

New Celtic Contemplative Worship Offers Alternative Inspired by Island in Scotland ~ by Sarah Garner

This fall, 10:45 am Sunday worshippers began experiencing a newly crafted worship service, the Celtic Contemplative Service of Holy Communion. Experimenting with this worship time was a response to a vision set forth by the church council to try new patterns of worship that would nurture people's faith and become a practice for daily life.

The result was a service that built on the intimacy and acoustic music of the 10:45 am service by adding times of quiet, thoughtful engagement, violin offerings, moments of reflection, simple songs, coming to the table, chimes, prayers, and scripture.

The spoken prayers, responses, and songs used in the service echo those created by the religious community on the small island of Iona in Scotland. Just over one hundred residents live on the Inner Hebridean island, traditional farmers, artists, and the like.



Iona is most famous because it is the resting place of Macbeth but also because its ancient abbey is considered the birthplace of Celtic Christianity. Saint Columba arrived at Iona to establish a Christian community in the year 563. Fourteen centuries later, in 1938, George McLeod, a Scottish pastor, looked to rebuild the abbey. This physical rebuilding became and remains a sign of hope for the rebuilding of individual lives, their community, and beyond. The ecumenical community that grew out of this now develops worship materials for

congregations pursuing justice, peace, building/rebuilding of community, and renewing worship. These are the tools we are using to offer our worship at St. John's.

If you haven't had the chance to attend one of these services yet, here's some of what you can expect. As you enter the sanctuary, you are greeted with intentional quiet. At the baptismal font, located near the sanctuary doors, you can write prayer requests and leave them in a bowl. These prayer requests will be shared and offered later in the service. You can also pick up a fabric bag containing a journal. These journals are used to capture your thoughts at any time during the service. You are welcome to page through the journal you selected to read the thoughts of other worshippers from earlier services and even respond to their thoughts to deepen intimacy and community.

During the service, in addition to readings, you will experience a time of silent reflection, accompanied by chime tones. You can use this time to journal, pray, meditate, think... whatever feels the best to you. The service includes Holy Communion and peaceful musical offerings of violin and piano. It is our hope that this service provides an alternative to traditional worship that speaks to people in intimate ways. You are always welcome to attend whether it is each Sunday or occasionally when the Spirit moves you to come.



To learn more about Iona Abbey in Scotland and their ecumenical community, visit <https://iona.org.uk/>. ♥