

***The Society for Ecumenical Studies
in association with the Iona Community***

Breaking Down Barriers in the Twenty-First Century

Second Ecumenical Week of Study and Prayer with the Iona Community, 8-14 September 2007

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The first thing I noticed when arriving in Iona from the Fionnphort ferry was the great welcome by the staff and members of the Iona Community. I was met by Geoff, one of the drivers and maintenance workers with his nice green van which took everybody's luggage up to Iona Abbey. The walk from the jetty took about 10-15 mins and the views were amazing. There was a large group of people arriving at the same time, none of whom I knew but over the course of the week got to know very quickly.

On the week there were 20 people who were sponsored and paid for by their churches. 1 Lutheran, 2 Union of Welsh Independents, 1 Congregationalist, 3 Catholics, 2 United Reformed, 2 Church of Scotland, 4 Edinburgh West End Churches Together, 2 Quakers, 2 Methodists and 1 Scottish Episcopal. 17 of these people were in the 20-40 age group.

There were 14 people over 60. They included 9 people from a Churches Together Group, 3 people from the USA and others from a variety of locations. In total there were 7 Roman Catholics, 7 Church of Scotland, 3 United Reformed, 5 Baptists, 1 Lutheran, 2 Quakers, 4 Methodists, 4 Anglicans, 2 Congregationalists and around 8 others.

After tea on the Saturday Evening in the refectory the first meeting was in the Chapter House. The first exercise was for everyone to introduce themselves by saying their name, where they came from and a song which represents their life. I chose When Peace Like A River by Horatio Spafford.

Services take place at 9am and 9pm in the Abbey every day. There are 2pm and 5pm masses at Oran's Chapel and The House of Prayer.

A number of topics were focussed on during the week. They were: "Breaking down walls - who moves the first stone?" - 1) Who am I?, 2) What am I?, 3) Where am I? and 4) What do I believe?, "Europe and Breaking Down Walls in the 21st Century", The Apostle's Creed:- can this be a prayer to break down walls within ourselves, our communities and our world? An exploration from a woman's perspective.", "Living with Difference: Cross-Cultural Migration" with particular reference to the book of Ruth and Mark 7: 24-30 - the story of Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman, "What is the Iona Community? - with reference to "Breaking Down Dividing Walls"

On Sunday afternoon after lunch some of us took a walk to the North Beach. I was amazed how clear and blue the water is.

On Monday and Thursday there were discussion groups and Bible Studies. The sections of the Bible looked at were Ruth 3 - Ruth and Boaz, at the Threshing-Floor, Isaiah 2 1-17 - The Mountain of the Lord and Colossians 1 15-23 - The Supremacy of Christ. We analyzed each passage and broke into twos to suggest our opinions.

On Tuesday a group of us went on an off road pilgrimage which was a distance of 7 miles round the island. The weather was ideal. It began at the Abbey and went to St Columba's Bay where we took a lunch stop. The green van met us

further on to provide cups of tea. The end came out at the MacLeod Centre.

On Wednesday afternoon there was a boat trip to Staffa and in the evening there was a Guest Concert in the Community Hall in the MacLeod Centre. I took great delight in standing up on stage and singing "The Wee Kirkcudbright Centipede" by Matt McGinn. Another favourite performed by Roy from Livingston was "Wee Johnny's lost his Joorie" (marble). The Evening Service was straight after in the Abbey.

It was great to be a part of the choir in the Abbey Evening Services. We had short rehearsals on the Monday and Thursday at 4.30pm entitled "The Big Sing" and "The Wee Sing" and thereafter at 8.30pm in the Abbey.

The fire alarm went off at 3.45am on Friday morning to everyone's delight. Not to worry - a great week had by all.