

Tell them we love them...

Kathy Galloway
(baptised Kathryn Johnston Orr)

6/8/1952 - 26/8/2025



Kathy was Leader of the Iona Community from 2002 till 2009, but from birth to death the Community was the ground and profound context of her life. It shaped her vision and practice, her commitment to the Life of life.

Kathryn Orr was the first child of Janet Johnston and Jack Orr, themselves brought together through Iona Community connection. She grew up in Oxfangs – a large new council housing scheme on the outskirts of Edinburgh, where Jack was the Church of Scotland parish minister for thirty years. As a member of the Community, he, with Janet, was committed to building a vibrant and welcoming fellowship. It was in the vanguard of active community-building: reflected in participative worship, a spirit of optimism, critical engagement with the world, and conviviality. Oxfangs was the workshop where Kathy began to develop her lifelong passion for justice, her sense of wonder, her capacity for discernment. Here her gifts in language and singing and leadership were hewn. Being an assertive and forthright young woman in the heyday of second wave feminism also earned her a reputation for being intimidating! These qualities served Kathy well throughout her life.

Summer holidays on Iona, ecumenical youth group trips to the old Youth Camp, and teenage experiences of cooking at the Abbey were formative too. Kathy followed in Jack's footsteps to Trinity College, University of Glasgow to study theology as a candidate for ministry. She was a pioneer (and a bolshie one) in an overwhelmingly male environment. She met and married Ian Galloway when they were both very young. They lived first in Govan, then Edinburgh. Kathy worked for three years with Stanley Hood at Muirhouse Church while Ian was assistant at the Old Kirk in West Pilton. They joined the Iona Community in 1976, and in 1977 made history as the first married couple to be ordained together as ministers of the Church of Scotland. For six years their home was The Stair Community in West Pilton where they shared a council housing tenement block with five other households, developing a pattern of common life (including breast feeding babies), meals, worship and involvement in the wider community.

In The Stair, and then as co-wardens of Iona Abbey from 1983-89, Kathy and Ian were at the heart of a dynamic generation of Community members seeking new ways to incarnate their commitment, through integration of work and worship, building community and working for peace with justice in a changing world. Christian MacLean recalls 'The Community bubbled with creativity in the 1980's: new songs, drama, liturgy and art; youth work; John, Graham and the Wild Goose Resource Group; influences from the World Church, feminist and liberation theology: it was an exciting time. Kathy was central to that creativity - and continued to be throughout her life. Her songs, prayers and liturgies, her hauntingly beautiful singing, her inspirational sermons - are all part of who we are. Her leading of worship was always thoughtful, carefully prepared, with that calm lovely voice.'

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From Iona it was back to Glasgow – the city which was Kathy’s home for the rest of her days. She roamed to every continent but always returned to her west end basement flat. After her marriage ended, she lived there with children David, Duncan and Helen. Duncan remembers ‘She filled our lives with love and sometimes a bit of chaos... She gave up her own comfort for us. For more than a decade, she slept on a rolled-up futon in her study so we could have our own little spaces. She never complained. She always put us first.’

Song in the silence
Irrepressible laughter
Long peace
Let go, let go, let go
Always let go, always receive.

Kathy Galloway

Kathy was creative in her endeavours to make a living as a ‘freelance theologian’ – a commitment which was never lucrative, but meant she spent time and effort less in institutions, but on umpteen projects and with people struggling for justice, recognition, rights.

Politics and poetry were her lifeblood. Her first book, *Imagining the Gospels*, was published in 1987. It was followed through the 1990s and 2000s by several collections of poetry, reflections, meditations and sermons.

Edited books include *A Woman’s Claim of Right in Scotland* and *Dreaming of Eden: Reflections on Christianity and Sexuality*. The range, accessibility, honesty and power of her writing has touched and inspired unnumbered people across time and the world.

For years Kathy edited the *Coracle*, and in almost every imaginable way she engaged in the life of this Community to the hilt. In 2002 she was elected Leader – a task she fulfilled with utter commitment, passion, hard work and creative energy. She challenged assumptions of power and privilege all her life, and facilitated the process of making the Community more equitable and inclusive. In *Living by the Rule*, she wrote “the Rule is, for us, a source of freedom and, in its outworking, contains something of our prophetic edge. It is not so much that I keep the Rule, as that the Rule keeps me.’ For her, faithfulness was about practice, not proposition. “The God I am in love with, she said, ‘is not the fantasy of transcendence, but the Life of life, living in the flow, acting justly, loving.’ Her spirituality was the passion, sap and grace of glory in the deepest grey, the vibrant yellow of her Christ of Scotland, her blessed hut in the Camas woods.

During her time as Head of Christian Aid in Scotland (2009-16) she was a consistent and challenging moral compass, building global partnerships particularly for climate and gender justice. ‘She had a way of cutting through the temptation to settle for compromise’, says Sally Foster-Fulton. ‘A truth-teller, prophet, mentor and friend’. Whether in that role, or representing the Community, or extensive involvement in international ecumenical work, Kathy relished travel, and journeyed with reverence and humility, valuing hospitality received and given.

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She was constant in her active solidarity with the people of Palestine, of South Africa, with indigenous peoples, and particularly with global sisters

Sister, fiercely devoted and loving mother, granny to 'my life's best work' Freya and Leo. A Scotswoman and citizen of the world who cherished the ordinary miracles of messy everyday life. Poetry and gardening, music and theatre, reading, friendships and conversation nourished her. She knew the struggle and courage of walking into the unknown, trusting the blessing of acting in hope, and in the love of goodness planted more deeply than all that is wrong.

Author: Lesley Orr

Photo Credit: Iona Community

Kathy, gone

when the Lover comes calls you home
beat-crossing the wave-time of your song.
we who want to hold the tide, forget all you taught
the chords struck from your life, resonate, long
become weighted down by fool-wish, full hearts.
Beached, in breakdown of a harsh goodbye to you,
God's Mooring loosed, your barque gone.

The rip tide pulled, swept you out
in a whoosh of speed, daylight swims by
our shimmering world, finding blue in the grey sea.
Was that your gift, your task fresh colours won
for life work, your mind direct to line of sight, beacons
bright, struggled days and nights shared
wisdom and wit, writing, singing, righting wrong!

Even though, really so, you are gone.
No light flash or flare to guide

Save our last wave from the jetty
Even though really so you are gone,
the night comes, and we are all alone.

For the rest. The best of ourselves, echoes
how, a community mourns, very dear stories

well well very well very well we tell, as the swell takes you home.

It is done when 'tis done. But your but, challenge
still rings, even if we cannot hear, can't bear yet to feel,
the deep Rhyme moving.

In loving memory of so much help, hope and hearts-ease over four decades of life in community
Kaz Reeves. August 29th 2025