

Community of Aidan and Hilda – Way of Life

Introduction

The Community of Aidan and Hilda is a body of Christians who wish to live wholeheartedly as disciples of Jesus Christ, and to express this in a distinctive way that draws inspiration from the lives of St. Aidan, St. Hilda and other Celtic saints. Members of the Community share the belief that God is once again calling us to the quality of life and commitment that was revealed in the lives of these Christians whose witness was so effective.

The Community of Aidan and Hilda offers a Way of Life that is universal and for today. It draws inspiration from many sources, including desert and Celtic fathers and mothers. Although their spirituality was lived in particular places and times they belong to all places and times. The Way of Life also calls us to be present to Christ in our own land and culture. For this reason followers of the Way of Life also look for sources of inspiration from within their own country. Groups of members in a country may add a national saint to the title of their branch of the Community.

General

In common with many communities within Christianity we have three vows. These are Simplicity, Purity and Obedience which we understand as principles, not rules (see also: 'Commonly Asked Questions').

- **Simplicity** means we are willing to be rich or poor for God according to God's direction. We resist the temptation to be greedy or possessive, and we will not manipulate people or creation for our own ends. We are bold in using all we have for God without fear of possible poverty.
 - **Purity** means we are wholehearted, not divided, in relationships. It means accepting and giving God our whole being, including our sexuality. We love all people as Christ commands, and accept Christ's teaching about marriage and celibacy. We respect every person as belonging to God, and we are available to them with generosity and openness.
 - **Obedience** is the joyful abandonment of ourselves to God. The root of obedience is attentive listening. We are most fulfilled when we foster a process of mutual discernment; this enables us to recognise that some people are charismatically or institutionally gifted in certain roles and we work with them to build up the common good. We respect each person and their role, and relate to them as an organ in a human body relates to every other organ (1 Corinthians 12).
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Specific

SOUL FRIENDS: The Celtic church affirmed and used the ministry of the Anamchara or soul friend. A Soul Friend needs to be a mature Christian who is in sympathy with the aims of the Community. (S)he does not need to belong to the Community of Aidan and Hilda but it is clearly helpful if they do. Each member of this Community will have a Soul Friend to work with them in developing a Way of life that is personally suited to them. The Way relates to the following ten areas of life, and is reviewed at agreed intervals.

1. Life-Long Learning

Daily Bible reading is at the heart of this way of life. In addition, we study the history of the Celtic Church, becoming familiar with such saints as Aidan, Brigid, Caedmon, Columba, Cuthbert, David, Hilda, Illtyd, Ninian, Oswald and Patrick. We remember their feast days and consider them as companions on our journey of faith. We also bear in mind their strong link with the Desert Fathers and the Eastern Church, and wish to draw them into our field of studies. It is essential that study is not merely as an academic exercise. All that we learn is not for the sake of study itself, but in order that what we learn should be lived. We encourage the Celtic practice of memorising Scriptures, and learning through the use of creative arts.

2. Spiritual Journey

A Soul Friend is a friend with whom we openly share our spiritual journey. We meet with our Soul Friend at least twice a year. (S)he is someone who is familiar with the Community of Aidan and Hilda and seeks to discern with us where we are on that journey, what the Spirit is doing in our lives, and how God is leading us. The Soul Friend respects the tradition that we come from. Thus, for example, some will seek a Soul Friend who is familiar with formal confession and penance.

The Soul Friend gives guidance on two disciplines which the Community considers to be important:

1. **Regular retreats.** The outworking of this depends on the individual's own lifestyle, but we encourage regular days of quiet and reflection, and also an annual retreat.
2. **Pilgrimage.** The purpose of pilgrimage is to tread in the shoes of Christ or his saints in order to make contact with the many rich experiences which are to do with being a pilgrim. Such pilgrimages draw us into deeper devotion to our Lord Jesus and will inspire us to mission. Members might seek out communities of prayer. The Community recommends pilgrimage to sites of the Celtic Christian tradition, such as Iona and Lindisfarne as well as to new "places of resurrection". Soul Friends give guidance about different ways of making pilgrimage.

3. Rhythm of Prayer, Work and Re-creation

Prayer: We commit ourselves to a regular discipline of prayer. If required, our Soul friend can give us guidance about this. The Community recommends the use of daily patterns of worship. The St. Aidan Trust provides patterns of worship which are suited to the Way.

Ways of praying will vary according to temperament. The Community encourages a renewal of 'all kinds of praying' (Ephesians 6.18), and we are therefore committed to discovering new ways of praying, from contemplative prayer to celebratory praise.

Work: We welcome work as a gift from God. Every member should engage in work, whether it be the routine activities of life or paid employment. Work motivated by values which conflict with the Way should be avoided as much as possible. In humility we accept what God gives us. If we have no employment and are not clear what our work is, then we seek the advice of our Soul Friend. We seek not to overwork, standing firm against all pressure to do so, because it robs ourselves, others or God of the time we should give to them.

Rest: The hours of rest and recreation are as valuable as the hours of prayer and work. The Lord Jesus reminds us that 'the Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27). In the Scriptures even the land was given a Sabbath in the seventh year (Leviticus 25: 3-5). The need for rest was built into creation (Genesis 2: 1-3). A provision for this kind of rest, which is both holy and creative, should be part of each member's personal Way of Life.

4. Spiritual Initiatives through Intercession

The Community affirms a world view that recognises the reality of the supernatural and of spiritual warfare. As Cuthbert and others 'stormed the gates of heaven', so we also need to engage in and to become familiar with intercessory prayer. We do not project on to the supernatural what belongs to the sphere of human responsibility. We affirm national initiatives in intercessory prayer.

5. Simplicity of Life-style

We wish to 'live simply that others may simply live', to avoid any sense of judging one another; and God will make different demands of each of us. Our common responsibility is to regularly hold before God (and as appropriate to share with our Soul Friend) our income, our savings, our possessions, conscious that we are stewards, not possessors of these things, and making them available to him as He requires.

A simple life-style means setting everything in the simple beauty of creation. Our belongings, activities and relationships are ordered in a way that liberates the spirit; we cut out those things that overload or clutter the spirit.

We are not seeking a life of denial for we thoroughly rejoice in the good things God gives us. Our clothes and furniture should reflect God-given features of our personalities. There is a time to feast and celebrate as well as to fast. Our commitment is to openness. We stand against the influence of the god of mammon in our society by our life-style, by our hospitality, by our intercession, and by regular and generous giving.

6. Care for Creation

We affirm God's creation as essentially good, but spoilt by the effects of human sin and satanic evil. We therefore respect nature and are committed to seeing it cared for and restored. We aim to be ecologically aware, to pray for God's creation and all his creatures, and to stand against all that would seek to violate or destroy them. We look upon creation as a sacrament, reflecting the glory of God, and seek to meet God through his creation, to bless it, and to celebrate it.

7. Healing Fragmented People and Communities

We renounce the spirit of self-sufficient autonomy, and are committed to a much more holistic approach which was the strength of the Celtic church. We encourage the ministry of Christian healing. We not only lay hands on the sick and pray for their healing, we also 'lay hands' on every part of God's world to bless it and recognise its right to wholeness in Christ. We seek to become more fully human as we grow in Christ, and we believe that 'the glory of God is seen through a life fully lived' (Irenaeus).

8. Openness to God's Spirit

We allow God to take us where the Spirit wills, whether by gentle breeze or wild wind. The Celtic Christians had such faith in the leading of the Spirit that they gladly put to sea in small coracles, and went where the wind took them. We desire this kind of openness to the leading of the Spirit.

Essential to this is a proper affirmation of the gift of prophecy. St. Paul urges us all to prophesy (1 Corinthians 14.1). We honour this gift and encourage its proper and appropriate use.

Learning to listen is a skill that has almost been lost, and which takes many years to acquire. We seek to cultivate an interior silence that recognises and sets aside discordant voices, to respond to unexpected or disturbing promptings of God, to widen our horizons, to develop 'the eye of the eagle' and see and hear God through his creation.

9. Unity

As we study the history of the Celtic church we discover the unity we once had as one Christian people within the one universal church. We are constantly ashamed of our divisions, and we repent of the schisms that have occurred from the Reformation onwards. We look upon all fellow Christians not as 'strangers but pilgrims together', and

we honour those in oversight in all churches, not talking about our own denomination or others. We resist in our own lives things that damage the unity of Christ's body, and will not do separately what is best done together.

The Celtic church was thoroughly indigenous to the people in a way that the church has never been since. Aidan lived alongside the people and refused to accept the practices and customs that would distance him from the people and make him seem superior. The Celtic church honoured, trusted and went with the grain of the human communities it worked amongst. We seek to cultivate a solidarity with all people in everything except sin, to value all that is truly human in them, and to shed attitudes and practices that put up barriers between the church and the people.

We desire the healing of peoples divided by class, colour or creed and repent of our own part in these divisions.

10. Mission

Our aim is that 'the whole created order may be reconciled to God through Christ' (Colossians 1.20). We seek to live as one Christian community so 'that the world may believe' (John 17.21). The goal of the way of life is to develop a disciplined spirituality that will make us effective in our witness to Christ in the world.

The Celtic church evangelised from grassroots communities such as Lindisfarne, Iona and St. David's. Our evangelism springs naturally from the community of our local church, and out of this Community. Bishops like Chad and Cedd were irrepressible evangelists as they travelled around. As we live out this life, the Holy Spirit leads us into new initiatives to bring God to the people. These will usually be through our churches at local or wider Community to pray, study and accomplish a particular God-given task.

We seek to share our faith wherever opportunity is given. We evangelise not simply out of a sense of duty, but because the Spirit of God is giving us a heart for the lost. We ask God to work through us in signs and wonders for his glory, not ours.

Our mission also includes speaking out for the poor, the powerless and those unjustly treated in our society, and to minister to and with them as God directs.

As our gifting and opportunity permit we counter false teachings that put what is created, whether in the material or spirit worlds, in the place of God, through love, sound argument, prayer and demonstrations of the power of God, in the spirit of St. Patrick's Breastplate.

Celtic evangelists worked hand in hand with those in authority to bring regions and kingdoms under the rule of God, and to open doors to the gospel. We seek to dialogue and work with people of good will in places of authority and influence so that our lands may be led by God, and become healed lands of the glorious Trinity.