changers’, we talked about the issues and challenges that humanity faced today, and were privileged to see rumbles of passion and action in the group – a group not old enough to see rumbles of passion and action in the group – a group not old enough to buy cigarettes but fully intent on changing the world.

This passion could be seen in how much work they had put into the traffickers’ lorry and in the mature, committed way they led the Abbey service and shared stories with tourists, guests, residents and volunteers.

The theme of Youth Festival 2012 was ‘treasure’: looking into what it means to treasure other people, the world around us and ourselves. Each teen journeyed through the week as part of a clan; a smaller group that met to discuss, plan worship and take part in games, and this allowed better space for the young people to get to know one another. Conversation, discussion and sometimes good-natured argument grew from the different nationalities and backgrounds of the young people: American teens baffled by the amount of tax Sweden paid and British teens struggling to get their heads around the idea of the American ‘health care system’. Any myth of a completely apathetic youth culture is put to bed by being part of these passionate discussions.

Yet we worked hard to play hard and put a lot of effort into making Youth Festival as beautifully ridiculous as we could. A massive pirate party took over the Mac on the Monday – all the young people adorned in pirate paraphernalia constructed after raiding the craftroom, while on Thursday night the village hall was turned into Iona’s most popular (and only) dance club, complete with disco balls and glow sticks. There was a ceilidh that went on well into the night, and a concert that featured more than your usual amount of crossingdressers. All of these moments had had masses of effort put into them, which is where the youth team come in. A mix of young teachers, police, youth workers and students meet for months in advance of Youth Fest to plan it, to allow it to happen as smoothly and beautifully as it does.

We were wary at Youth Fest that something of worth might get lost amongst all the activity; that ‘doing’ would take precedence over ‘being’. With that in mind, we encouraged and challenged the young people to use the Wednesday morning to take stock and reflect on what was going on for them, and so that the Iona experience didn’t become separate from ‘real life’. Our worries that the young people would not take this opportunity seriously were unfounded, we realised, as we watched them split up and spread out across the village to take a few hours to write, draw or simply think.

To appreciate something of the impact of Youth Fest, it takes sharing in moments like staying up late talking, and then sitting together on a hill waiting for the sunrise of the last Iona morning. A mix of teens from the UK and Canada shared with me how Iona
The second week of July brought a challenge for the Camas team with the theme of 'I'm a Rock Climber'. Over the course of the week, the participants engaged in a variety of activities aimed at overcoming obstacles and building confidence. The weather conditions were challenging, with rain and strong winds making the experience even more intense. Despite the difficulties, the participants persevered, giving a testament to the resilience and spirit of the Camas community.

EXTRACTS FROM THE CAMAS DIARY, 2012
The Camas Diary is a blog written by Camas guests, volunteers and residents:
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A YOUTH GROUP
Sunday/Monday: On the first full day at Camas we split into two groups for abseiling and art. During the kayaking session we played games in the water such as tag. By this point I had fallen in four times. The first time was definitely the worst as the chill of the water was quite a shock! Andy and Karle

Tuesday/Wednesday: Half the group braved the 40-foot descent down the granite quarry – some quaking more than others, and some taking longer than others! Jon, our instructor, was very patient and reassuring. While half the group were abseiling, the other half took part in a treasure hunt. Later that day we packed for wild camping on Market Bay. We built a fire which lasted for four hours, long enough to cook our jacket potatoes and to keep us warm whilst listening to ghost stories. Richard and Aaron

Thursday: For the raft-building challenge our team worked well to construct an unbreakable and, as it turned out, undefeatable raft. Unlike previous years, there was no plan of sabotage – and as the opposition’s raft tipped over twice within minutes, we didn’t need to anyway.

Finally, we got our chance to take the Camas Challenge and run Camas ourselves for a day. The air was full of anticipation and rumours: the stirrings of a song started to emerge, the art room began producing great lengths of streamers, and delicious aromas started to drift over heads from the kitchen. It made for one fabulous last evening together. Becky and Caroline

The next morning we awoke to the reality that it was time to leave Camas and say our goodbyes. After a long, slow trek down the track one last time, we shared our memories of the week in a final reflection. Thank you to everyone who supported our efforts to fundraise for coming to Camas; you will never know what a difference it has made to all our lives, and we are eternally grateful.

PROVANMILL AT CAMAS – BANTER CENTRAL
Coasteering was a new concept. This includes getting into wetsuits, buoyancy aids and helmets and then heading out to the islands in front of the Camas buildings to climb around them on the rocks and in the water. To finish the whole thing off you simply jump off a big rock at the end and go for a swim. After you’ve done that, you come into the common room for a nice evening in front of the fire. Monday night, just after 9 o’clock, we suddenly had dolphins in the bay, jumping and playing around! It was a beautiful sight as the sun set. The week ended, as usual, with the Camas Challenge and loads of fun games. Thank you for a great week, guys. Come back soon!

FREEMAN AHOY!

Camas staff welcomed a group from Freeman College in Sheffield. The weather throughout the week was beautiful, allowing for all the usual Camas activities, as well as a wonderful evening kayak trip over to Iona, where the group got to sample the delights of the fair isle.
The highlight of the week was the camp at Market Bay – fish leapt out of the water in front of a glorious sunset, a pod of dolphins swam by and some of the group were even brave enough to sleep under the stars. Sheer bliss…

The Camas Challenge was equally blissful – pirates was the theme. Pirate names were created and moustaches were drawn. We feasted on burgers, rolls and salad. Following the meal we played loads of games, including a vicious game of crab football, and we ended the evening sitting round the fire writing songs about the past week. Thank you, Freeman, we loved having you here! @ http://thecamastory.blogspot.co.uk

Camas is the Iona Community’s Adventure Centre on the isle of Mull.
Camas Adventure Centre, Ardtallaig, Bunnessan, Isle of Mull, PA67 6DX, UK, www.iona.org.uk

SUDDENLY DOLPHINS IN THE BAT

New week, new youth! A group from Glasgow came to take over Camas for an exciting and adventurous week filled with new experiences. We spent time in the art room doing loads of fun stuff: feltig, marbling paper; we wrote our names on the beams in the ceiling and quite a few fell for the art of making friendship bracelets.

At the ripe old age of 24, I am a member of what demographers call Generation Y. For me there was never a time television wasn’t in colour. I cannot remember a time when my family didn’t own a computer. Before coming to work for the Iona Community I had never written a cheque or sent a fax because credit cards and email have always served me perfectly well, thank you very much. Instant, high-quality communication has always been a part of my life, so it’s no surprise that Generation Y thinks about the world differently to other generations. Modern communication has revolutionised the world in which we live, including ways that might not be immediately apparent. When pocket watches became popular in the 1800s did the idea of God being the watchmaker of the universe! How will these new technologies affect the way we think about God in the future?
The opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics was one of the highlights of my year. As someone who has recently studied in the field of Communications, one of my favourite parts was the all-singing, all-dancing tribute to the power of modern communication during the ceremony. It was a party-like atmosphere which culminated in a triumphant reveal: Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, sitting at a computer, and the message ‘THIS IS FOR EVERYONE’ in bold letters wrapping around the stadium, each person’s chair a single pixel in the glowing proclamation. I was touched by the sentiment and did some research on this man, and in the process I discovered some incredible things which made me think about God’s relationship to us and also about the Kingdom of Heaven.

Tim Berners-Lee is an incredible man. While working at the physics lab CERN in Switzerland and France he invented a handful of technologies many of us now use on a daily basis, all of which work together to create the interlinked documents we now refer to as the Web. He invented the web browser, something found on every computer and nearly every mobile device developed today; he invented the system of hypertext links we use to navigate from page to page online and he invented HTML, code, which is the language web pages are written in so they can appear on our screens.
The incredible thing about all these technologies is not the ideas themselves, but that on the 30th of April 1993, CERN, under the direction of Tim Berners-Lee, announced that the Web would be free – to anyone, with no fees due. The first browser was released into the public domain, which meant that anyone could use it, change it, resell it and innovate on it, without paying Berners-Lee anything at all. It is widely acknowledged that Tim Berners-Lee could have been a billionaire, but instead he gave his inventions away, creating a sector worth hundreds of billions of pounds to the global economy. Although he is now worth a cool US$50 million, at the time such altruism would have been a significant personal and financial risk.

Previous to CERN’s announcement, the Internet was just an academic tool almost only ever used by scientists and scholars, but this act of indiscriminate generosity opened up the Internet to the world, sparking new economies, forms of artistic expression, political activism and accountability and most of all – collaboration. Everybody benefited from it: both the deserving and undeserving. It was for everyone, and it changed the world.

Sir Tim Berners-Lee made himself vulnerable to exploitation by making his inventions freely available. In a spirit of collaboration he allowed others to join in the work of making the Web everything that it is today – this is a work that is unfinished; it is perpetually improving. So it is that in an act of indiscriminate generosity God made himself vulnerable to us, making himself freely available through Jesus. In a spirit of collaboration he has allowed others to join in his work, continually ushering in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The World Wide Web is deeply exciting to me as a young Christian because it has become a kind of living, growing, modern-day parable. It is made of rigid wires and code but it is also somehow organic, adapting and moving; it is new and always changing. It provides a new avenue for people to speak out and it has democratised production of content so that broadcasting ideas is no longer a privilege only available to the mega-wealthy. With increasing efforts to bridge the digital divide between those with access to the hardware and the skills to use the Web and those without, more and more previously disenfranchised voices are being added to the conversation. This is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, is it not? The Web has been free and open for less than 20 years – this is only the beginning.

What wonders the Internet, through the World Wide Web, has opened up to us, and what wonders we can see developing in the ever-growing Kingdom – collaboration, self-expression, reconciliation, activism and a thirst for justice. What a privilege that we can take part. This is for everyone.

Rohan Salmond

Rohan Salmond is General Admin Assistant on Iona...
Milad Azar
Inside Palestine

My name is Milad Hanna Azar. I am a young Palestinian who lives in Bethlehem, the city where Jesus Christ was born. I graduated from Bethlehem University with a B.S. degree in nursing and health sciences. Nowadays, I’m working in a pediatric hospital as an intensive care unit staff nurse, and doing voluntary work in a band of clown doctors in the hospital.

Because there is a shortage of nurses in the world, I have a job. My friends, though, those who graduated with a B.S. in business or IT, are still searching for jobs. Travelling outside Palestine is one way by which they are hoping to find a job and to continue their lives in a safer place. Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories plays a strong role in the situation facing new Palestinian graduates as well as affects the whole Palestinian community of course. Checkpoints, soldiers, weapons and the wall all make for a dangerous and blockaded life.

Even with all these stressors, we are all trying our best to find jobs inside Palestine, because we have faith, and hope of peace and freedom one day.

Milad Azar is a volunteer cook in the Abbey and MacLeod Centre kitchens. (Milad is the son of Hanna Azar, who has been a volunteer cook in the Abbey and MacLeod Centre kitchens.)

Waking up with Benedict and Buddha

Since finishing university, Youth Associate Sebastian Harries has been ‘seeking peace and pursuing it’ on a journey which has taken him from Iona, to life in a Benedictine abbey, to meditation flash mobs, to a public meditation for peace in Trafalgar Square with Thich Nhat Hanh …

‘Live in peace yourself and then you can bring peace to others.’
— Thomas à Kempis

Finding inner peace and attempting to bring peace to others has been at the heart of my journey over the past year as an Iona youth associate. After finishing university in 2011, instead of seeking gainful employment, I decided to spend some time with different spiritual communities. Having experienced and witnessed much suffering in myself and in the world around me, I hoped that through community life I could immerse myself in an environment where I might encounter peace, stillness and people who were committed to deeply loving one another. After spending three months volunteering on Iona, I decided to become a youth associate because I was so moved by the commitment to action for peace and justice among the community members. Becoming a youth associate was also a way for me to help support the work of the Community by making a formal commitment to bringing the spirit of the Iona Community to others.

I spent the first three months of membership back on Iona as a volunteer. After leaving Iona, I travelled to a Taizé European meeting in Berlin, where around 30,000 people under the age of thirty gathered together ‘to be in peace’. Initially this seemed a strange concept to me; the notion of there being tens of thousands of people seeking peace in an enormous city seemed counterintuitive. I was used to finding peace in silence and solitude (or by ‘escaping’ to a wee Scottish isle), not in large groups or busy places. However, the opportunity to share silence, prayer, thoughts and feelings with people from so many different countries helped me to discover a real sense of unity and a tangible way of living in peace. The attitude of goodwill and openness among the people there left me with a deep and lasting feeling of hope and a knowledge that this idea could grow and encourage many others to encounter peace.

Following my trip to Berlin I joined a contemplative community of nuns and monks at Mucknell Abbey in Worcestershire, who follow the Rule of Saint Benedict. The rhythm of the day allowed regular time for sitting in silence and contemplation. But rather than this being the peaceful experience I’d expected, I came face to face with a huge amount of anger, sadness and suffering within myself, and I became more aware of the pain and suffering that people experience in places of hardship or trouble. In solitude I felt much closer to the events of the outside world than I had done when living outside community: Previously I’d felt incredibly distant, helpless and sometimes numb to the suffering of others, particularly when constantly being bombarded with negative information and images from the media. The silence of the monastery meant I did not have any distractions to allow me to run from these emotions or experiences. Therefore I had to work out a way to cope with them that could benefit other people – I needed to be able to overcome my own anger and fear and respond with actions of love and peace.

Living in community also made me realise that we cannot choose the people we share our world with, but we can do our best to live in peace and love one another. Although a monastic community may have less physical contact with the wider world than many lay people do, the harmony of the brothers and sisters can help anyone who visits them to encounter peace, and bring that peace to others. Living in a small community can make it easier for us to notice what we need to do to live at one with each other – the smallest of actions can have a dramatic effect on other people. If these actions are done in peace, then the peace can grow. This peace can allow us to encounter the divine love, which I can only describe as being in the presence of God.

After leaving the Abbey, the next thing was to work out how I might put all this into practice. Prior to volunteering on Iona I’d been active with a group called ‘Wake Up: Young Buddhists and Non-Buddhists for a Healthy and Compassionate Society’. Wake Up is a community of 16- to 35-year-olds who meet together to practice mindfulness meditation in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk and peace activist. I went on from the Abbey to help with their public meditation event ‘Sit In Peace’.

One of the Wake Up members, Elina, felt so strongly that the peace of meditation should be shared with the wider world that she began to organise meditation flash mobs in prominent public locations in central London. The purpose of these flash mobs is to create an environment for people from all walks of life to come together in meditation; to spread awareness of meditation among the public; to come together as a community to send positive intentions out into the world – simple acts can stimulate major paradigm shifts in thinking – and to show that leading by example is the best way to lead. The flash mobs had led Elina to organising ‘Sit In Peace’, a sitting meditation guided by Thich Nhat Hanh, which took place in Trafalgar Square one Saturday afternoon.

Around four thousand people came together simply to sit in peace. It was incredible to watch passersby: some stopped to watch, others joined in, or paused for a moment, then carried on their way. Some took pictures or looked puzzled. Despite the sounds of passersby, buses and sirens, nothing was able to disturb the quietness of those sitting together and the effect it was having. I was stewarding for the event and for most of the time was behind the stage, but it didn’t matter: I remained touched by the energy of stillness and calm. Someone came up to me and expressed how sceptical he’d been about spirituality, but said that the peace he had encountered in the sitting meditation had moved him deeply. The event really enabled people to be the peace they want to see in the world.

Practising mindfulness (being truly present and aware) has been essential through the ages in helping people to maintain a relationship between cultivating inner peace and taking action for justice and peace in the world; in helping individuals learn how to listen deeply to their own needs and to the needs of others, and to practise being nonjudgemental. Through stillness we can recognise the divine in all people and beings, and respond with gratitude and love, rather than anger and fear.

www.wup.org

– Sebastian Harries

© Ken Bok
A conversation with Jean Young

Iona Community youth resource worker Chris Long chats with long-time youth worker and member Jean Young, who for over fifty years has been working with inner-city youth...

CHRIS: Why bother?

JEAN: I grew up with folk who gave up time and energy for me and in a home where my parents were involved, not in youth work, but in the church and community, so I suppose it just came naturally. These folk helped to shape me and made me the person I have become. Also, since before I even went to school I wanted to be a teacher. Apart from a short spell when cartography interested me, I never wavered. I changed my mind several times about which age group I wanted to teach and what I wanted to teach. During my career I changed from teaching geography and RE to working in guidance and learning support, so I guess I never really made up my mind. I never worked in a ‘good’ school so when many of my friends left teaching to work in intermediate treatment or social work, I stayed in teaching because I enjoyed it and also because I felt that pupils needed someone in the school who knew the area and believed that they could reach their potential there.

CHRIS: Best residential?

JEAN: There are two. One was at Stroove in Ayrshire with Alice Scrimgeour, who was my real mentor in youth work. It was the early ’70s and groups from the different sections of Northern Ireland were coming for a two-week break. Some of these Irish camps worked and some didn’t. This one worked really well and the young folk mixed really well. I realised, however, that the young folk were with adults who had no responsibility for them and the adults were with young folk that they were not looking after. Both groups really got to know each other as individuals and the week produced some amazing moments. The prayers led by the young folk at the Friday night communion were among the most heartfelt I have ever heard.

When Fred’s group had their reunion, they insisted I brought the Govan High pupils along because it wouldn’t be the same without them. For years, individuals from both groups kept in touch.

CHRIS: What three things have you learnt from young folk?

JEAN: To never give up. I have known so many young folk from very difficult backgrounds who have soldiered on against the odds. If I had been in their shoes, I am sure the system and the situations would have ground me down.

Always to see each person as a work in progress. My mother used to say: ‘Only fools and barns look at unfinished work.’ Many a young person has left school with little to show for their time there and yet I get messages on Friends Reunited telling me of the amazing things they are doing with their lives.

Not to hold on to grudges. Young folk fall in and out with each other on a regular basis. It is often the adults around them who want to make an issue of it and that is often what leads to problems.

CHRIS: Funniest incident?

JEAN: There have been lots. Once a colleague I and I were in the old youth camp on Iona with a group of young folk from Bridgeton. They were not particularly well-behaved and had been keeping us up at night rather a lot. In the middle of the night, we were woken by sounds in the area in front of the kitchen. We devised a plan where one of us crawled through to the long multi-purpose hut while the other went out of the glass door. We burst out with immaculate timing on – the seagulls attacking the bins! Another I remember was with Calton kids at a camp in a church hall in Stevenson in Ayrshire. One young lady persuaded all of the camp not to use the toilets: ‘Because if you sit on the lavvy pan, a hand will come up and grab your bum!’ So the leaders had the exclusive use of the toilets all week, while the children went behind bushes and used the public toilets. That young lady became an air hostess by the way …

CHRIS: Biggest frustration?

JEAN: How difficult it is to get a little bit of money for youth work. Our village youth club runs on a budget of £5000 per year but raising that money takes hours in fundraising and grant applications. The other thing that frustrates me is the amount of red tape and accounting that has to go on to get the money.

CHRIS: What are key differences between school and club?

JEAN: In school you are expected to command respect by rules. In youth club, you earn respect by being there. When I first got a promoted post in school, the criteria was how much extra time did you spend with the pupils on the clubs. Now it is on the courses that you have attended – usually during school time when someone else is coping with your classes. I enjoy the privilege of being alongside teenagers as they become their own people, as opposed to the folk their parents would like them to become.

CHRIS: Lowest moment?

JEAN: I had one young man from Barrhead in Glasgow who decided in the early ’70s that he wanted to go into the army. As his guidance teacher, I talked him through his motives and helped him with his application. His father arrived at the school in high dudgeon accusing me of filling his head with nonsense and pushing my militaristic views! (He wasn’t aware of the Iona Community’s pacifist stance.) He was worried that his son was going off to be cannon fodder in Northern Ireland. Tommy was killed at Goose Green during the Falklands conflict. Reading of his death, I felt it would annoy his father if I went to the funeral but I wrote expressing my sorrow and sympathy. He very graciously replied that he had been wrong. Tommy had loved the army, had been placed his father had only dreamt of, had learnt to ski and had become a top marine. In his loss, he even thanked me for standing up for him against his father. How humbling.

Jean Young has run youth clubs and programmes for homeless young adults and has worked with the Church of Scotland as a Young People’s Leader, among many other things. Presently she runs three youth groups, and supports young people through work with the Iona Community. In 2011 Jean was awarded an MBE for her commitment to young people.

Chris Long is a graduate in youth work and theology. He is a fan of the cinema, well-crafted sauce, pineapples and enjoys cooking.

21 console winter 2012 conversation

WILD GOOSE PUBLICATIONS
BOOKS AND DOWNLOADS

Youth: Readings, Prayers and Liturgical Resources (download), by various contributors, £7.60

A wide-ranging rich collection of reflective and liturgical material for youth groups, youth workers and anyone concerned with youth issues. Drawn together from many Wild Goose books.

No Ordinary Child: A Christian Mother’s Acceptance of Her Gay Son (book), Jacqueline Ley, £3.00 (plus post and packing)

When Jacqueline Ley’s 23-year-old son told her that he was gay, she was shocked and hurt. Her fundamentalist Christian background told her that homosexuality was sinful and that her son had placed himself beyond the pale.

One of the things that she came to learn, however, was that ‘beyond the pale is where we find Christ in the deepest and most compassionate sense, that God incarnate chose to suffer outside a city wall.’

This book of reflections on a mother’s journey from craving normality for her child to celebrating him as a blessedly extraordinary creature of God is not only a chronicle of a remarkable change of attitude. It is also an argument for letting go of our preconceptions about other people – often those nearest and dearest to us – and for acknowledging that what God plans for their lives may be something greater and more mysterious than we can ever imagine.


How can you help children to ‘grow up with God’? One way is through storytelling. By telling children stories that speak of their concerns, by listening to their own stories, and by exploring their questions, you can help them to grow up trusting that God will be at the centre of their lives.

have fun getting to know Fergie the Frog and others through Nancy Cocks’ wonderful stories as you and the children you care about find new ways to experience and grow closer to God in everyday life.

Growing up with God is for parents and grandparents, teachers, ministers and priests – indeed for any adult who cares about the spiritual lives of children. But be warned: your heart will not escape unscathed! What matters to children often matters deeply to adults as well. We all can learn to trust God’s presence more deeply, whatever our age, we can ‘grow up with God’.

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Why participation?

Member Dot Gosling is chaplain and senior lecturer in Christian youth work at the University of Chester ...

My definition of participation for the purposes of this reflection is as follows: 'The positive, voluntary and active involvement of an individual or group in shaping something in order for transformation to take place for the good of all involved. It can create feelings of joy and affirmation and is fundamentally based on an ethic of respect between persons.'

From the Iona Community website: 'What we share, expressed in many different ways, is an experience of the liberating power of Jesus Christ, and a commitment to the personal and social transformation that spring from the vision and values of the gospel.'

Why participation?

At the heart of participation are the core values of equality of opportunity, lifelong learning, belief that everyone has something valuable to contribute, anti-oppressive practice, empowerment, active listening and affirmation. From a Christian point of view, this definition is further enhanced by the mandate set out in Galatians 3:28: 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female: for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'

Clearly, the encouragement to participate can have an extremely positive and often very significant effect on young people. 1 For example, experienced positive active participation as a young person and this experience has stayed with me to the present day. As Senior lecturer, I work closely with youth work students with the specific aim of trying to encourage them to empower young people within the church to become active participants (rather than passive receivers) in their own faith journeys. Encouraging young people to participate in this way enhances their growth as people and their development as disciples of Christ, and promotes an ownership of their faith and of the church to which they belong. Having an ethos of equality of opportunity empowers more people to take ownership of the issues of their particular locality and to get involved, rather than remaining passive and expecting those in positions of authority such as clergy, readers and other leaders to do everything. Empowering people is a skill that involves all the other core values and is vital for transforming the church into a place where those on the margins, those who do not feel part of the church for whatever reason, are welcomed and listened to, valued and loved as Christ commands us to love (Matthew 22:37–39). This could transform the culture of church so that active listening to those on the margins, including many young people, becomes part of the whole church’s thinking and behaviour.

In some church contexts, the lack of a diversity of theological understanding will often lead to narrow theological views and perspectives. Implementing a strategy of active listening would allow these beliefs to be explored through discussion and debate. One of the main difficulties, however, is that the church often does not recognise how urgently listening to those on the margins is needed to purposefully include young people in its work not just to stop the decline in church attendance, but for inclusion to be part of the theology of the church for everyone.

For the church to be completely inclusive is a problem for many people due to their theological beliefs and understanding of the Body of Christ. However, I believe that the relationship within the Trinity profoundly teaches us how we should relate to one another. It reveals that at the centre of all our relationships should be mutuality and interdependence, not independence. In terms of children and young people, this carries significant implication as it means recognizing all ages as important and as an equal part of the Body of Christ. Although some young people may choose not to participate, for those who do their confidence may increase, barriers may be broken down and understanding and knowledge of their own faith journey and church structures may be increased. The main question is whether individuals within the church can open to different views and have awareness of themselves as potential oppressors or libertators. Our place is not to judge or belittle, but to encourage and empower individuals to have new experiences, to help more people grow in knowledge and understanding of God. Our place is to remember that as Christians we are all members of the same Body of Christ; that we have all been commanded to love God and love our neighbours as we love ourselves (Mark 12:31).

1. An Equal Place at the Table for Children and Young People, Lucy Ward and Barbara Haynes, Participation Wales, 2010

PRAYER

Trinity of love, One God in perfect community, hear our prayers for your children.

Let them come to you with all that hurts and disturbs them.

Welcome them with your healing smile.

Encircle them with your strong arms, and send them out to serve you in the world.

Kate McIlhagger, adapted from a prayer written by a group of young people from Brazil, from The Green Heart of the Snowdrop, Wild Goose Publications, www.ionabooks.com

The creative spirit

Journalist/promoter Hamish Gibson interviews actor/film-maker Lorn Macdonald. Hamish and Lorn are ‘Community kids’ and old friends who met on Iona …

HAMISH: What projects – films, music videos, acting jobs – have you got going on at the moment?

LORN: I have just finished 12 intos for the 12 songs on Rachel Sermanni’s debut album Under Mountains. Caitlin Delveis and I have been making what you could describe as visual tasters to the themes and tones of the different songs. They have just been launched on Clash Magazine’s website and have been really well received.

HAMISH: You recently did filming for an upcoming short on Iona. What’s the film about, and how well do you think Iona works as a location?

LORN: A group of us have been filming a zombie horror-comedy called Man’s Best Friend. I don’t want to give too much away, but it’s about a young man who keeps a zombie chained up in his flat. How that scenario ends up on Iona you will just have to wait and see … Iona is a brilliant location for filming because even if the film isn’t any good at least people can go ‘Wow, that sky is stunning’!

HAMISH: How long have you wanted to film something on Iona? What made you choose it as a location?

LORN: I’ve been wanting to film on Iona ever since I made my first James Bond spoof at the age of 12. For Man’s Best Friend it’s a perfect location because at that point in the narrative the film becomes a lot lighter, but Iona has a wonderfully dark edge to it as soon as the sun goes down. I like to think we took full advantage of that as well. This film is somewhat of a guinea pig for my ultimate feature film plans.

HAMISH: What with your family connections, etc to the island, how do you see yourself being able to use your background with Iona to your advantage when using it in your projects?

LORN: Well, the obvious answer is I know where all the good spots are. I also know where and where not is acceptable to walk around as the living dead.

HAMISH: What was the first thing you ever acted in?

LORN: First thing I appeared in on stage was Pansy/A. An opera where I walked around swinging incense and didn’t really understand what was going on. The main character was really upset for a lot of it. He might have been stabbed at the end, I can’t remember. First thing I properly acted in would have been one of the plays we did at the Lyceum Youth Theatre. I was the mad scientist. I was the youngest in the group and it was my moment to shine – I got a big laugh. That secured the need to be an actor, and the attention seeking is yet to wear off.

HAMISH: You’ve just started at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland [ex RSAMD]. While in Glasgow do you plan to do theatrical projects largely within your studies, or do you want to continue doing more outwith it as well?

LORN: Most recently I’ve made, along with fellow wannabe thespians, a short contemporary version of Everyman [Anon]. We wrote, filmed and edited it within the one week. Now we have loads of budding young actors to work with it could be a really exciting three years – that’s a lot of films.

HAMISH: What’s been the most notable project you’ve worked on so far? What’s been the major stepping stone in encouraging you to want to take on acting/directing professionally?
**A touching place:**

**news and letters**

**MOVING MOUNTAINS: RESHAPING THE WORLD: A GLOBAL YOUNG ADULT FESTIVAL IN PALESTINE/ISRAEL, JULY 2013**

A celebration of environmental sustainability, economic justice, human rights and community, organised by Diakonia and Sabeel. For info: www.friendsofsabeel.org.uk

**NEWS FROM CRE8, from Director Rob Wardle**

(CRE8 is a charity based on the Moss Estate in Macclesfield and is part of the work of St Barnabas’ Church. CRE8 works with children, young people, young adults and their families, including those who are at risk or hard to reach: www.cre8macclesfield.org)

CRE8 will be going to Camas for a week in August 2013. The young people will not get another holiday during the year – and Scotland is a foreign country to them! Camas does always bring out the best about living in community. Our young people are used to living together on the estate. Camas helps them to deal with ‘stuff’ without resorting to the ‘usual methods’. In other words, they learn to forgive, accept, understand and challenge each other in a safe environment. This has big benefits for the way we do community work with them when we get back. CRE8 will also be coming up to Camas and Iona with older young people who’ve been to Camas previously. This will be to give something back – by doing practical work, including building and renovation. We like doing this here in Macclesfield.

**the Iona Community from our work**

**practical work, including building something back – by doing**

**and social enterprise experiences**

**with a Scottish flavour for people who’ve been to Camas and Iona with older young people**

**CRE8 works with children, young people, young adults and their families, including those who are at risk or hard to reach**

Near the end of the week, the young people took part in a workshop, facilitated by Programme worker Ben Raw.

Folk were split into seven groups, and given famous quotes on ‘Treasure’ to think about.

They were then asked to write their own quote on treasure, using their time on Iona as inspiration.

Then – gathered all together outside the MacLeod Centre in the summer sunshine, bathed in the brilliant clear Iona light – they painted their quotes on to lengths of cardboard for an installation in the Abbey, which became the focus of the Thursday night communion service (see front cover of Coracle).

Here are the quotes on treasure from the seven groups of young people (Ed.):

**Treasure can be found in memories and friendships as well as in what we have achieved.**

**Treasuring material has no value and can be lost too easily: find your treasure in creation.**

**Happiness, love and thought are the treasures of a lifetime.**

**Discover who you treasure, as good friends and family are the true treasures of life.**

**Many of life’s treasures are bypassed – we must stop and enjoy them!**

**We choose to treasure the joy we find in life, relationships and nature.**

**You won’t find your treasure at the end of the journey, rather you will find it within yourself and the journey itself.**

**Photo by Ben Raw. Used with permission**

**Where your treasure is . . .**

‘Treasure’ was the theme of Iona Youth Festival 2012.

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