

## The “Way of Columba”

We have set out on a journey of faith and discovery. We desire the company of one another as we seek and serve Christ, moved by the example and witness of the saints of the early Celtic Church. We ask the blessing and grace of the Holy Spirit, the presence of good companions, and a covenanted way of Life. This Way of Columba is an invitation for each of us to seek our place of Resurrection, the place where the saints believed themselves called to rest in God’s mercy.

The Way of Columba is a way of passionate response to God in Christ. It is rooted in Biblical witness, the example of the saints, and the ancient understanding of Baptism as full initiation into Christ’s death and resurrection.

These are the eight aspects of the Way:

### **1) Commitment to Jesus Christ**

“Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior?”

BCP 302

“Delightful it is to live on a peaceful isle, in a quiet cell,  
serving the King of Kings.” Attr. to St. Columba

### **2) Common Life**

“Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship...?”

BCP 304

“See that you are at peace among yourselves, my children,  
and love one another...” Attr. to St. Columba

### **3) A Life of Prayer**

“Will you continue...in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”

BCP 304

“Let me say my daily prayers, sometimes chanting,  
sometimes quiet, always thanking God.” Attr. St. Columba

### **4) Soul-Friendship**

“Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one  
another, that you may be healed.” *James 5: 16*

“Eat no more until you get a soul-friend.” St. Brigid of Kildare

**5) Accountability**

“...for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

*Luke 6: 38*

“Let them cultivate and share the fruit of the earth.”

*The Rule of Ailbe*

**6) Service and Witness for Justice**

“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”

*BCP 305*

“I would invite the poor to my feast, for they are God’s joy”

*St. Brigid of Kildare*

**7) Learning and Study**

“Give me understanding, and I shall keep your law...”

*Psalm 119: 34*

“And what is the fruit of study? To perceive the eternal Word of God reflected in every plant and insect, every bird and animal, and every man and woman.”

*St. Ninian’s Catechism*

**8) Pilgrim Identity**

“Happy are the people whose strength is in you!

Whose hearts are set in the pilgrim’s way.”

*Psalm 84: 4*

“Precious has been the pilgrimage before going to meet death.”

*“The Scribe in the Woods”, ancient Irish*

## **Commentary**

*Note: this Commentary is meant to begin our own ongoing conversation on how to live the Way. Our own experience, informed by prayer and reflection, will develop and refine the Commentary over time.*

### 1) Commitment to Christ

The Way of Columba is a Way of Christian discipleship, following Jesus Christ as Lord. Those who follow the Way seek to root their whole lives in Christ, asking his grace in prayer, placing Christ at the center. Frequent meditation upon the Renunciations, Affirmations, and Baptismal Covenant of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer (pp. 302-305) is recommended. This is especially appropriate during times of quiet and of retreat, of life-transition and of personal and corporate crisis, and before major feasts and holy seasons of the Church year. Other means may help accomplish this same end, such as frequent reading of the New Testament, especially the Gospels, so that a warm and living love of Jesus Christ is maintained and nurtured.

### 2) Common Life

Christian life is common life, and we are redeemed by Christ as a people. In a fragmented culture, wherein we are consumers rather than community members, wherein virtual reality substitutes for real experience of one another, forming real Christian community is vital and meets our own deepest hungers and longings.

The Celtic Christians formed vital community based on the real condition of the culture in which they lived. Their communities adopted and then transformed the Celtic world of family and clan, such that the word “muintir” came to mean both “monastery” and “family”. Within the “muintir” there were different states of life—married members, children, “monks” and “nuns” living common life, hermits of both genders. These “families” affiliated with one another in a linkage based on common spirit and mission, forming the “paruchia”, the larger “family”.

In our time, although the parish church remains a center of worship, common life, and ministry, it no longer functions as the center of members’ social lives, nor can it completely fulfill the members’ hunger for community. Also, the parish church is not

the sole location for ministry, as the ministry of the baptized takes place in daily life, work, commitments, relationships.

The common life of the Way of Columba consists of:

- a) Nurturing, on the one hand, the larger common life of the parish church by frequent attendance at worship, most especially Sunday Eucharist, and support of other gathering occasions.
- b) Seeking, on the other hand, a place of common life in addition to the parish church. This will normally consist of the formation of a “Columba family gathering”, a “muintir”, which covenants to meet with regularity at a time, place, and in a way best suited to the members’ lifestyles. These gathering will include a time of prayer, of study, of shared hospitality, and of conversation including mutual support and accountability in the Way. Any means that contribute to the sharing of our lives, including the Internet and other new means of communication, may help this process.
- c) Gathering as one body when a general meeting of the Companions of the Way of Columba is called.
- d) The Companions of the Way of Columba treat one another with humble and accepting love, regarding one another as a gift of God. They seek ways to express their caring, especially when a member is in need or ill or distressed. They avoid gossip, backbiting, and slander as direct threats to the life of Christ among them, and instead seek to build up one another and the larger community in love.

With time, there may emerge those who wish to live these values in actual residential community with one another. This should be welcomed as a natural outgrowth of the Way, although careful discernment should precede such an undertaking. There may also be those who feel drawn to make formal vows to the Way, living it with an advanced degree of observance. They may seek to do this as solitaries or in community life. Such folk are to be supported and offered the careful discernment of the leadership and Companions, consulting the local Bishop and other church authorities when appropriate.

### 3) A Life of Prayer

The Christian life is a life of prayer, and of growth in prayer.

The Companions of the Way seek to deepen their life of prayer. And as Thomas Merton said, "If you want to learn to pray, then pray."

Asking the Spirit's help, the Companions of the Way offer prayer daily. There are many resources to support this commitment, some of which will be listed in a separate "toolkit". But what really matters is that we pray, and support and sustain one another in this life of prayer.

Daily Christian prayer includes prayerful reading of the Scriptures, and especially the Gospels. A plan or "lectionary" for reading Scripture on a daily, systematic basis may be found in the Book of Common Prayer pp. 934ff, as well as in Forward Day By Day. Celtic Prayers From Iona also includes a Psalm and Gospel lectionary cycle.

Our common prayer and our personal prayer inform and energize one another. Companions of the Way make all effort to attend Eucharist on Sunday and other holy-days, and welcome other opportunities to participate in the corporate prayer of the Church. In addition to formal liturgy, Companions of the Way of Columba welcome other opportunities to pray with one another and others, formally and informally.

Daily prayer shall be offered by and on behalf of the Way of Columba at 12:00 Noon at the parish church, Monday-Thursday, using a form of Office written for the Companions of the Way. All are invited to join in spirit with this common offering.

Intercessory prayer is offered by the Way daily for one another, and for the needs of the Church and the world.

#### 4) Soul-friendship

A deep Christian life is nurtured by sharing one's journey with another, in whom one can confide, with whom one can pray.

A distinct characteristic of the Celtic Church was the practice of soul-friendship. So important was this practice that St. Brigid told a young priest to arise from the dining table and not eat until he found a replacement for his deceased soul-friend!

A soul-friend is a Christian friend with whom one can honestly share one's journey and receive acceptance, support, prayer, and if need be challenge. The practice developed into the ministry of

“spiritual direction”, offered by clergy and others who were formally trained and authorized. But soul-friendship is an older and broader gift to the Church. The Scottish Hebridean islanders practiced it until quite recently. One of the chief tasks of the Hebridean soul-friend was to sing their friend the “soul-peace” as they lay dying, accompanying them as they passed to their Resurrection.

This Christian ministry is already partially visible in many forms, among them the practice of “prayer partner”. Companions of the Way are encouraged to embrace this ancient Christian practice, and to choose one other person with whom they may speak and pray. For those who wish a relationship with one who has been chosen and formally prepared, a “spiritual director”, resources and referrals will be made available by the leadership of the Way.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, administered by a priest, is also a rich resource for growth in Christ, and in its inception grew from the Irish experience of soul-friendship.

## 5) Accountability

Rejoicing in life as a gift, the Companions of the Way seek to grow in accountability for the gift of their own lives and the good things in their care. They take stock of their personal giftedness and seek to live their personal gifts joyfully in service of others, both in and out of the Church. They embrace the Biblical standard of the tithe, and seek to grow in the joyful liberty brought by assuming Gospel authority over money. They take a gentle, honest look at their lives and how their time is spent. They strive for balance, making time for prayer, study, work, relationships, rest, and recreation. They set aside an annual time for solitary reflection and prayer, be this as brief as a day spent alone at home, although more and more frequent time would be best.

The Companions strive for Gospel simplicity in their lives, in their use of the goods of the earth, and in their care of themselves and others. They observe Christian chastity according to their state of life, honoring their bodies as divine gift and respecting the presence of Christ in all others. In accord with the Celtic sense of the lively presence of God in all creation, they treasure the created world as sacrament of God’s presence, and regard concern for the environment as part of their Christian commitment.

## 6) Service and witness for justice

The Companions of the Way take seriously the Gospel teaching of the Lord, who assures us that as we do to the least among us, we do to him. They seek to proclaim Christ's Lordship by all means, but especially witness by serving those most in need.

The Companions of the Way work for peace, a difficult task in the warlike times in which we live. They seek and serve Christ in the poor, both in direct service and in advocacy for their rights and needs. They seek to make the "paruchia" a place of hospitality, of charity and service, where all in need are treated with dignity and respect. They actively support the Columba Center outreach ministries in the ways best suited to each one. The Companions address in prayer, reflection, and action the societal forces that demean and diminish human life and dignity—racism, discrimination of all kinds, materialism, and subordination of human needs to financial profit. Companions may disagree on specific details of right action to be taken, but all agree on the reality of the human needs about us.

## 7) Learning and Study

The Celtic Christians deeply valued the life of the mind as a manifestation of the goodness of God's own life in creation. Celtic monasteries were known for their learning, and were centers for the arts, for literacy, scholarship, and teaching.

Companions of the Way embrace the God who delights in revealing wisdom to those who desire and seek it. They seek to broaden their knowledge of the Scriptures, of the teachings of the Church, of the Celtic saints and Celtic Christianity, and of the search for God in the contemporary world. They strive to set time aside daily for reading, and identify the ways in which they best learn. The "muintir" sets aside time for study in its gatherings, be this Bible study, reading and discussing a book together, watching and discussing a relevant video or movie, using some sort of structured curriculum or study guide, or taking turns keynoting and leading discussion. Some time is set aside for study and discussion of the Way and other writings of the Columba Center.

All Companions are encouraged to own both a Bible and a copy of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer.

Any Companion who feels called to pursue additional theological study, whether through EFM, through formal theological training, or through other means, is to be commended and supported. Any Companion who seeks to pursue intellectual deepening of any kind is also to be commended, as the creator God is to be found in the pursuit of all forms of truth.

## 8) Pilgrim Identity

The Biblical God is a pilgrim God, and Christian life is one of journeying without and within to the homeland promised to us.

We live as pilgrims when we recall that in the journey we meet Christ as did the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The pilgrimage is first and foremost inner and within; as the Irish poet said, "Pilgrimage to Rome? Much labor, little profit! The King that you seek, you will not find, unless you bring him with you."

But the outer pattern of our life can and should echo the pilgrim character of our souls, bringing our whole lives in Christ to wholeness.

The Companions of the Way honor and acknowledge the sacred spaces within their lives, and honor sacred places "where prayer has been valid." They honor their journeying by telling their own pilgrim stories.

When opportunity presents, the Companions of the Way dare to fulfill their dreams of going on pilgrimage to the ancient Celtic holy sites in Ireland or the British Isles, as well as to other Christian holy places, chief among them the lands hallowed by the feet of the Lord himself.

*May Christ bless*