



IONA COMMUNITY

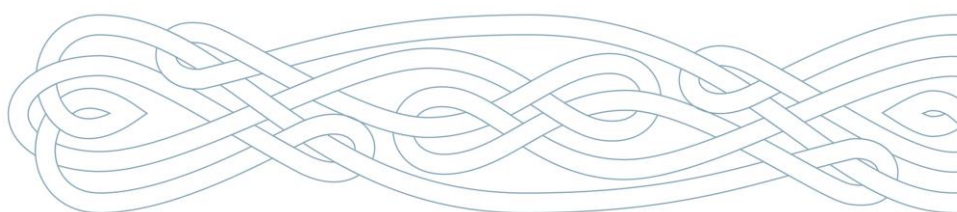
Creation Care, Climate Justice
and First Nations Voices

Ruth Harvey, February 2024

A report describing and evaluating a pilgrimage
through Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand,
25th September – 29th November 2023

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INTRODUCTION

The pilgrimage began with an invitation from the Wellspring Community in Australia to the Iona Community Leader to visit 'these lands now called Australia' on a Creation Care Pilgrimage. Having reignited our long-standing relationship as communities of faith committed to justice and peace, particularly since the slump of the pandemic, this was seen as an opportunity to strengthen that relationship, consider ways to deepen our connection at a strategic level, and consider the wisdom coming from indigenous Aboriginal Christian leaders in the context of the climate catastrophe.

Along with Members of the Wellspring Community we would travel across the continent, listening to First Nations leaders, gleaning wisdom about creation care, sharing something of the Celtic spirituality through the lens of the Iona Community today, asking how these wisdom streams might weave together.

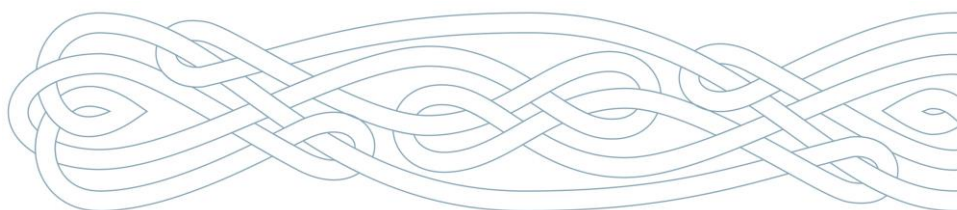
The purpose of the pilgrimage was:

'to offer genuine sharing to stir hearts, to acknowledge pain, and to fill souls with gladness, joy and conviction, to give comfort, courage and hope for the future.'

(Joy Connor, Wellspring co-Leader)

An ambitious itinerary was agreed, with Wellspring Members organising events locally across 9 locations, from Boorloo/Perth¹ in the West to Meanjin/Brisbane in the east, over 5 weeks. For me, this would be a total of 28 events including two retreats, five church services, visits to nine cultural centres, participation in six panel discussions, along with a total of five presentations or lectures, and one national radio interview. I would be travelling across Australia with Brooke Prentis and Lisa Wriley, Members and co-Leader of the Wellspring Community, Brooke bringing immense wisdom as an Aboriginal Christian Leader; Lisa bringing her deep engagement in creation care and activism. Brooke and Lisa also had a series of engagements across the continent, many of which overlapped with mine. This was an opportunity to listen deeply, share news of Wellspring widely, ask big questions about how we might address the climate catastrophe as communities of faith, and more broadly, engage fully as two values-aligned communities. Joy Connor, the other co-Leader of Wellspring was a companion on much of the second half of the pilgrimage, but was present in every pore of the event, given her deep immersion in the vision and logistical planning. We were hosted by Members of the Wellspring Community along the way who shared their homes and their food, their worship and their longings, and so much of their time and talent with us.

¹ Location names are included to respect the local Aboriginal relationships with the local Wellspring Community. We understand the ongoing impacts of colonisation that impact borders and names. We respect all Aboriginal peoples' connection to specific places and all places across these lands now called Australia.



In addition, with Iona Community contacts strong in Aotearoa/New Zealand, given the distances travelled, a further four weeks was added to the itinerary, the first two of which were programmed to build up relationships with values-aligned communities and networks there. The final two weeks were to be holiday.

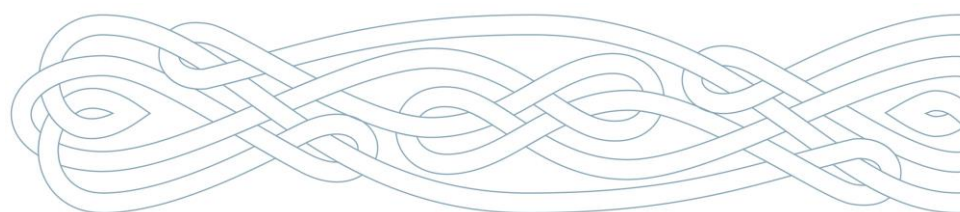
Early on I knew that to sustain body and soul over these 9.5 weeks I would need Nick as my travelling companion. He agreed to join me despite the painful paradox of travelling on what turned out to be ten separate flights in a world being torn apart by the consumption of fossil fuels. Nick's insights and spiritual wisdom, his wise and quiet voice around climate justice, and his skills in capturing video and photographic footage were invaluable.

In preparation I worked closely with Wendy Lloyd, part-time Communications Manager, who joined in with the pre-pilgrimage cultural awareness training offered by Brooke Prentis, with the multiple early-morning planning meetings, conceptualised how our communications streams would flow, and offered wisdom and support throughout the whole experience, keeping on top of social media output along the way.

I knew that for me to make sense of the themes that might emerge and to honour the relationships that I would encounter, I needed to bring the very best of myself to the time of preparation as much as to the pilgrimage itself. So I share here what I call three 'preludes' – events that I chose to engage with as deliberate preparatory encounters, pre-pilgrimage pilgrimages, if you like!

The first prelude to the pilgrimage was to grapple with what was required of me as a 'Celtic Christian Leader'. Understanding that the notion of Celtic Spirituality is complex and emotive, I worked with Wendy Lloyd on hosting a series of reflections online under the banner: The Celtic Connection. Exploring four questions with different people, I looked at what we mean by [the Celtic Connection](#) through the lens of: who we are, where we belong, what we believe and how we live together. The last of these was a three-way conversation between myself, Brooke Prentis and Lisa Wriley while we were travelling, which constituted the 2023 Iona Community Lecture. These conversations and the wisdom of those who spoke remain an undergirding source of inspiration for our work in community.

Flights were booked and bags were being packed for a 25th September departure. I found myself, however, on a CalMac ferry to Mull on 1st September to visit Iona Abbey staff – and realised that my pilgrimage had begun: **the second prelude** was in motion (can you have more than one prelude?) There was no doubt that I would need to draw on immense physical stamina to keep going for the allotted weeks in changing climates and time zones. How was I going to strengthen my spiritual stamina for a similar big journey? I decided to focus on writing an occasional collect on my travels, which I will weave in here – a collect, a series of 'five folds', naming who we are praying to; saying more about the one to whom we are praying; naming a single request; saying more about this request; finishing with a 'bird of praise' (I'm grateful to Pádraig Ó Tuama for this unfolding in his piece which you can [listen to here](#)).



Collect 1: Looking through a murky ferry window, Sound of Mull, 1/9/2023

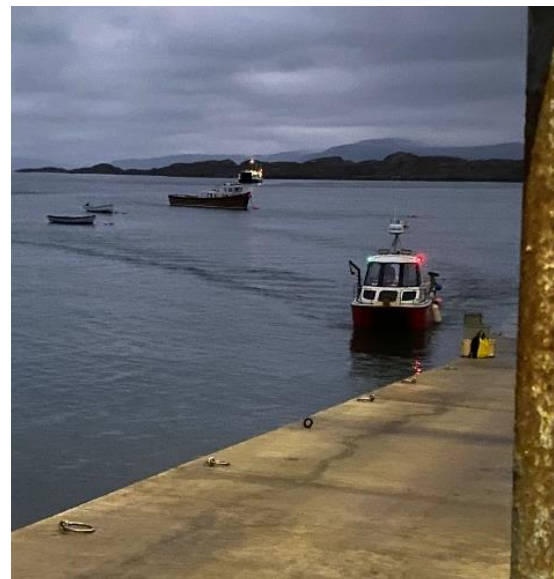
*God of the grimy window.
 God who sees beyond all that obscures,
 freshen my gaze this morning.
 Open wide the vistas that sing on the horizon
 offering us a glimpse of the not yet nestled in the now.
 And strengthen all CalMac workers,
 as they value safety and sustenance
 over sparkling portholes.
 In the name of the one who
 rises on the wind like
 a sated Oban seagull.
 Amen*



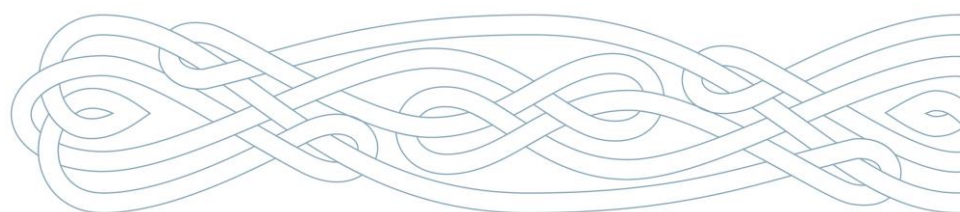
Collecting wisdom as I travelled, I was pleased to spend time with Lydia Perris, MacLeod Centre volunteer who was analysing what she saw of the Iona Community's life, in relation to the [17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#). Her analysis, matching the passion and wisdom articulated in an initial vision for the Mac written by Eve Sharples and Meg Wroe, give us much food for thought and was uppermost in my mind and heart as I travelled. There is much, says Lydia, that we are already achieving in relation to the SDGs, not least our food policy in Iona Abbey. One of the gaps that she noticed, however, was our lack of engagement with marine concerns. And so collect number two emerged as I was waiting for my early morning ferry to leave Iona:

Collect 2: Iona Jetty, 4/9/2023

*God of the deeps;
 God of the squid and the seal,
 the mackerel and the minke,
 the dolphin (and the mermaid...)
 forgive our lack of curiosity
 about life below the waves.
 As seas rise and lands recede,
 may the translucence of the jelly fish
 so dazzle our souls with humility and awe
 that we plunge deep into your transforming love
 to rise renewed through
 your call for sea-earth justice.
 Amen*



The third prelude to the pilgrimage was my journey to Kloster Hoechst south of Frankfurt, Germany for a 'continentals meeting'. Meeting with over 60 Members and Associate Members living on the continent of Europe whetted my appetite for cross-cultural sharing and reminded me of the rich story of global community that we already share.

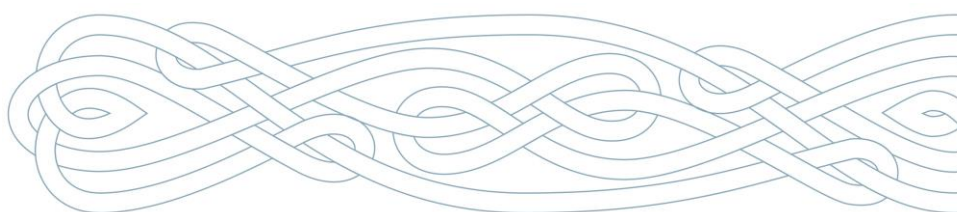
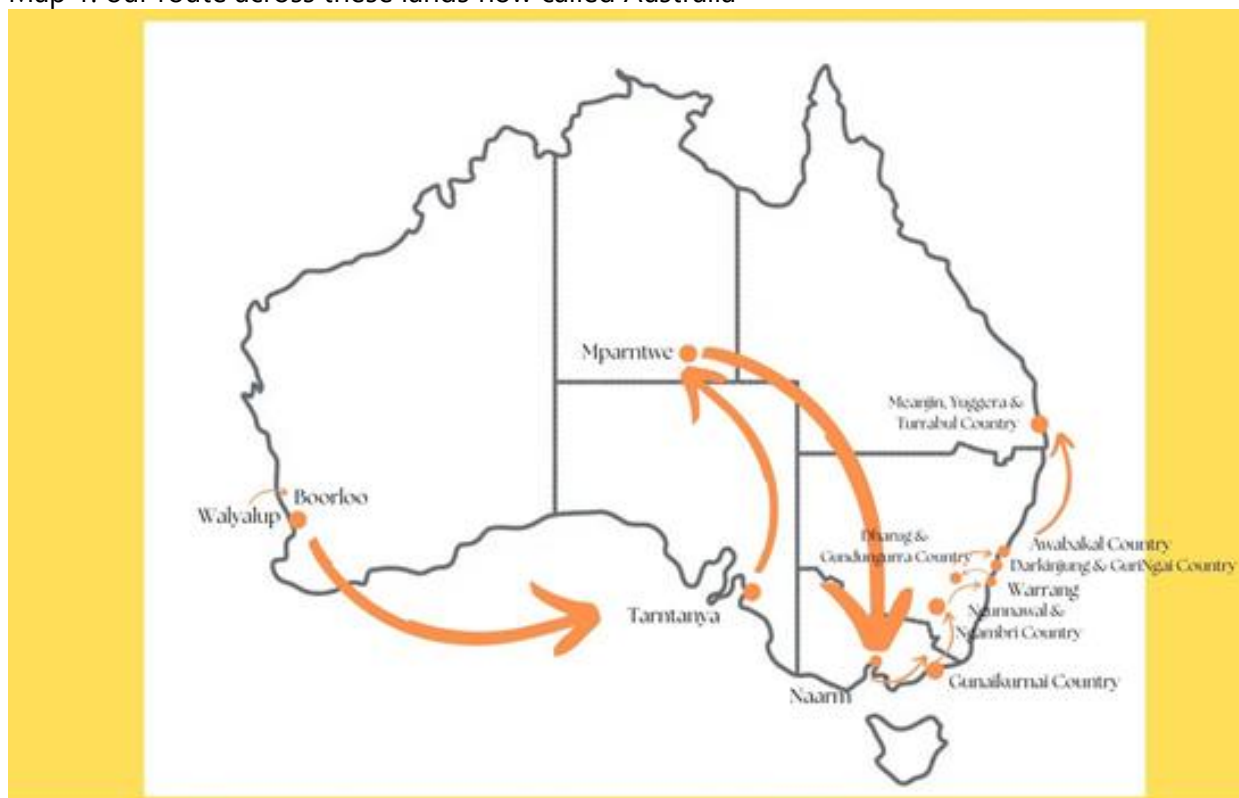


Cultural Awareness Training

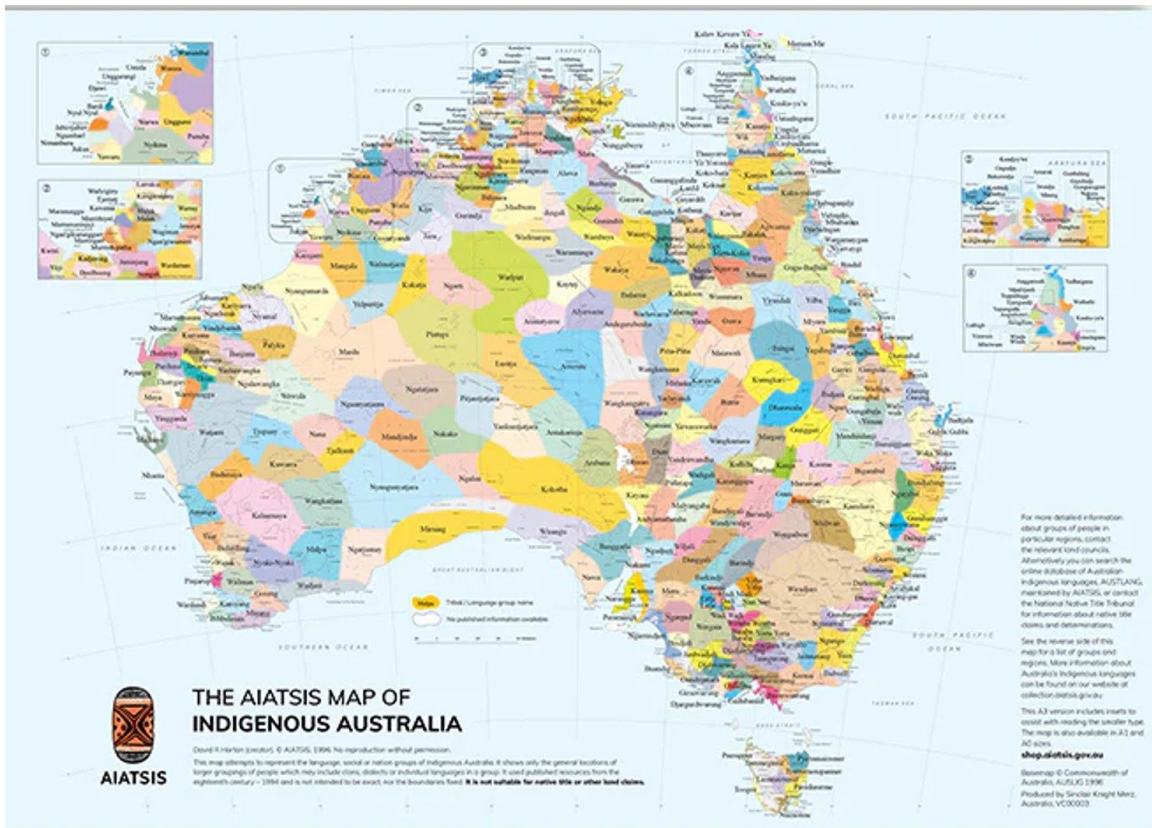
An online session to orientate us to cultural, linguistic and religious nuances was arranged by the Wellspring Community, through which we learned much, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders constitute 3.2% (984,000) of the total population (25.69million) of Australia.
- There are 300 nations across Australia, and 100 Torres Strait Islands
- To be recognised as 'aboriginal' you must
 - have an aboriginal heritage
 - self-identify as aboriginal and
 - be recognised as part of your community as aboriginal
- 'Country' means 'all lands, waters, sky, trees, plants, animals, birds, fish, rocks, mountains and people' (Brooke Prentis)
- It is important to address 'seasoned' aboriginal leaders correctly. This mostly means using 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'. But not always. If in doubt, ask!
- Groups are called 'nations' or 'countries', not tribes
- A Traditional Owner is someone who is born on the land and has a continuous link with that land
- A Traditional Custodian is someone who lives on the land but is not a TO

Map 1: our route across these lands now called Australia



Map 2: 300 Nations and 100 Islands

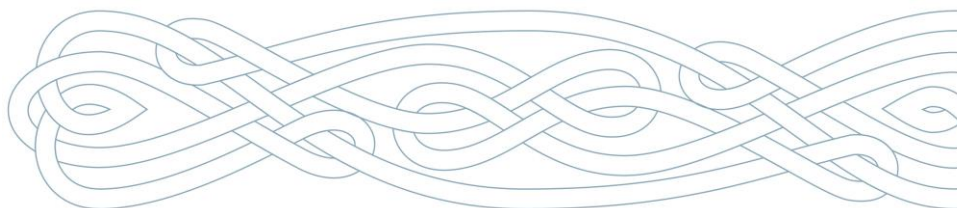


With these preludes, wisdom and maps in our back pockets, we set off..... What now follows is a series of 'post cards' sent from seven locations across the pilgrimage. I end with some reflections and questions for the way ahead.

POST CARD 1: 25TH – 30TH SEPTEMBER, WADJEMUP/ROTTNEST ISLAND AND MOORO KATTA/KINGS PARK (BOORLOO/PERTH)

A ferry port; a crowded boat with excited day trippers and holiday makers; white sandy beaches and blue-turquoise sea. So far, so familiar. The island of Wadjemup (known also as Rottneest Island) lies a 30-minute boat ride from Boorloo/Perth, on Noongar Country, Western Australia, in the Indian Ocean.

This island, inhabited by many hundreds of Quokkas (small marsupials mistaken as rats by the first Dutch sailors to land here in C16, hence the name Rottneest or 'rats nest' in Dutch), was also the destination of around 4,000 Aboriginal men and boys incarcerated here until 1930 in the purpose-built prison, for minor offences. Many were held in dark dungeon-like rooms, 10 at a time, with capacity for no more than 4. Around 400 of these men and boys died in custody, some while trying to escape. Their burial site was for a while a camping ground.



We were welcomed 'to Country' by Uncle Neville Collard, Noongar Elder and guide, who led us in a 'smoking ceremony' where we were bathed and cleansed in the smoke of the fire, then invited to offer thanksgiving to all of Creation by throwing sand into the sea.

The generous, open-hearted welcome of Uncle Neville onto land inhabited by his ancestors over millennia stood in stark contrast to the hostility of more recent settlers/invasers/colonisers. I was struck by Uncle Neville's comment, after what was a deeply spiritual welcome, that 'we don't have religion – we have culture and law, or lore.' In what he offered there was a deep sense of what I would understand as the fullness, or sacramentality of all: an integration of ritual and welcome; story-sharing and campaigning for justice; honouring of past elders while pointing to hope in present and future leaders – all of this and more was the sum of the wholeness of Creation.

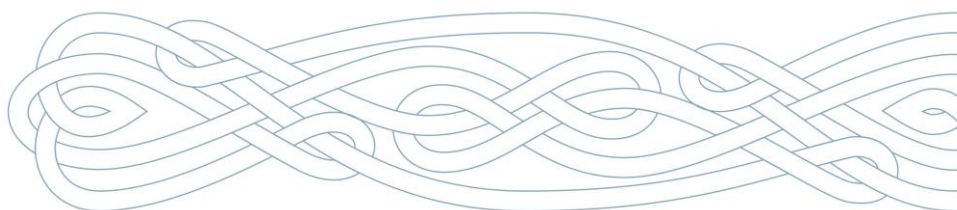
The juxtaposition of the holiday camp, where until the 1980s a luxury tourist bunk could be booked in The Quad (Prison), with the horror of the chain-gangs and the chilling dungeons depicted in the island museum was deeply distressing.

We sat, once Uncle Neville had left, in the small chapel, considering his gift of welcome. We held stillness. We shared impressions and tears; anger at the hypocrisies of history; horror at the knowledge of ongoing injustices: "nationally it's twice as likely for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to be in prison than in university." (changetherecord.org.au)

Back on dry land, we met the next day at Mooro Katta/Kings Park for a time of yarning and singing on Country. The generous open-hearted 'welcome to Country' offered by Della Morrison and Brooke Prentis, indigenous Aboriginal women, is becoming a familiar ritual of the peoples of these lands. We sang together with the 'Madjitil Moorna' choir, who through song offer 'learning, healing, bringing cultures together.' We drank tea and ate cakes and scones prepared by a local indigenous community. We swapped stories of faith and care for Creation.

If day one had been a day of opening our hearts to the pain of the past, day two was a moment of healing amongst friends and strangers.

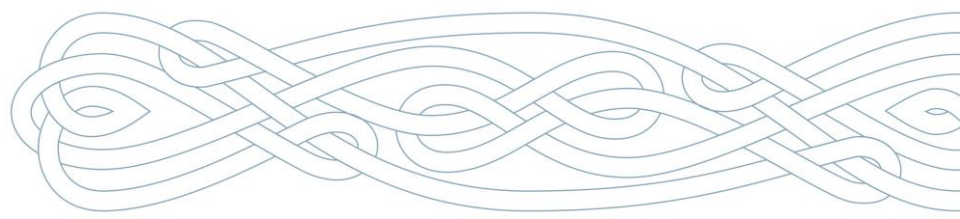
The backdrop to our yarning and singing circle was a mural of a tree prepared by Lisa Wriley, co-leader of the Wellspring Community. Each of us was invited to share, on a cloth leaf, examples of *how* we care for Creation, to be pinned to the tree as signs of hope. We were then invited to write in a book about *why* we care for Creation, to be written, in due course into the trunk of our tree-mural. And so as we journey across these lands, we hope that through sharing time and space with one another, we will continue to weave a pattern of understanding and inspiration in our care for Creation.





Questions and Reflections for the Way Ahead 1

1. Given all we know about the impact of colonialism, the violence perpetrated, and the way those stories have remained so often hidden or distorted, what now is our work in the area of truth-telling, as a religious community with roots in the northern, western world? Our Common Concern Networks may be a vehicle for us to reveal hitherto concealed truths about injustices in their areas of expertise, with the questions from the Challenging Racism CCN currently in front of Members (January 2023) offering a guide for other such deep engagement.



2. We are a community known for celebration, song and story sharing, for recognising the cultural heritage that makes and shapes us, and our faith. How do we ensure that we continue to weave these threads into our life in community?

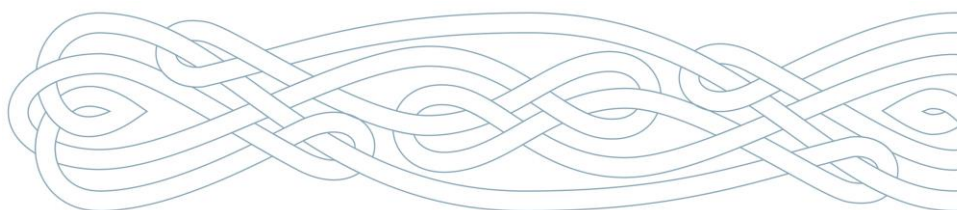
POST CARD 2: 1ST – 7TH OCTOBER, TARNTANYA, KAURNA COUNTRY (ADELAIDE)

I wrote this postcard a few days in advance of **The Voice Referendum** in these lands now called Australia. This was to be a crucial vote on the journey for justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The **Uluru Statement from the Heart** was issued in 2017 and signed by over 200 delegates at the First Nation Constitutional Convention. It called for three things for Indigenous peoples: voice, treaty, truth. The Voice vote on Saturday 14th October requested "a permanent advisory body that would give advice to the government about the issues that affect First Nations peoples." More than a referendum, 14/10 offered an opportunity – to right 250 years of wrong, to reframe or re-set the relationships between settled and settler populations here.

Since the first settlers/invasers/colonisers arrived on this already populated, sophisticated, cultivated, flourishing land, much wrong has been perpetrated. In Tarntanya/Adelaide, on Kaurna country, Uncle Allen Edwards welcomed us to the **Colebrook Reconciliation Park**, one-time site of the Colebrook Home where between 1943 and 1972 around 450 indigenous Aboriginal children, including Uncle Allen's mother, were removed from their families to be 'assimilated' within a white culture. The 'Grieving Mother' statute and the 'Fountain of Tears' are poignant reminders of the pain of that policy. Later we visited **Raukkan**, an Aboriginal community where Uncle Clyde and Auntie Rose Rigney, and Uncle Ken Sumners shared with us their sense of calling to pray for healing and peace in their community through, in particular, the pain of addictions, to alcohol and to drugs, that has blighted the lives of so many indigenous communities where land, livelihood, culture and dignity have been stolen.

Brooke Prentis talked movingly as we pilgrimaged together about her Christian faith and the passion that drives her to work for justice, particularly for the Aboriginal Voice. She talks of the resonance within her indigenous community of the Christian faith, where the story of Jesus' life and the wonder of Creation resonates with her deep connection to land, to spirituality, to justice. In a world where the notion of 'settlers' and 'settled' resonates as profoundly violent, assuming stability only arrived with the colonisers when in fact the arrival of these very colonisers upset, de-stabilised, un-settled a vibrant and thriving eco-system, it was moving to hear Brooke talk about Jesus as 'The Great Un-Settler'. "If I am not un-settled by Jesus each and every day life, then am I truly living the Gospel?" In a world where the sins of past generations of 'settlers' are visible in the scars and the wounds of today's young people, the notion of what it means to 'settle', to 'colonise', to 'invade' takes on a new meaning

The call in the Uluru Statement begins with voice. It also calls for treaty and truth. Specifically, the indigenous peoples of these lands call for a 'Makarrata Commission', "to



supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.” **Makarrata, however, signals more than a process of reconciliation** – it is a Yolngu word meaning a philosophy, a process of conflict resolution, peace-making and justice.

In each encounter we were graciously encouraged to put care for creation at the heart of our lives, and to put forging of relationships at the core of our work for reconciliation. Bishop Chris McLeod, Aboriginal Bishop of the Anglican Church in Australia (with an uncle George McLeod – we grinned together about that one!) encouraged us to ‘share the glory of your land.’ The shame and ongoing sorrow of the history of colonisation here and across the globe is real. The call from our indigenous friends is clear. Care for creation here and in your homeland. Honour and deepen relationship for the sake of the world.

Collect 3: Tarntanya/Kuarna Country, October 2023

God of torrents of tears.

*God of weeping mothers and stolen children,
of earth marked and scarred, of communities addicted
and elders unseen, unheard, gather us in to listen deeply,
share intently, understand so fully
that our differences become starting points and
our points of intersection become rivers of connection
flowing more deeply than all that divides.*

In the name of the One who calls us to be one beyond borders. Amen



Questions and Reflections for the Way Ahead 2

3. Core to The Voice referendum was The Makarrata Process. Central to the vision and purpose of the Iona Community is a commitment to peace with justice. What are the processes of reconciliation, within the Iona Community, and within each of our indigenous cultural contexts, that we can actively adopt to realise this vision? How can we strengthen our calling as a community committed to peace with justice, through training and equipping all of us in leadership (voluntary and paid) with the skills for hosting difficult conversations?
4. Part of the Makarrata process is the acknowledgement of trauma, individual and collective. How do we journey with generational, inherited traumas? As perpetrator and victim, as the 'settled' and the 'unsettled', what are the first steps we might take together to heal the wounds of the past?
5. What are the places deep without our own landscapes that teach us about land, spirituality, belonging, how we might live together in communities committed to justice with peace?

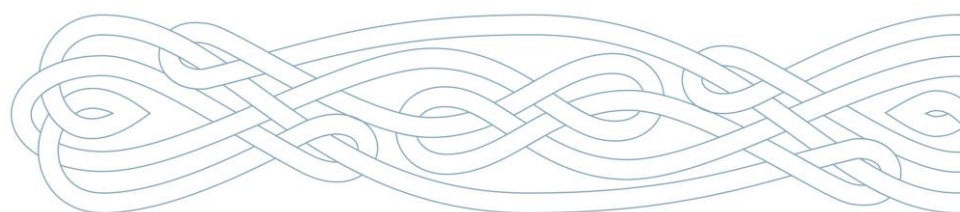
POST CARD 3: 7TH – 11TH OCTOBER, ARRENTE COUNTRY, ALICE SPRINGS/MPARNTWE

You might think that the desert would be the last place on earth to enjoy a campfire. The hot, dusty land, with dry-heat and the red red rocks of Arrernte country around Mparntwe/Alice Springs was our home for 5 nights in early October. Twelve of us were staying at [Campfire in the Heart](#), a retreat space for 20 or so guests, with a warm welcome and with a campfire space where the cool of the desert evening was off-set by the glow of the flames.

We had time to go deep together, to move close to one another through living in community – a profound experience so much at the heart of the life of the Iona Community, writ large here in a profoundly different part of God's great Creation.

In worship I shared with our friends at the Uniting Church in Mparntwe/Alice Springs the deep connection that we share as people of faith with an incarnate God – a God born of a woman, born of a Creator who took an incalculable risk to live as a child on earth. I illustrated this connection with the image of the Lipchitz Sculpture from Iona Abbey – a bronze image of the Holy Spirit hurtling through Mary, who stands with her feet firmly rooted in the midst of Creation, arms wide open, eyes blind, as the power and energy of the Holy Spirit flows through her and out to the world.

This deep connection with an incarnate God was powerfully mirrored back to us in a tender encounter later in the week with Dr. Kathleen Wallace, indigenous Arrernte Aboriginal scholar



and artist who shared with us the story of her painting, now a prominent stained-glass window in the Roman Catholic Church in Mparntwe/Alice Springs. In it, Mary and Jesus are depicted in full ceremonial paint as Aboriginal people. Mary is bare-breasted, and, with Jesus, is 'standing on a sandhill on the earth. Jesus' hands are open to give light to the world. The light is there for all people to follow. There are three circles towards the top of the painting. Dr. Kathleen told us that 'My grandfather, through his ancestors, was given a dream of three circles. The circles are Arrenge, Akngeye, and Utnenge – grandfather, father and totem spirit. I realised later, when the Sisters of the Sacred Heart read to us from the Bible, it was like the Trinity – Father, our Creator, the Son and the Holy Spirit.'

On the final full day together at Campfire in the Heart, before our last sharing around the fire, we reflected on the story of Jacob and Esau as told in the book of Genesis. The brothers fight, fall out, live in exile from one another for many years, then tentatively come back together again. On that same day I was privileged to meet with Meredith Lake, host of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 'Soul Search' podcast, who recorded a conversation with called "The Iona Community: thin places and strong communities." [You can listen to this here.](#)

As we left Arrente country, we then headed towards Melbourne/Naarm . It was there that we felt the impact of the Voice referendum. Reeling from the scale of the 'no' result in the Voice referendum, and stunned by the horrors of violence in the lands called holy, there were few words to offer. And yet I know from our experiences in community in the desert that violence is not the way – the way to reconciliation must be through deep listening over many years. The way to peace is also through deep coalition and partnership, such as that with the Network of Christian Peace Organisations. The Iona Community signed [this open letter](#) about the situation in Israel/Palestine.

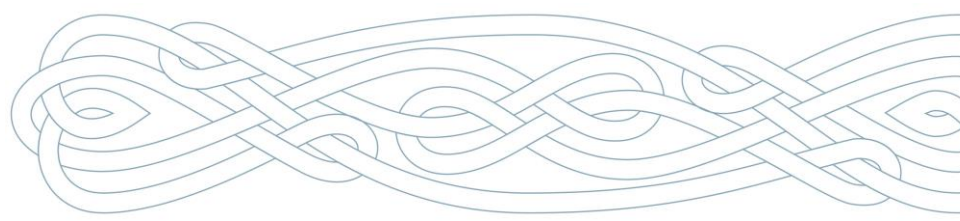
In the [Week of Prayer for World Peace](#), I shared a prayer from the desert, holding all who are engulfed in violent struggle in heart and in mind.

*Collect 4: Desert Pea Collect, Campfire in the Heart, Mparntwe/Alice Springs, 9th October
God of the forgotten.*

*God of the massacred and mown, of the trampled, torn, decimated and desecrated,
may we linger in lament long enough to unlock our tears so our flood of sorry
meets the deep flow of sorrow locked into these lands.*

*Let us reclaim lament as that un-ceded, uncontested,
sovereign, sacred space where agency rests alone with the one who weeps.*

*So transform our hearts that the fragrance
of the blood-black-red of the desert pea lingers in our loving
now, and always. Amen.*



*Collect 5: Campfire in the Heart, Mparntwe/Alice Springs, 10th October
God of soft sands and desert rocks.
God of deep sleep, of stone-sand pillows where dreams
unfurl, where balance is restored, and where perspective is found.
So grant us times of dreaming-rest, of reverie and revelation,
where pathways to peace open wide, and roads to reconciliation unfold.
This song of hope we lift to you, bird of peace.
Amen*



Questions and Reflections for the Way Ahead 3

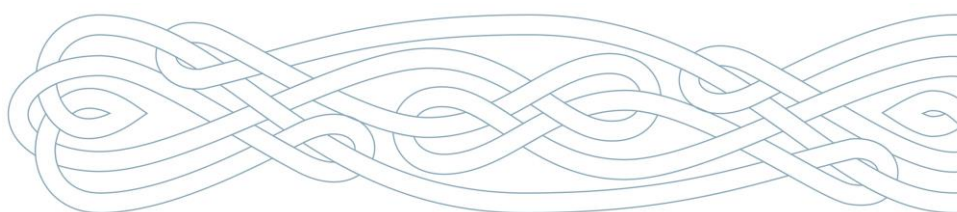
6. Dr. Kathleen Wallace is a respected Elder within her Indigenous and her church community. She has a story and a gift in its telling that reaches back into her tradition while also reaching forward into a shared future. In our Oral History project within the Iona Community we have begun to capture the stories of our past as a Community and to glimpse how those stories uncover wisdom for our future journey. Who are the elders in our community today? Whose stories we can learn from? How might we take forward a further Oral History project to celebrate and share these stories of faith?
7. While we sat in the red desert earth with members of the Springs in the Desert community, and while we walked on country with Keith at Whitegums, noticing the 'lie of the land' and the myths and stories embedded within the land, we were encouraged to tell the stories written into the pain and the joy embedded in our landscape. In what ways might we do this more fully within the Iona Community?
8. Keith at Whitegums reflected that his conservation work was his spiritual practice. We met this same spirit of conservation being an expression of spirituality at Quarantine Island near Dunedin. As we renew the MacLeod Centre, as we refresh our carbon accounting within our membership, in what ways might our care for the earth, our conservation work, our carbon accounting be more fully recognised as core to our spiritual practice?

POST CARD 4: 15TH – 20TH OCTOBER 2023, NAARM, WURUNDJERI AND BOONWURRUNG COUNTRY (MELBOURNE), GUNAIKURNAI COUNTRY (GIPPSLAND)

The emotional and political fall-out of the 'no' result of the Voice Referendum hit hard. It's not straightforward. Boarding a flight pre Referendum to Mparntwe/Alice Springs with a 'vote yes' banner one of our team was confronted by an Arrrente Aboriginal woman. She was offended by the banner. A 'yes' vote in her opinion was buying in to the (unsubstantiated) story that the United Nations would, with a 'yes' result, take back land from local custodians. Misinformation, rumour, and fear-mongering have been rife in this process. The 'no' result was not a surprise. The [scale of the no vote](#), however, was deeply shocking (only 1 of Australia's 8 states/territories voted yes. The referendum would only succeed if a majority of states voted yes) and is a reminder of the deep divisions and levels of racism still at play here.

You can hear me, Brooke Prentis and Lisa Wriley process our response to the referendum outcome as part of the [Iona Community 2024 Lecture](#).

Despite the shock of the result there were tender moments. Worshipping with the congregation at Wesley Uniting Church in Melbourne on the day after the referendum was one of these. There were many tears and a sense of shock. There was also a sense of regrouping under the banner of the ['Uluru Statement from the Heart'](#) – and a renewed energy for voice, truth and treaty. After worship I met with members of the Dayspring and



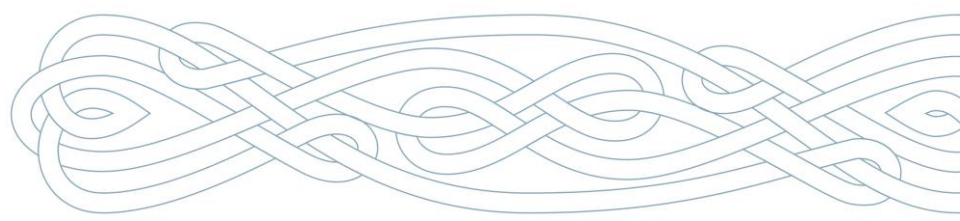
Benedictus communities. It was also good to catch up with past staff member Deborah Pike, and Associate Member Kevin Hurd who had travelled from Tasmania to join us. As we tried to move through Melbourne to catch our bus east, towards Gragin/Raymond Island, we were stopped by a mass protest – plenty of Aboriginal flags, mixed in with Palestinian flags too – people hurting by years of oppression, with little political voice. All protesting against violence. We missed our bus – a gentle reminder of the violent disruption to daily lives felt by millions in the face of war around the globe.

Disruption and discomfort were ongoing themes as we have travelled. Arriving on Raymond/Gragin Island later that evening, we were transported, perhaps most fully since the pilgrimage began, into the theme of Creation Care. This island the size of Iona, within the Lake District of Gippsland is home to hundreds of Koalas, Kangaroos and Kookaburras. We learned from the local rangers and church folk of the developing plantations of native trees to sustain the Koala population, along with a regular care programme which removes many of the Koalas annually to be 're-housed'. We learned of the concerns about island erosion and the delicate balance here between eco-system and tourism. Off-island, we visited [The Keeping Place](#), a cultural centre in Bairnsdale set alongside an education and a health centre for local Aboriginal peoples, where the story of some of Australian's bloodiest massacres is told. We heard of the destruction of an ancient tree nearby in 1987 by neighbours intent in keeping Aboriginal groups off the land.

We heard from Bishop Richard Treloar, from Rev. Canon Aunty Phyllis Andy, and from Rev. Kathy Dalton about the attempts by the Anglican Diocese to reach out to local young people. And Cath Connelly, Warden of [The Abbey on Gragin](#), where we were staying, told us about the revival of this youth centre as a place for hospitality, spirituality and environment – a familiar story given the focus in the Iona Community right now in retrofitting the MacLeod Centre.

Living together in community both at Campfire in the Heart and here at The Abbey on Gragin allowed us to share deeply with one another. We laughed and swam and sang, cooked, swapped stories and we prayed. We were able through these times of living in community able to share some hard, uncomfortable conversations: how the interruption of a continuous First Nations culture and society destroyed so much wisdom, language and lore; how the violent massacres and ripping apart of families has left generational trauma; how the binary language of indigenous/non indigenous feels dehumanising to some; how the cry for Creation Care sits uncomfortably alongside ongoing reliance on, even addiction to carbon consumption in the form of flights and ongoing mass coal extraction in Australia.

In the renovated chapel at The Abbey on Gragin we shared these concerns in worship. Over meals and on walks we learned about eco projects to save wildlife and reduce reliance on fossil fuels, and we talked about building new alliances and partnerships. In all this we can continue to 'Learn, Pray, Act.'



All the while, our hearts and minds were deeply, and rightly 'disrupted' by the reels of horrific news from Israel and Gaza. News of the deaths in Gaza of over 30 members of the family of Ahmed Alnaouq, co-leader of our I/P week on Iona in September shook us deeply. Our Common Concern Network on Israel/Palestine has been working hard to disseminate our Position Statement, and continues to **'Learn, Pray, Act' for peace with justice** in Israel and Palestine. I'm reminded of the words of John Paul Lederach, Mennonite mediator, that a just peace will only come when the flourishing of our grandchildren is intimately bound up with the flourishing of our enemies' grandchildren. At the Abbey, Christians, Jews, indigenous leaders together, we prayer for peace for all the children and grandchildren in Israel and Palestine, and for wisdom among the elders.



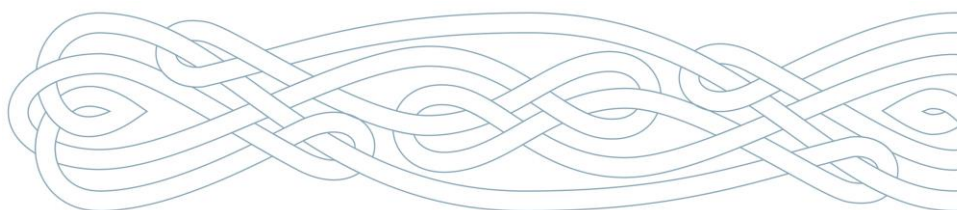
Questions and Reflections for the Way Ahead 4

9. The partnership between the people of Raymond Island/Gragin and the local conservation group means that Koalas are supported to thrive sustainably on this island. The partnership between advocacy groups calling for a 'voice' for the Indigenous population to be guaranteed in the seat of power reminded me of the alliances that make up the Poverty Truth Commissions around the UK, where the voices of those with lived experience of poverty are put in front of the people with power. Over these last months the CCN Israel/Palestine has led the Iona Community in forging closer alliances with partners calling publicly on those with power for a ceasefire and an end to war (see [here](#)). What further strategic alliances or partnerships might the Iona Community forge to strengthen 'voice' and agency where it is most needed?
10. Brooke Prentis talks of Jesus as 'the Great Un-Settler' – that we "should be expected to be un-settled by Jesus each and every day". At this retreat at The Abbey, led by a team including Abbey Warden Cath Connolly, a skilled harpist, we were invited in to rhythms of daily prayer and contemplation, of stillness and simplicity. How do we in our life in community find this balance between being un-settled by injustice and being soothed in simple stillness?

POST CARD 5: 20TH – 26TH OCTOBER 2023, NGUNNAWAL AND NGAMBRI COUNTRY (CANBERRA) AND WARRANG, EORA NATION (SYDNEY)

We were accompanied by many birds on this pilgrimage. We met Ibis and Lorakeet, Kookaburra, Magpie, Black Swan, Crow and Pelican among others. Each time we met a new species, someone in the team told a story, shared a dreaming, or pointed out a characteristic of that bird that we may learn from. The crow squawking throughout one introduction was clearly understood by our host as having an important part in the conversation. Other birds from my world travelled with us: the dove speaking peace, the wild goose snapping – keeping us on the move, flying in formation, roles in the skein adapting and shifting according to the climate.

First in Canberra/Kamberi, then in Sydney/Eora Nation, it was a week about faith meeting politics. In Canberra/Kamberi around 40 of us were hosted by the [Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture](#) where we heard the pleas of Torres Strait Islanders Christian Leaders to listen to the heartbeat of the Creator through the experiences of local indigenous peoples whose homes, livelihoods and whole islands and populations are threatened by rising sea levels. A throw-back to the [Polkinghorne Oration](#) from our last night in Adelaide, where Rev James Baghwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches, presented on the topic 'Oceans of Justice & Rivers of Fairness – A Pacific Voice in the Wilderness.'



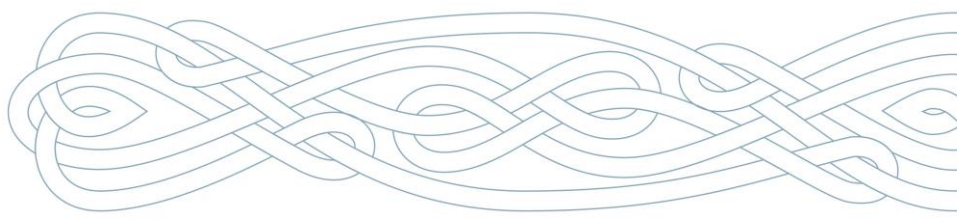
Brooke Prentis showed us again the Climate Scarf, illustrating stitch by stitch the last hundred years of climate statistics. This time she brought with her the next scarf, showing the next one hundred years of climate statistics. The future seems bleak. We spoke and prayed in the chapel which is orientated to face Parliament, where a mural of the White Owl, symbol of the holy spirit, adorns a wall facing in the same direction. Words, prayers, learning, actions travel between people of faith and people with political power, holding one another to account.

Later we joined the congregation at St. Stephen's Uniting Church opposite the parliament building in Sydney/Eora Nation. We heard about the **Sydney Alliance**, a network of political, citizen-led and religious organisations mobilising for radical change across a range of issues in the city. Later that day Uncle Pastor Ray Minniecon welcomed us to **Scarred Tree Ministries**, "a community where Indigenous people can integrate their rich heritage and culture into their walk with Jesus," supported by the local Anglican Church.

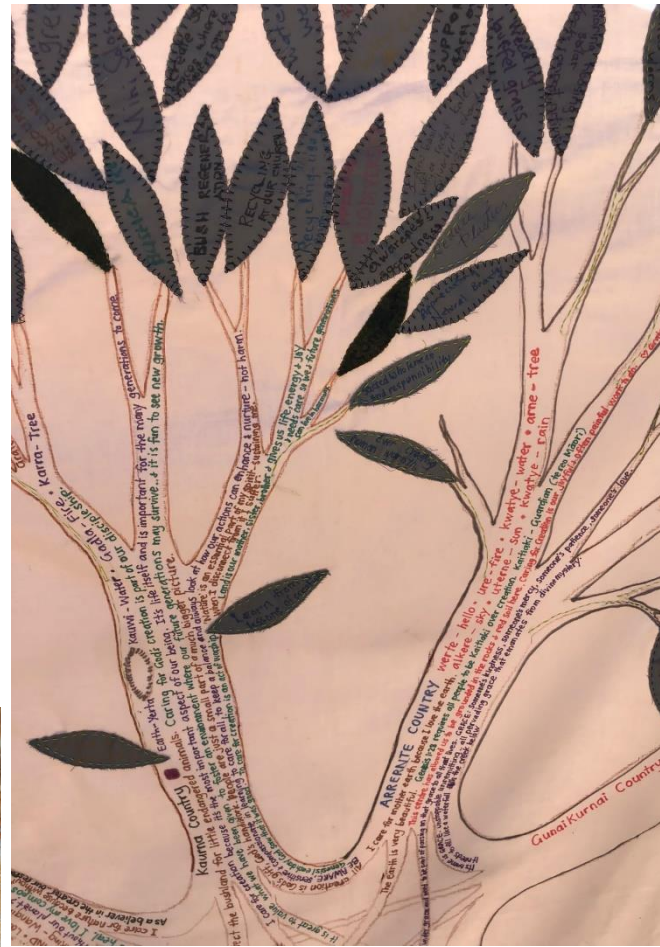
Uncle Ray spoke of the disappointment he felt while a representative of First Nations people at COP26 in Glasgow. The **last-minute wording changed in the final resolution** saw India win a proposal to alter the wording from 'phase out' to 'phase down' coal and other fossil fuel production. He spoke of the horror he felt as this gave **Matt Canavan** and other Australian representatives the green light immediately to proceed with sanctioning a new batch of coal mines in the name of industrial and economic progress. The British Westminster Parliament must also be held to account as their proposal for a new coal mine as a sign of progress in west Cumbria continues to move through the courts despite the best efforts of environmental activists through XR and other groups.

Uncle Ray has an infectious laugh and a warm welcoming presence. He also has a badge-festooned hat including a pin of the St Andrews flag. He admitted coyly that he has some Scottish blood coursing through his veins! During the New South Wales Ecumenical Council gathering north of Sydney at the Armenian Apostolic Church I presented Uncle Ray with a wild goose badge from our Community Shop to add to his hat. He pinned it on immediately, with glee!

Just before the close of our public conversation in north Sydney Uncle Ray grasped my hand and invited all present to bow our heads in prayer for the people of Gaza and of Israel. Through all the turmoil of the climate catastrophe, including the massive bio-diversity loss, through the desperate need to raise the voices of the First Nations communities, there is a deep bond that unites us across political and faith boundaries – it is the bond of our common humanity that sees injustice and grasps the hands of those around us as we learn,



pray and act for a more just and peaceful world in the name of Christ. The dove, the goose, the white owl: may they all keep us learning, keep us praying, keep us moving.



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11. Right outside the parliament building in Canberra/Kamberi is the [Aboriginal Tent Embassy](#). Established in 1972, this is the longest continuous protest for Indigenous land rights in the world. Members of the Iona Community have a long track-record in taking our faith onto the streets, to the gates of nuclear weapons bases, to the mailboxes of power brokers. The witness of the Scarred Tree Ministries, the Sydney Alliance, and the local churches living cheek by jowl with seats of power in Eora Nation/Sydney and Kamberi/Canberra was a reminder not just of the importance of this witness, but of the resilience needed for the long haul in order to keep the voices of the most marginalised in front of those with most leverage.

POST CARD 6: 27TH – 31ST OCTOBER, DARKINJUNG COUNTRY AND GURINGAI COUNTRY (CENTRAL COAST), AWABAKAL COUNTRY (NEWCASTLE), AND MEANJIN, YUGGERA AND TURRABUL COUNTRY (BRISBANE)

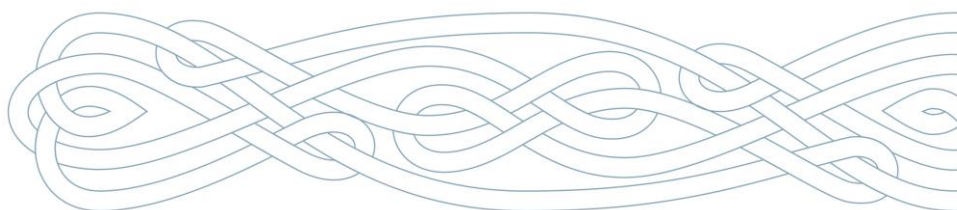
This final leg of our travels in Australia took us from Eora Nation/Sydney up the east coast, through Central Coast, Awabakal/Newcastle and Meanjin/Brisbane and finally to Coochimudlow island. Heavily populated, this coast is also home of huge sandy beaches, long stretches of surf, wide open skies, and heavy coal industry. Here are a few highlights:

Darkinjung Country and GuriNgai Country / Central Coast

Nick and I stayed for one night at the [Narara Eco Village](#), a model village sitting on land once belonging to the Gosford Horticultural Institute. Set up in the early 2000s, with a vision for an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable world, their aim is to create a sustainable ecovillage as a demonstration of this vision. Having completed phase 1 with around 120 residents living in self-build eco homes, they're now ready to launch phase 2. Narara are following a leadership and governance model of [sociocracy](#), where circles of members make autonomous decisions within their sphere of influence. I have been reflecting on the 2019 governance changes within the Iona Community and asking: in what ways might our processes become even more democratic along these sociocracy lines?

Narara's integrated approach to eco living, private gardens providing most fruit and vegetables for residents, and water being supplied from a local reservoir reminded me of the wisdom and experience poured into our Camas Centre over the years. How much is this way of life transferrable to our everyday lives? Can our vision for Mac Houses model something of this sustainable life that is accessible to those without disposable income and is fit for purpose for our city living?

Equally inspirational, if on a smaller scale, was our one night in the wi-fi free hut-hermitage of John and Joy Connor, Wellspring Member and co-Leader, in the garden of their Blue Mountains home. A day spent walking on-country with Tim Selwyn (Girri Girra) in and around



Lisa Wriley's eco-garden at Kariong was followed by a celebratory weekend of hallowing events in Awabakal Country/ Newcastle, NSW.

Awabakal Country / Newcastle

Helen Weavers has been a long-time Associate Member of the Iona Community. During COVID-19 Helen, an active Member of the Wellspring Community, joined the Iona Community's New Members Programme. She has, along with her new Members year group, been surfing the wave of what it means to become a fully global and radically dispersed community. This Creation Care pilgrimage, and Helen's enthusiasm and guidance, has meant that relations between Wellspring and Iona are strong and deepening. We are now working out how to support one another further, as parallel, values-aligned communities which remain distinct while also sensibly converging some of our structures to conserve and focus our energies.

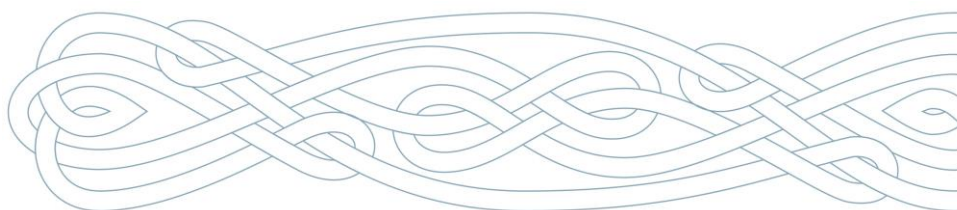
Leaving Newcastle it's hard to ignore either the huge coal-mounds, or the heavily industrialised port. Traversing these lands now called Australia, dependent on both the consumption and export of coal, where petrol costs half the price of that in the UK, while on a Creation Care pilgrimage, itself dependent on flying, throws up many uncomfortable, unsettling paradoxes. There may be few simple answers to life's perplexities. Living the questions and working our way towards a sustainable world is a start.

Meanjin/ Brisbane

Arriving in Meanjin/Brisbane we were reunited with Brooke Prentis who introduced us to Aunty Jean Phillips. A senior Aboriginal Christian leader, Aunty Jean is famous for her work supporting those living in poverty, bringing to light the need for better housing and employment, as well as raising awareness about the truth of Australia's history. Her work has made a significant contribution to building bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Aunty Jean, now in her 80s, spoke powerfully to a packed church gathering in Brisbane, about the need for leadership training programmes for young Aboriginal Christian leaders. Might there be a possible collaboration here with our Young Adults Group?

Our last full day in Australia meant an early start and a ferry from Victoria Point to [Kutchi Mudlo/Coochiemudlow](#) island. Home of Heather and David, Wellspring Members, this island has a chequered history. We were taken to the home and studio of Merrett Keech who had arranged a personal viewing of her powerful artwork for our Wellspring/Iona visit. Taking the flags of Australia, the Aboriginal peoples, and Torres Strait Islanders, her series of paintings blowing holes visually in the colonial notions of identity and belonging threw us into a deep conversation about flags, collective power, and the potency of symbols to encapsulate a sense of identity.

Coming from a land where the individual flags that together make up the Union Jack are themselves variously and individually used to induce both powerful pride and vicious violence, I found it unsettling to see that Union Jack nestled so deeply within the colonial project. Being with our friends in community, some of whom had been with us for the previous five weeks, meant that the tears and the listening, the depth of sharing and,



however small, the sense of collective strength, was profound. This has been the most remarkable experience of community on the move.

Final reflections from these lands now called Australia

Throughout this pilgrimage we have felt the presence of (and been regaled with stories about) Members such as Peter Millar, Jan Sutch Pickard, Kathy Galloway, John Bell, Norman Shanks and others who have over, a number of decades, brought to Australia a powerful story of community building, inspirational living and a generous faith as a counterpoint to all that was deathly about the colonial period. A lasting image now as we travel onwards is of leaving Mary Pearson and Helen Weavers in the car park of Jesmond Park Uniting Church, one longstanding and one newly hallowed, both Members of this globally dispersed, locally rooted Iona Community. Surrounded by her family and friends, and by her Family Group, Helen is a beacon of light to all who seek the renewal of faith through community in these lands.



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12. The relationship between the Wellspring and the Iona Communities has been given a new focus and energy through this remarkably well-organised and inspirational Pilgrimage. The interest in membership of the Iona Community across the globe is steadily growing. How do we work closely with values-aligned partners such as Wellspring to ensure that we both honour our distinctive stories, while merging those parts of our structures and our programmes that will encourage the flourishing of all?

POST CARD 7: 1ST – 26TH NOVEMBER 2023, AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

November brought a change in focus, along with a change in temperature. Having travelled through intense coastal and desert heat with dear companions across thousands of miles in Australia, meeting over 30 First Nations/Aboriginal leaders, having been welcomed into 10 different households, two retreat centres, and countless church communities and having swum off three separate islands in three oceans, we were now ready to arrive in Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand.

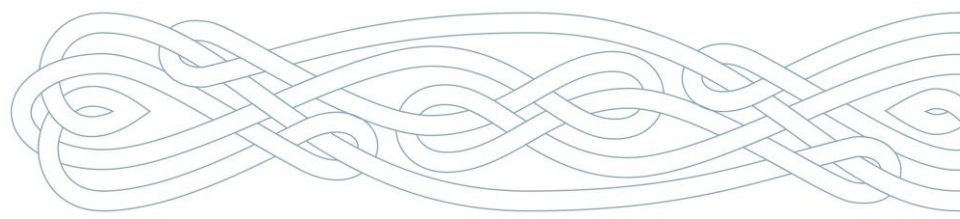
Our time in Aotearoa/New Zealand was more self-programmed, and the temperature, particularly the further south we have travelled, was much more like summer in the UK – warm with hints of rain... While the pace was slightly slower; the welcome was equally full and generous.

Being hosted by the Dudley/Tombs family in both Wellington and Dunedin, and by the Ryan family in South Dunedin, we were been given the very best of introductions to this beautiful country. Meeting with Associate Members at various events was a highlight, as was the time we spent at Karitane with Hilary Oxford-Smith, second year New Member of the Iona Community. Evenings with the congregation of Knox Church and then with colleagues and friends at the [Centre for Theology and Public Issues](#) at the University of Otago where I gave a public lecture were hugely stimulating and rewarding experiences. The thriving, liberally-minded, musically diverse congregation at [Knox Church](#) are looking for a minister.

In addition to these moments of deep connection, here are some more highlights:

- [Ngatiawa River Monastery](#)

Playing a key part on the [Urban Vision](#) network within Aotearoa/New Zealand, and supported by the Anglican Diocese and Bishop, Justin Duckworth, this group of around 20 adults with 8 teenagers and young children, live in Christian community in the hills just north of Wellington. They offer a ministry of presence and availability, each relying on employment outside the Community for income, while opening their doors wide to the traveler, the stranger, the regular visitor and co-community explorers like us. They host a rhythm of daily worship and wholesome meals around the kitchen table. The day after we left they were welcoming around 40 people to join them for a weekend of learning and festivities as they deepened their immersion in Māori culture and language together. Built out of a strong commitment to following Jesus, a passion for social justice, inclusion, and prayerful Christian worship, I was particularly struck by their patterns of discernment (they have a discernment month annually), their youthfulness and youth



focus, and their radical openness to welcome all.

- **The Seedling, South Dunedin**

We spent the best part of a week with the Ryan family, friends who had joined us in the UK, including a week on Iona, in the UK summer of 2023. Jono and Julie, with Daniel and Luca, made a commitment a number of years ago to live amongst the folks in South Dunedin in Christian community. An evening spent in prayer and reflection with some of the Seedling Members introduced us to the solidarity they share in this area of multiple deprivation; the wisdom with which they have joined in with community projects such as a sewing network; the power of their creativity as they write and lead and sing their way through worship rooted in the lives and longings of people in their neighbourhood. Jono had come to Scotland earlier in the year to find out about similar intentional communities such as Bert, the Gorbals Group and other expressions of Christian community particularly in Glasgow. In a quietly powerful way he and The Seedling are leading the way in modelling what this means within the South Dunedin context.

- **Kamautaura/Quarantine Island**

Having met Peter Matheson first online and then at Knox Church in Dunedin, it was a huge privilege then to spend the best part of a day with him and others visiting Quarantine Island. Nestled in the bay just west of Dunedin, near Port Chalmers harbour (home of the Presbyterian 'The Iona Church'), this island was for many years used as a first stop for ship-loads of migrants who arrived with illness on their boat – hence the name. In the 1950s a team of visionary church leaders, including Peter's father recently arrived from Scotland, established the St. Martin Community on the island, inspired by George MacLeod and the Iona Community experiment. Now the island is managed by a conservation community. And although the St. Martin Community folded a while ago, the spirit of that part of the island's story lives on. After a day of clearing invasive grasses from sapling trees, counting birds, and monitoring pest control, we met in the tent-shaped chapel for a time of reflection and sharing of vision before heading back to the mainland. The synergy between those of us from the Iona Community, and the conservation team was immense. We talked a lot about Camas, about living close to the earth, about weaving stories of mystery and faith and doubt into the everyday lives of people working to honour all Creation. We left feeling sure that there might be more to do together.

- **Transitional Cathedral, Christchurch:**

Collect 6: Christchurch Collect

Go-between God

God of each yesterday and

of every tomorrow,

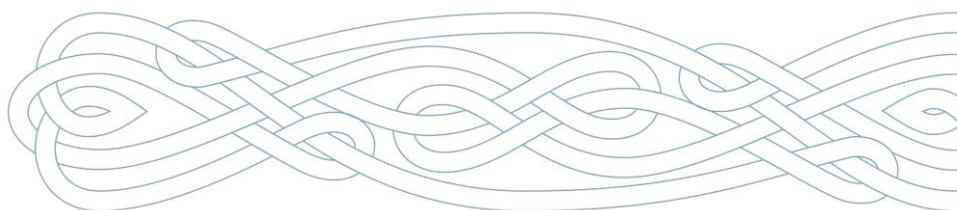
of transitions that

pivot us between your now and your not yet,

stand strong beside us in the moment.

Help us so in turn to stand firm, to hold solid ground

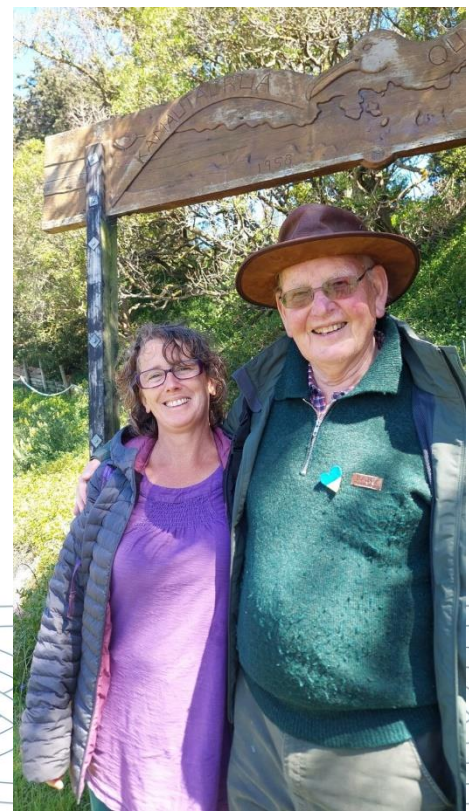
with the people of Gaza, the people of Israel,



*with the people of Sudan, the people of Ukraine.
In moments of shaky uncertainty
when all seems tumultuous, stand firm.
As your world turned widdershins, tapselteeerie, heelster-gowdie
on the cross, so companion us through all uncertainties.
And so may we remain strong in resurrection hope
and stable in undying love. Amen.*

After 12 days of holiday in the north of the South Island, mostly spent tramping around the Abel Tasman national park, and playing in wakas and kayaks in the warm ocean, Nick and I headed south for our final destination before our return journey home. Hosted by Fiona and Andrew Taylor in Christchurch, we were honoured to spend our final evening with members of the Anglican Cathedral in that city. Built as a symbol of renewal while the original cathedral is reconstructed after the devastating earthquake of 2011, and known affectionately as 'the cardboard cathedral', this place of worship exudes both provisionality and steadiness in its walls and its worship. The steel shipping containers and the cardboard infrastructure give a sense of that transition between things material and things spiritual. As we walked through this city in transition, seeing all around us the flux and change in building sites and shored up structures, in weary and curious people treading lightly on earth aware of the beauty and the danger, in equal measure, the words of George MacLeod come to mind – an appropriate sign off, I hope, as this Creation Care pilgrimage really does come to an end, while the deep, life-long journey of creation care fully begins.;

*'Invisible we see you, Christ beneath us.
With earthly eyes we see beneath us stones and dust
and dross, fit subjects for the analyst's table.
But with the eye of faith, we know You uphold.
In You all things consist and hang together:
The very atom is light energy,
the grass is vibrant, the rocks pulsate.
All is in flux; turn but a stone and an angel moves.'*



Questions and Reflections for the Way Ahead 7

13. Our vision for the renewal of the MacLeod Centre focusses on retrofitting a space primarily for young adults, with a focus on environmental sustainability and environmental learning. The models of community living that we encountered at Ngatiawa River Monestary, Quarantine Island, South Dunedin and in Christchurch show patterns for how to engage young adults in conservation work within the context of a worship-full community. To what extent can our vision for the Mac on Iona, and for Mac Houses on the mainland, be part of a global alliance of Christian communities and networks? Is it time to launch this GloACC network?

