

## **Corrymeela June 2020: 'Reflections on Emergent Community'**

Ruth Harvey, Leader of the Iona Community

### **Introduction**

Despite valiant attempts, and a surprising new approach to time since March, weeds are still growing in our garden here. We have one particularly aggressive weed. You might know it, called 'Mare's Tail' or 'Horse's Tail.' Apparently it survived the ice age. It's not going anywhere. So I've had to embrace the art of reconciliation in my own back garden, and have decided to reframe this weed in the age-old way as 'a flower growing in the wrong place.'

I've been thinking a lot about reframing in the last days and months. How might three months of radical, unexpected cocooning, or lockdown help us to reframe, or re-pattern what it means to be an intentional Christian community?

I'd like to share some thoughts on this with you today. I'm only three weeks into post. So bear with me! What does it mean for Corrymeela, for Iona, to be an 'emergent community?'

First a word about context. And there are three things I'd like to share here:

### **Context 1: Corrymeela/Glenn**

My experience of Corrymeela goes back to 1983 when I first visited for a Corrymeet at New Year with some of the Wild Goose resource group of the Iona Community. I've been a few times since.

More recently I've been involved in the work of the Spirituality of Conflict group, and with Reconcilers Together. In both groups I had the utter privilege and honour to get to know not only Corrymeela better, to meet the glorious Glenn Jordan.

To Adrienne, Philippa and Christopher and to all of you who knew him so well and who love him still, on behalf of the Iona Community, our love to. We laughed, Glenn and I in the autumn last year because Glenn was the 'poster boy' for the Gathering in Glasgow on Conflict and Faith.

His photo in the pre-event publicity drew gasps of 'who is that male model'.

He was suitably coy – and of course deflected the attention to others, as usual.

We in the Iona Community lost two dear colleagues very suddenly in the last few months: Graham Maule of the Wild Goose Resource Group and then Peter Macdonald our former Leader. We know what it means to be bereft of a dear colleague and friend too soon – we share with you in the grieving of Glenn.

### **Context 2: Covid-19**

The second context I want to acknowledge right now is of course this strange and tender times of Radical cocooning. I like Leo Vradkr's 'reframing' of shielding, or lockdown as cocooning – it helps me to embrace the potential as well as the dread inherent in change.

With this in mind, this tension between potential and dread, and because there is for many an experience of trauma, or crisis about the Covid event, I find the Chinese symbol for 'crisis.' Really useful. This word is made up of two symbols:

# 危机

The first, wei, means 'danger'; and the second, ji, means 'opportunity'. Or 'dread' with 'potential.' As we look to reframe what it means to be an intentional faith community today, it's perhaps worth considering that while there may be dangers and dreads ahead of us, there are also opportunities and great potential in this time of crisis or trauma.

### **Context 3:**

And the third context is that this experience we are having now, as faith communities emerging out of a time of crisis or chaos, is not new. Our oldest Hebrew scripture remind us that the world was birthed out of chaos and confusion.

Jesus was born into a culture of occupation and oppression, out of which emerged a new radical community of hope. And our beloved communities of Iona and Corrymeela, and others such as Taize and the worker priest movement, grew as a radical response to moments of crisis, some, such as the world wars, on a global scale, not unlike our pandemic. Part of our context is to know that hopeful communities grow out of times of crisis. Who knows for example what communities of hope and solidarity may emerge out of the crisis of racial injustice?

Within crisis there is both danger and there is opportunity. There is dread and there is hope.

This happens to be our crisis moment.

### **Flow and Core Message**

So there are at least three contexts which influence our sharing.

What I would like to share with you today is two connected reflections as we explore **how we might reframe, or re-pattern our life in community.** These are the questions I'd like explore

Firstly, what does it mean to be an emergent community in these liminal times between pre and post pandemic?

Then secondly what patterns are emerging, or re-emerging, that can sustain us as we are re-formed, or trans-formed?

### **Exploration 1: What does it mean to be an emergent community?**

So first, what does it mean to be an emergent community?

The notion of 'emergence' was coined in 1999 by the economist Jeffrey Goldstein as:

"the arising of novel and coherent structures, patterns and properties during the process of self-organization in complex systems."

This concept of emergence is used in science, and increasingly in management development, to help understand how organisations evolve.

As complex organisations, or communities such as Corrymeela or Iona, reframe or reorganise ourselves, new, coherent patterns emerge. We are more than an organisation of course – we are a habitat, or a koinonia – a community of believers grounded in our faith. But these models from science can help us understand ourselves better. It is our task to notice these new patterns.

- What is emerging just beyond our vision that we can't quite see but beckons us on?
- What is the glimpse we can see out of the corner of our eye pointing us to the new?

In religious terms, this process of emergence is very familiar to us: What is the 'now and the not yet' – the eschaton – that glimpse of the kingdom that we catch out of the corner of our eye but can't quite see fully? In what ways are we "trying to make that which belongs to the afterlife happen here and now."

George MacLeod talked about the veil between things spiritual and things material being as thin as gossamer. We live in this thin place, between things seen and things not yet seen, between the now and the not yet.

It is the work and the task of all faith seekers to remain alert, awake to those glimpses of the 'not yet', the kingdom of heaven breaking through in our midst. This is our garden of gethsemane moment – we are to remain awake, alert.

This is the emergent way.

#### **Cynefin: koinonia**

As we explore this emergent way, there is another grounding model which I think is instructive for our faith communities. This model is based around the Welsh word: Cynefin meaning 'habitat', 'community', or 'koinonia' – it's a word that points to the 'ground of our being' – what is the context, community, or ground: the habitat which helps us to flourish?

Dave Snowden is a business analyst who has taken this notion of cynefin and applied it to emergent systems. He uses this word to describe a sense-making model which I believe speaks to our times. There are five areas which Snowden calls domains. They help us describe both the mundanity and the complexity of what it means to be an emergent community living between the now and the not yet.

Let me describe them briefly.

In the bottom right, the 'obvious' domain is where processes and systems are clear, constrained, and deemed 'best practice. For example, filling in an expense form, or following a one-way system, or indeed signing up for an online event such as this. Obvious processes are tried and tested processes that we carry out without too much thought.

Every community is only as good as it's best administration processes. These purr along smoothly underneath all the complexity. The 'obvious' processes, at their best, are largely invisible and help ensure that the system as a whole shines, sings, hums.

Moving up to the top right, the complicated domain is where there is a clear series of processes each of which may need external expertise – such as building an aircraft, or baking bread. There is a process, it is clear and many elements are obvious, but taken together they are complicated and need a level of external expertise.

Processes that are practiced over and over again in the complicated domain may move into the obvious domain. For example, getting to Corrymeela, or to Iona, for the first time is complicated. There are a few separate, obvious steps which taken together are complicated. But once you've practiced the sequence a few times they becomes 'obvious'. This is good – we evolve as complicated systems become obvious.

Then there are complex processes, in the top left. This is the domain where new practices and new ideas are given room to emerge. Some of these ideas may fly. Others may fail. But this is a 'safe to fail' domain, where the encouragement is to consider novel ideas. This is where emergent processes flourish.

In all of this there is the danger of falling into chaos, bottom left. A bit of chaos can be creative – and can birth novel practice. But too much of chaos can be disastrous. Indeed too much of any one of these domains can be deathly. Moving from one domain to the other, there is always the danger of moving into the 'disorder' which is the fifth domain in the centre. But Snowden says that to move between the domains we must be willing to embrace at least some disorder.

In a crisis there is both danger and opportunity.

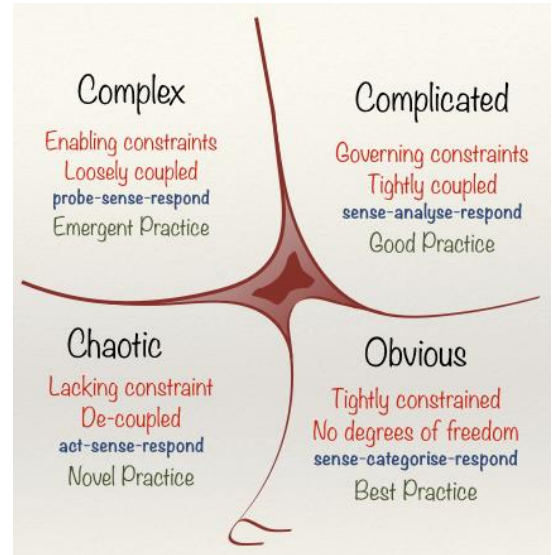
It's more dangerous, or precipitous, if we move from an 'obvious' system to a 'chaotic' system. 'Complicated' and 'complex' systems are places from which the leading edge can emerge. The boundaries between these four domains, with 'disorder' being the fifth in the middle, are rich boundaries where change, creativity, clarity of thought and insight emerge.

So what is this model offering us about how to be an emergent faith communities in these liminal times between the now and the not yet? I believe that we largely dwell, as faith communities, within the complex domain.

We are of course more than a series of processes. We are a human, fractured, vulnerable community. We are a habitat, or a koinonia.

But now is a time for us to open up our creativity and to let new ideas fly. If we retrench into the obvious patterns and practices, following only that which is tried and tested, we could tip over into organised chaos.

Now is the time to fly kites, to play with 'safe to fail' ideas, from which emergent practice will flourish. Why? To celebrate the kingdom of God closer than breathing, to usher in justice, peace,



reconciliation. Always keeping our eyes open to that glimpse of the kingfisher, that brush with the kingdom of God out of the corner of our eye.

### Examples of Emergence

There are three examples of ways in which this kind of emergent community is happening already.

- **Emergent Connecting** It's stating the obvious to say that we are finding new ways to connect with one another during 'cocooning'.

I am reminded of the early days of the formation of the Student Christian Movement, and the World Student Christian Federation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. John R. Mott and others shared a vision of a world-wide network of active theologians who would meet, reflect, worship and plan actions together around common concerns. An Executive Council was called to meet from across the globe in South India.

Members travelled for weeks, some for months, by boat and early forms of rail travel to meet together. The pace by which they journeyed was of a different order to that which we know today. But like us they were pioneers, not allowing physical distance, or social distancing to get in the way of a vision inspired by their reading of the Gospel.

The early church was the same – apostles travelling by foot and boat to spread the word of God among seekers.

It seems that while our context is different, our challenge is the same: how to make best use of current technology to help us connect with one another. As in C19 Europe, not everyone has access to, or desire to make use of latest technology. For good reasons. So we must remain alert to those who are excluded by zoom or anxious about security while at the same time blending, in person with remote gatherings. Emergent Connecting.

- **The second way in which emergent faith community is happening already is through Emergent Prayer** From your first prayer post in early March the Corrymeela community has been leading the way in emergent prayer for pilgrims today. Posting prayers that are concise, creative, sumptuous all at once – can I thank you for your glorious daily prayers. New patterns of praying together are emerging.

I can remember when I received my first fax. It was 1990 and I was living and working in an international office. A number of us had been alerted to a fax that was to arrive from a colleague in Nairobi. At the appointed time we gathered, almost reverentially around the fax machine. We waited in silence – and at the first tick tick tick of the machine as it signalled an incoming message our jaws collectively dropped and we watched this page arrive from the other side of the world. We were astonished by the magical, almost mystical communication that it was offering – a bit like prayer

The rise of the telephone when it was first introduced, like the printing press, was viewed not only with jaw-dropping awe, but with suspicion and uncertainty – these machines would diminish human interaction and disperse human community it was said. But a bit like prayer, and fax machines, we may not exactly understand how the medium works, but we have learned to trust that it is effective. Ancient rituals of prayer are re-patterning themselves through today's technology.

Weekly prayers of healing are now being live-streamed from Iona Abbey; people are connecting across continents on a Sunday morning and at other times for worship ; disenfranchised worshippers are re-connecting after years of absence: there are many examples across the world of renewed and transformed models of prayer.

The story of one of our Members of the Iona Community throws light on the ‘now and the not yet’ of prayer evolution. Growing up as a Christian within a communist context they had to believe in the glimpse of the kingdom caught out of the corner of their eye, in order to have hope that faith and justice would prevail and their prayers would become legal. In their part of the world, at that time, prayer was only safe ‘underground’, hidden behind secret doors and within clandestine gatherings.

While the context is different for us, the dynamics are the same.

In times of crisis, there is both danger and opportunity. Faith in the risen Christ means we must be resilient in the face of danger and find hope nestled within each opportunity. So Emergent Prayer.

- **A third way that emergent community is with us already is in Emergent Justice:**
  - One of the marks of community transformed will be a revisiting of what we mean by justice:
  - Emergent justice will mean our homeless in Glasgow, in Belfast, in Cardiff won't return to the streets but will remain accommodated in unused hotel rooms.
  - It will mean we will change our patterns of travel and of meetings for good so that we reduce our carbon footprint permanently. We must lead the way on this, finding a new balance between meeting in person and meeting on line.
  - Emergent justice will mean that all workers in our public services, including our health, social care, education and emergency services will be paid a fair and honest wage. And they will be trained and equipped to offer holistic care: where healing is about mental, spiritual and social health as well as about physical health.
  - Emergent justice will mean that over-crowded, under-resourced housing, and abusive behaviours will be eradicated.
  - Emergent justice will point to our collective ignorance about racial justice. Yes, all lives matter, but the ‘black lives matter’ focus rightly puts the spotlight on the need for a bias in favour of the marginalised and the scapegoated.

The French novelist Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr famously said ***plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*** which translates: —"the more things change, the more they stay the same." Or in the words of the Pretenders: ‘some things change, some stay the same.’

There is something in this emergent journey that is inviting us both to imagine a new future, and at the same time to dig deep into our beloved roots, to nourish those roots and sustain them.

So enough about the process of emergence. Three patterns of emergence already presenting themselves to us: emergent connecting, praying, and justice.

### **Exploration 2: noticing patterns of emergence**

The companion exploration I'd like to offer is that there are **patterns** of emergence rooted in our

back story. These patterns are more like spiral, less like a straight line. In our emerging we come upon ourselves 'again for the first time.'

What are the deep emergent patterns already at work within our communities that speak to our past and that point to our future?

George Fox, the 'father' of what we now call the Society of Friends, or the Quakers, said this in 1656:

"Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone" George Fox, 1656

Be patterns. Be examples. Let your life speak. Let your life preach. As we look at our lives, how are patterns? And what patterns can we lean in to that will continue to transform our communities. Well here are two patterns that already exist within our history. There will be more.

The pattern of reconciliation. And the pattern of worship.

The first is the pattern of reconciliation written in to our salvation story.

### **Patterns of Reconciliation**

William Bridges in his book 'Managing Transitions: making the most of Change' offers us a model of transformation – one that is tried and tested in business and large corporations across the world.

In order to lead through change, Bridges says first we must distinguish between change and transition.

A change, such as a decision at Council, or a physical house or office move, or a date when Lockdown is announced is situational. That means it's a specific event bound by time. A transition, on the other hand, is a three-phase process and is psychological: it is the process people go through to embed the change.

The three stages of 1) letting go, 2) the neutral zone, and 3) the new beginning are mostly sequential, but overlap. Even in the new beginning phase, there is still an element of letting go. Even in the letting go there are glimpses of the new beginning: the eschaton.

Life is full of weekly, daily transition experiences. I decide I'm going to make a change: go for a run, but I need to move my body and my mind through the process of transition, through the letting go of my comfy my bed then the dithering in the kitchen before I make my move!

Here's a less mundane example. A decision made by the Iona Community Council to change our governance structures last May will take at least two years to transition into reality as we all shift behaviours, habits and ultimately culture to embed the new patterns in our daily lives.

And in the context of reconciliation: a decision made by one party to move out of the family home, or to change jobs, while containing glimpses of the future, may need a very long time of waiting, of unknowing, of uncertainty before the fullness of that decision is seen or felt.

In the now nestles the not yet.

Onto this pattern of reconciliation can be mapped a very practical pattern of conflict transformation. In the early stages of a mediation parties must be given space to rage, weep, mourn, question the change, or the letting go. Next comes a phase of uncertainty, of not knowing, of waiting in the

neutral zone. And finally, with enough patience, support and skill, parties may emerge into a hopeful future.

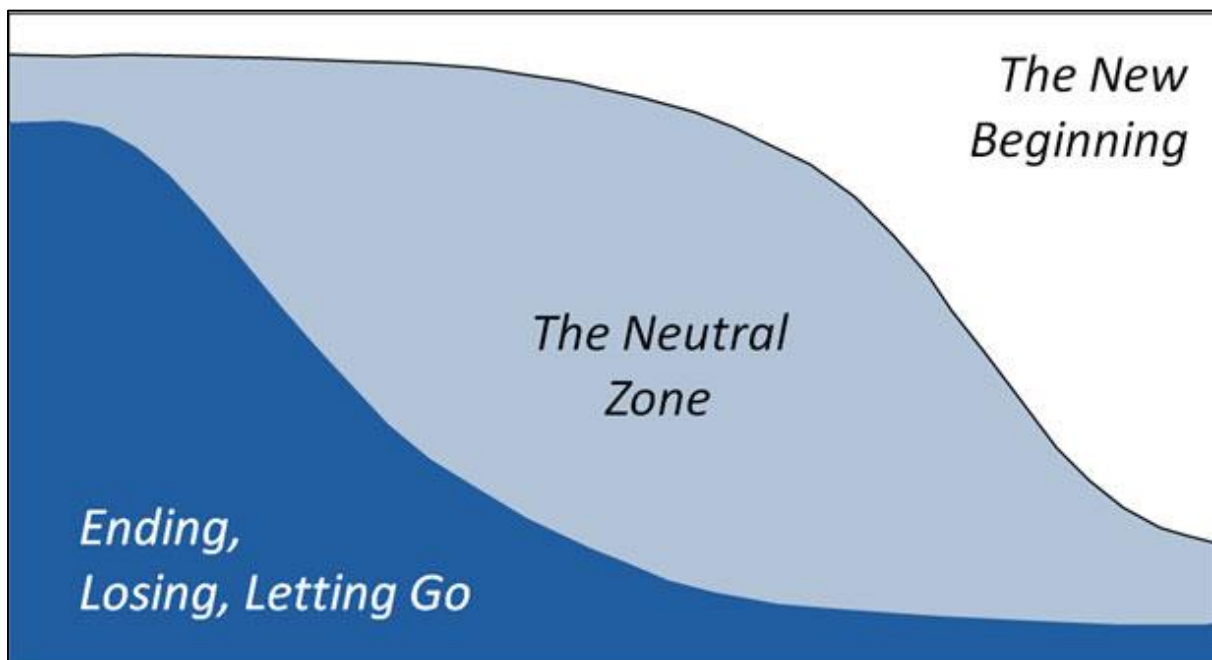
Onto this pattern of change management, and conflict transformation can be mapped our own story of salvation. In the passion and the crucifixion the people lament, weep, grieve the death of Jesus they let go.

On Holy Saturday the followers of Jesus waited in the not-knowing, in uncertainty, the neutral zone and fear.

And finally, on Easter Sunday the community of believers celebrated in the hope and delight of the resurrection. A new beginning.

Our holy pattern of lament, waiting and hope holds us steady in the midst of so much uncertainty.

We have been here before. We understand the necessity to dwell in the waiting time; not to rush prematurely to a bright shiny new future; but to be ready to catch the glimpse of that emergent future as it appears out of the corner of our eye.



### **Patterns in our worship**

The second pattern embedded already within the life of our emergent communities on which we are invited to draw is the pattern of our worship.

Kathy Galloway, my predecessor in two jobs within the Iona Community now, wrote a wonderful book called 'The Pattern of our Days'. In it she offers liturgies and rituals to guide us through each day, and the liturgical year. Macrina Wiederkehr in her book 'Seven Sacred Pauses' guides us through the monastic rhythm of prayer and reminds us of the stone from which we were hewn. Many other great liturgists who guide us through the pattern of our praying.

In conversation last week with Cath Hollywell of the Journey Community in Derby, a community committed to peace and reconciliation, Cath was telling me how powerfully the Corrymeela daily prayers support her fledgling community. When I said I was going to meet with you this week she asked me to pass this on.



One charism of Corrymeela – one of your many ‘unique selling points’ – is your ordinary, extraordinary commitment to a pattern of prayer that is all about emergence; that is all about the transformation of ordinary people and ordinary moments into moments of salvation: moments or glimpses of the emergent Kingdom community.

This dance, between God and God’s people in worship is not new – patterns of this dance are embedded in scripture, and in the Psalms in particular. Let’s look briefly at Psalm 85 to remind ourselves of the pattern of worship which both binds and looses us to be emergent faith communities today. This is a Psalm in four movements which mirror the four movements in our worship life. The first movement is from God to us.

1. God to us: in invitation, and welcome

- <sup>1</sup> LORD, you were favourable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
- <sup>2</sup> You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you pardoned all their sin.
- <sup>3</sup> You withdrew all your wrath;  
you turned from your hot anger.

First God welcomes us in and we acknowledge God’s presence. Verses 1 – 3 illustrate the great power and invitation of God: God is favourable; God restores; God forgives; God withdraws ‘hot anger.’ God’s forgiveness extends to whole nations: the path has been cleared and a new way stretches ahead – unencumbered by the past.

2. Us to God: in confession

- <sup>4</sup> Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away your indignation towards us.
- <sup>5</sup> Will you be angry with us for ever?  
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
- <sup>6</sup> Will you not revive us again,  
so that your people may rejoice in you?
- <sup>7</sup> Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,  
and grant us your salvation.

In verses 4 – 7 we lay bare our ‘faults and our frailties’ seeking forgiveness from God. The psalmist, having established that our God is all forgiving, guides us now in reaching out to God with a plea, an appeal for this very same forgiveness and compassion. We ask God three things: to restore us; to revive us; to save us. After a time of isolation, even desolation when we turned away from God (a kind of spiritual lockdown) we long to be restored, to be revived, to return.

3. God to us: in forgiveness, wisdom in preaching, teaching, sacrament

- <sup>8</sup>Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.<sup>[a]</sup>
- <sup>9</sup>Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.

in verses 8-9, God moves towards us once more and we must listen. One of the first skills in the work of reconciliation is to learn to prioritise listening over talking. In order to listen we must first stop talking. This is deep listening with the intent to understand (not necessarily to agree). This also means stilling the voice in our own head – the voice that is often, in everyday conversation, honing our next offering. Whether through prayer, meditation, walking, running, mindfulness or other reflective practices, the daily exercise of stilling the soul and listening to God releases wells of wisdom otherwise untapped. In a time of heightened anxiety – of conflict, or pandemic – it is these stilling practices that guide us in listening to the wisdom in ourselves, in others, and in the voice of our God. Into this still-listening space God ‘speaks peace to his people’ – a whole, shalom-peace marked by integrity and fullness.

4. Us to God: in intercession, and sending out in peace into the world

- <sup>10</sup>Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
- <sup>11</sup>Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
- <sup>12</sup>The LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.
- <sup>13</sup>Righteousness will go before him,  
and will make a path for his steps.

These verses remind us that as God first moves towards us in grace and forgiveness, so we respond in faithfulness – and it is this movement, this dance which opens the door to justice and peace. God’s steadfastness and love are a free offering made full and whole in the union between justice and peace (10). Our faithfulness reaching towards God will meet God’s grace reaching towards us (12) and so a pattern, a new culture of peace marks the way ahead for all time (13).

As we emerge into a new-old habitat, or ‘cynffin’, alert to the signs of the times, and glimpses of the future, we remember that history is cyclical rather than linear, and that ‘in making all things news’ in the name of Christ, we indeed do come upon ourselves again for the first time.

When I look at the Corrymeela community I see a community fiercely focussed on reconciliation, focussed on the future, drawing deeply on the patterns of human stories that have formed and trans-formed you and countless others around you.

In your programme work you are focussed on

- transforming sectarianism through dialogue;
- transforming division through encounter;
- transforming lives through community;
- transforming conflict through peace-building.

In the emergent future which we can only glimpse, please never stop being yourselves.

The future will be familiar, and will also be wholly different, holding recognisably within it the essence, or core of the past: *plus ca change; plus c'est la meme chose*.

Here are some questions to ponder together:

What are the emergent opportunities that are ours to explore?

What patterns are emerging from our past that speak to our future?

What are our young people and our seasoned friends pointing us to?

What are the glimpses of the kingdom that we see out of the corner of our eye?

### **Prayer for Corrymeela**

I'd like to end with a poem and a prayer. First the poem. This is by Kenneth White, the Scottish poet born in the Gorbals, now living in France:

*for the question is always*

*how*

*out of all the chances and changes*

*to select*

*the features of real significance*

*so as to make*

*of the welter*

*a world that will last*

*and how to order*

*the signs and the symbols*

*so they will continue*

*to form new patterns*

*developing into*

*new harmonic wholes*

*so to keep life alive*

*in complexity*

*and complicity*  
*with all of being -*  
*there is only poetry*

Of this poem, Kathy Galloway has said: that selection is a spiritual matter; ordering is a political matter.

And so I finish now with a prayer for the Corrymeela Community:  
in your grief, reaching out to you with solidarity and love;  
in your continued emergence reaching out to you with companionship and shared trust in those glimpses of the kingdom.

So let's pray:

Loving God  
We pray this day, this night,  
and in the pattern of our days,  
for our dear friends of the Corrymeela community.  
We pray for those committed to the fierce work of reconciliation.

We pray  
for stillness to steady our hearts,  
even in the wee small hours  
when grief overtakes us.  
We pray for all in mourning.

We pray  
for clarity to articulate our longings  
even when we are blind with rage  
and engulfed in fury.  
We pray for those who 'select', and those who 'order'.

We pray  
for solidarity in community  
even when we cannot  
tend one another as we want.  
We pray for emergent communities of hope.

We pray  
for peace in our hearts  
for now and for all time.

Amen