

Volunteering on Iona for the Iona Community

Thank you for considering joining the Volunteer Team on Iona supporting the ministry of the Iona Community. We are grateful because the work of the community could not exist without our volunteers. They come from all different places and from all walks of life; they span all adult age groups and all faith traditions; they are enthusiastic and passionate. Our volunteers contribute hugely to our common tasks: offering hospitality, modelling inclusive and creative worship, building community, and supporting the advancement of peace and social justice.

We particularly welcome applications from marginalised groups who are currently under represented within the Community. Specifically, people of colour, LGBTQ+ people, and those from a disadvantaged social background.

Volunteering on Iona could be one of the most enriching experiences that you have in life - this is certainly what many of our past volunteers tell us. It is demanding, though, and not for everyone. We would therefore like to encourage you to think carefully before applying as to whether it is the right move for you.

In this spirit of discernment, here is an outline of some of the joys and challenges of living and working as a volunteer on Iona.

The Common Task

If you come to Iona, you will be joining a constantly changing, inclusive community of volunteers and resident staff as they work and worship together, and share in the Iona Community's exploration of Christian common life. By living in community, you will have opportunities for deep sharing and learning – learning about yourself, human nature, your relationships, and God. You will form many friendships, some of which may well be for life. You will have many opportunities to explore your own spiritual journey and grow in your faith. You will also learn new skills and develop existing ones – for example helping to lead worship, working in the shop, or baking bread. You will experience human encounters of a depth and variety that could prove profoundly enriching, and even life-changing.

The experience of living in community on Iona will in many ways be made even richer because the island is so small and has few of the amenities and distractions that one might find elsewhere. On Iona, people get to know and rely on each other a lot more quickly and more deeply than in other settings.

It is also a very challenging way of life.

You will be with other people nearly all of the time, be they colleagues or guests. You may have to share a bedroom with one other person (if permissible under Covid-19). You will nearly always eat with other people. You will get on very well with some, and not so well with others. If you are someone who needs a lot of personal space or peace and then please consider carefully whether volunteering for the Community on Iona is the right choice for you. Although we try to be as accommodating as possible, the facilities on Iona are limited so if you have specific access requirements please get in touch for further information.

Volunteering with the Iona Community is very full on, both physically and relationally. You will be allocated to a team – typically housekeeping, kitchen, maintenance, sacristan, administration or the shop – and be expected to be on duty five days a week. This includes carrying out specific work tasks and eating with guests. In addition, you are encouraged to attend morning and/or evening worship. This is an intense experience, and it requires both physical and mental resilience.

Living on Iona

Iona is undoubtedly a beautiful place: an island which, in spite of its small size, offers an extraordinary range of landscapes – including some lovely sandy beaches suitable for swimming (beware, though, the water is very cold). There is a huge variety of wild flowers, bird life and sea animals to enjoy. The quality of the light can be extraordinary, no matter the weather, and it has drawn numerous artists to Iona over the centuries.

The island can be very crowded from Spring till the end of Autumn, but it is not difficult to leave the crowds behind and find yourself alone in settings so beautiful that it makes your heart sing. And of course, the sea is ever present, bringing its own rhythm to life.

Iona is also an iconic place in the development of Christianity in the Western world, and the whole island is steeped in history. It attracts, every year, tens of thousands of visitors and pilgrims from all over the world, and many comment that Iona has a unique feel that they have not experienced anywhere else.

It is also a challenging place. It is remote: the nearest town is three hours and two ferry rides away. Once the last ferry of the day has left (6.30pm), there is no way of leaving the island before the next morning except by private boat or emergency helicopter. In effect, there is no 'escape' – which some people find difficult. As for the local amenities, outside the few specialist shops serving the tourist trade, there is only one small food shop with limited offerings, and two hotels with bars.

There is also no permanent medical presence and no pharmacy, which is why having general good health is so important to everyone who lives on Iona.

We find that some potential volunteers who have never been to Iona have a rather romantic idea of what it would be like to live and work on such an iconic island.

The reality is that volunteering with the Iona Community on Iona can be hugely rewarding if you have the right temperament, are resilient, and are willing to embrace the experience with all your heart. Many of our past volunteers say their lives have been greatly enriched, and at times transformed, by their experience.

Equally, the considerable challenges of living and working on Iona could mean this is not the right place for you.

This is why we are asking you to think very carefully before you decide whether to apply.

If you are not sure and would like to talk it through with someone, feel free to email the Operations Manager at operationsmanager@iona.org.uk or the Warden at warden@iona.org.uk

If you are interested in further exploring volunteering on Iona, here is some practical information which you will find helpful:

- Travel expenses are paid for from whatever point you set off from the UK mainland. We ask that you travel as economically as you can.
- Volunteers are provided with meals and accommodation (inclusive of all facilities such as electricity, heating and wifi).
- Volunteers live in Iona Community premises on the island.
- There is a strict no alcohol and no illegal drugs policy in all Iona Community premises.
- There is also a strict no smoking policy in all premises.

If you decide to apply

Please note that you must be **over 18 years old** by the time you start volunteering on Iona. Please also note that we require a commitment of a minimum of one month, and preferably several months. **Preference will usually be given to applicants who can stay for at least three months.**

If you live outside the UK: following the UK leaving the European Union on 1 January 2021, if you do not have UK or ROI citizenship, in most cases, it will be necessary for you to apply for a work visa under the 'Temporary Work - Charity Worker Visa' category.

The Iona Community is an authorised 'A-level' sponsor and can therefore attain a set number of Certificates of Sponsorship (CoS) under Tier 5 of the Points Based System (PBS).

We will help you to apply for a visa but the application costs at your end (around £250/£300 as of October 2021) will need to be met by you. It also requires form-filling and an appointment at the nearest British consulate registered for visa processing.

Please also note that there is no guarantee that a visa will be granted once you apply (and have paid the money). The process is unfortunately entirely out of our hands.

We wish you all the best in your discernment process!

Appendix

A. Introduction to the Iona Community

The Iona Community is:

- an ecumenical Christian community of people from different walks of life and different traditions in the Church;
- committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to following where that leads, even into the unknown;
- engaged together, and with people of goodwill across the world, in acting, reflecting and praying for justice, peace and the integrity of creation;
- convinced that the inclusive community we seek must be embodied in the community we practice.

Our Rule

We share a common discipline of:

- Daily prayer, and regular engagement with the Bible and other material which nourishes us
- Working for justice and peace, wholeness and reconciliation in our localities, society and the whole creation
- Supporting one another in prayer and by meeting, communicating, and accounting with one another for the use of our gifts, money and time, our use of the earth's resources and our keeping of all aspects of the Rule.
- Sharing in the corporate life and organisation of the Community

The Iona Community was founded in Govan and Iona in 1938 by George MacLeod, minister, visionary and prophetic witness for peace, in the context of the poverty and despair of the Depression. The original task of rebuilding the monastic ruins of Iona Abbey was to serve as a sign of hopeful rebuilding of community in Scotland and beyond.

Today, we are a community of Members, Associate Members, and Friends. The Iona Community welcomes people from all walks of life at its centres on the islands of Iona and Mull. It trades through Wild Goose Publications and the Iona Community Shop on Iona, and resources a wide range of Church and community organizations through its Wild Goose Resource Group. The Iona Prayer Circle is a worldwide network which prays for people and places in distress. Coracle is the magazine of the Iona Community, which seeks the exchange of thoughts and ideas as a basis for finding common ground.

Through participating in Family Groups, Regional Groups and Common Concern Networks, Members, Associate Members, Friends and our Young Adults Group share concerns, faith and tasks: a common life together.

Iona Abbey Centre

After 3 years of being closed to guests, the Abbey Centre is now open again, with a completely renovated building and new facilities.

In 2022, the Resident Community of staff and volunteers will be hosting a residential programme and experience of living in community. We will continue to comply with

government guidelines on Covid. This may require a reduced capacity as well as the other mitigating measures currently in place, such as mask-wearing indoors.

We will also continue our ministry to the many visitors who come to Iona for the day, or who stay at other centres on the island.

The Resident Community will be leading daily worship in the Abbey Church and the Community's book and gift shop will be open.

The MacLeod Centre will remain closed to guests (whilst accommodating some volunteers), but the Community's outdoor centre at Camas, on the nearby Ross of Mull, will be open.

More Information

For more information about The Iona Community in general, explore the website www.iona.org.uk

B. The Iona Community's work on Iona

The Iona Community's Abbey Centre on Iona exists today both as a resource and a challenge, not only to ourselves and to all who visit, but also to the wider Church and indeed to people of all faiths and of none.

The agreed priorities of the Abbey Centre over the next 2 years are to:

1. Offer all who come to the Abbey Centre a clear experience of the concerns of the Iona Community as reflected in our Rule, our Working Principles and our Charter.
2. Develop a model of radical hospitality in the intentional common life of the Community, including those who come to live and work in the Abbey Centre, offering:
 - a. a warm welcome
 - b. deep encounter and challenge
 - c. an enriching rhythm of work and worship / prayer and action
3. Increasingly prioritise as guests in our centres, those living with social, physical, mental and economic disadvantage, alongside a wider diversity of guests and visitors, building sustainable relationships before, during and after their stay.
4. Facilitate a model of worship, prayer and reflection as part of everyday life, enabling members, guests and visitors to make more meaningful their Island Centre experiences and their lives.
5. Offer innovative programmes, which challenge participants to work for peace, social justice and the integrity of creation, and explore the development of an Iona Community Learning and Equipping Framework, along with the local Island and wider community.
6. Maximise the extraordinary dedication, skills and expertise of our staff and volunteers, through ensuring optimal staffing levels, clear roles and responsibilities, robust supervision and support, and opportunities for training and innovation.

(Taken from the 3-year strategic plan for the Iona Abbey Centre)

We hope this means that those who come to our Iona centre will experience it as:

- ***A safe place***, in which to explore the meaning of Christian life together, both within the life of the mainstream churches and also within the many new ways of being church, and how to live a committed Christian life in a multicultural and multi-faith world;
- ***A place of openness***, where people at different stages on their personal journeys can share and learn from each other what God is saying to and through them, and through the story of the Iona Community and the world-wide church;
- ***An empowering place***, from which people may go forward on their pilgrimage strengthened and emboldened to make a difference in the world in which they live.