



## Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum

### Scottish Pilgrimage Gathering 2020 - Summary Report

A total of 35 delegates representing members of the Forum, speakers and guests met virtually via Zoom video conference on 2<sup>nd</sup> October for the 2020 Gathering. See below for a list of attendees and apologies.

The SPRF Chairman, **Very Rev Dr Sheilagh Kesting** warmly welcomed everyone to the Gathering and referred to the information previously circulated on the afternoon programme.

*An audio recording of the talks summarized below is available at [https:// sprf.org.uk](https://sprf.org.uk) via the Members Section (password protected) of the SPRF website. We recommend listening to the recording to get the full meaning of our speakers' contributions.*

**Daniel Romani**, Project Officer with **Faith in Cowal**, set the scene with an account of his work promoting local pilgrimage walking routes connecting the historic churches across Cowal. Since moving to the area in 2017, Dan had used his experience of photography and web design and an interest in walking to develop online resources to build on the initial work of Gilbert Markus supported by the Argyll Presbytery. Although much of this focused on the early Christian heritage of Saint Mun and others, Dan was keen to interest local people and businesses in new pilgrim routes associated with them to attract more people to a relatively unvisited area of Scotland. A total of 200 miles of walking routes had now been identified, linking Kilmun and Strachur and other locations with the Cowal Way LDR and other walks. Dan has created a new <https://www.faithincowal.org/walking-guides/> website with a Facebook link, attracting over 1,000 online visitors / month. Other promotional work has included Radio Scotland and press coverage. Dan hoped that his work would be extended further in 2021, ideally through employing a local 'pilgrimage guide' to organize walking retreats and engage with local households. More investment was needed in the infrastructure of routes, mapping, story board and digital interpretation (using the View Ranger app) and Dan said he would welcome ideas for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the project. It was noted that funding for his post was provided by a local charitable trust endowment which was unique to the area and was geared to faith projects.

**Bill Jack**, Chair of the **Kentigern Way Steering Group**, then gave a personal account of the creation of the new Kentigern Way pilgrim walking route over the past 3 years. His talk, entitled 'Kentigern, Baithene and Bothwell – celebrating Glasgow's missionary saint' looked at Kentigern's life and work as a 6<sup>th</sup> contemporary of St Columba who evangelized across the kingdom of Rheged and into present day Cumbria before founding - as St Mungo - what became Glasgow Cathedral. Through the work of his colleague St Baithene, Bothwell has been a centre of Christianity for some 1,500 years. Bill explained that the *camino* to Santiago de Compostella was his initial inspiration for the Kentigern Way project, encouraged by conversations at the Forum meeting at Luss and with others in SPRF since. Development work by Bill and his colleagues had encompassed historical research, mapping and ground scoping work to ensure that a largely off-road pilgrim route from Annan to Glasgow was both authentic and walkable and able to offer local accommodation. It used sections of existing LDRs to cross five different Council areas, covering 150 miles in 10 defined sections, 90% off-road. Outline information can be found online at <http://kentigernway.com/> Bill commented that many people he approached had initially

shown little interest in the idea of creating a pilgrimage walking route, and it takes time to get this concept accepted by Councils and other public organisations.

**Richard Frazer**, Convenor of the **Edinburgh Presbytery of the Church of Scotland** and author of 'Travels with a Stick' about his *camino* pilgrimages, broadened the focus by speaking about the Church of Scotland's response to developing pilgrimage in Scotland. He hoped we would see many more projects like Dan Romani's, and also felt the initial official lack of interest in Bill's work was an experience shared by others. Nevertheless, there had been an astonishing 'slow revolution' over the past 30 years in public attitudes to Christian pilgrimage since his first *camino* walk in 1983, and this was no longer viewed as a 'Catholic' practice alien to other churches. Since the former Church in Society Council had led the adoption of the historic Deliverance on Pilgrimage at the 2017 General Assembly, the Church of Scotland had been looking to resource parish churches to develop their own pilgrimage activities. Richard felt that a starting point in this process was to use Scotland's landscape and outdoor places to connect with people who have little or no involvement in church, recognizing that we face not so much a 'crisis of faith' but a crisis of organized, institutional religion. Using pilgrimage to appeal to the non-religious through local congregations was a vital part of our response, and Steve Ainsworth's new book 'Rewilding the Church' underlined this message. This was likely to be a slow, incremental process but it amounted to a new way of 'doing church' differently. Individual churches should form new local partnerships to advocate, enable and encourage congregations to 'do pilgrimage' and host visiting pilgrims in their communities, maybe using social enterprises to create resources for all of Scotland's pilgrim routes. Richard closed by emphasizing major new opportunities to link faith and ecology in supporting local responses to global environmental issues, using pilgrimage as a transformative experience.

This last point led very easily into the last talk given by **Richard Murray**, a Lay Reader in the Episcopal Church and a Trustee of **Eco-Congregation Scotland**, on the subject of 'Pilgrimage as a pathway to climate activism'. Richard related his own life and career to ways of finding God in our personal lives as a pilgrimage – i.e. a journey with a spiritual meaning – and how undertaking an 'eco-pilgrimage' can and does change people, by taking us out of our normal environment of church worship and our concerns over church buildings. Coupled with an interest in inter-faith projects, this is what led Richard to help set up the Deeside Climate Action Network, following a remarkable 'pilgrimage of learning' on sustainability issues held in Banchory, which reflected much wider initiatives. Under the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, every country is treaty-bound to avoid dangerous climate change and find ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions globally in an equitable way, and for the past 30 years world governments have met annually at a Conference of the Parties – or COP. In 2015, an international eco-pilgrimage group walked to the COP meeting in Paris to highlight the need for a global response to the climate emergency. Similarly, COP26 in Glasgow, to be hosted by the UK Government in November 2021, will be a focus for eco-pilgrimages among communities in Scotland. These events can offer all of us the opportunity to step outside our normal lives to travel slowly and sustainably by re-connecting us with the natural world and leading a simpler lifestyle.

After warmly thanking all four speakers, the Chair invited comments and questions.

In response to **Rev Dr Scott McKenna**, Dan Romani commented on the strong support he has received from local clergy in Cowal and said his project would actively develop the role of local churches as links to the new pilgrim routes. **Dr Marion Bowman** commented that Dan's talk also highlighted opportunities for maritime pilgrimage along the Argyll coastline, replicating exciting new projects in

Norway that she was aware of through her contacts to create a maritime extension of the St Olaf Ways connecting other countries with the Nidaros shrine at Trondheim – a new meaning of ‘slow tourism’. In reply to Richard Frazer, Dan also highlighted the value of village halls as affordable accommodation for pilgrim visitors in an area with a relatively under-developed tourism infrastructure. **Rev Douglas McHugh** referred to a new community centre being opened opposite the church at Kilmartin; a similar approach could be taken to adapt the disused manses at Strachur and other locations in Cowal as pilgrim accommodation.

Richard Murray replied to a question from **Nick Cooke** to recount his very positive experience of leading Christian and inter-faith groups on eco-pilgrimages on nature reserves or the Deeside Way, which highlighted the enormous potential of such activities among church congregations. Marion Bowman wondered if outdoor pilgrimage could be used in this context to help newcomers from other countries feel at home in the Scottish landscape, to which Richard Frazer replied that the pioneering work of Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees in meeting this need should be explored further - see <http://www.sfar.org.uk/> Richard also welcomed the metaphor of ‘rewilding’ to describe the process of de-construction and reconstruction that the churches needed to address, especially given the new opportunities in a post-Covid society. However, **Jane Coll** felt that the term ‘rewilding’ in this context risked alienating Highland communities where associations between wild land and the Clearances were part of a recent painful history in many people’s memories. The Chair said this was valuable reminder of the use and significance of language – for instance, the term ‘Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace’ used by the World Council of Churches was untranslatable in some countries!

Bill Jack’s request for advice on measuring the economic and social impact of new pilgrim walking routes was partly answered by **Ed Heather-Hayes**, who confirmed that FCCT had installed six electronic people-counters at key points on the Fife Pilgrim Way to provide quarterly data on usage; this is not an exact science but, used consistently, the methodology would monitor significant trends and the data provided so far showed an increasing number of visitors using the FPW route.

Nick Cooke reported on plans to convert St Fillan’s Church in Killin, Perthshire (a listed building known as a ‘tin tabernacle’) as a Pilgrim Church open to all managed by the local community for visitors but retained as a place of Christian worship. This would become the westerly destination of the Three Saints Way and the mid-point of the eventual Iona – St Andrews Pilgrim Way. This might well be the first such project of its type and had secured strong support from the SEC Diocese and local politicians.

**John Henderson** commented on opportunities to develop maritime ways on several Scottish routes, notably the Northern Pilgrims Way between Tain and Kirkwall and the Mull section of the coast to coast route to Iona. He also announced plans to publicise the Forth to Farne Way via a new guidebook to the route being published by Rucksack Readers in conjunction with SPRF and the Steering Group.

Closing this session of talks, the Chair expressed her warm thanks to all four speakers for their inspiring contributions which had stimulated very positive comments and discussion among participants.

Following a short comfort break, the Gathering concluded with the **2020 SPRF Annual General Meeting**. The draft AGM Minutes are recorded separately and are being circulated to all SPRF members.

**Nick Cooke**  
Secretary

**2 November 2020**

**Registered Attendance by Zoom:**

**SPRF Patron:** Lord David Wilson of Tillyorn KT GCMG

**Full Members:**

Church of Scotland – Faith Nurture Forum (Felicity Burrows)  
CLEAR Services (Nick Cooke)  
Faith in Cowal (Dan Romani, Douglas McHugh)  
Fife Coast & Countryside Trust (Ed Heather-Hayes, James Dawson)  
Holy Socks (Margaret Wylie)  
Kentigern Way (Bill Jack)  
Northern Pilgrims' Way (Jane Coll)  
Norse Pilgrim Ltd (Lynne Collinson)  
Orkney Pilgrimage (Stuart Little)  
Paisley Abbey / Whithorn Way Steering Group (Sylvia Jenks, Sally Cook)  
Pluscarden Abbey (Fiona Mitchell)  
Scotland's Churches Trust (Jamie Erskine)  
St Mirin's Pilgrims (Martin Bonnar)  
Strathearn Episcopal Churches (Rev Gennie Evans)  
Walking Support (John Henderson)  
Way of St Andrews (Hugh Lockhart)

**Associate Members:**

Rev Prof David Atkinson  
Jill Baker  
Dr Marion Bowman  
Prof Ian Bradley  
Rev Richard Frazer  
Joe Gibbs  
John Graham  
Margaret Hadley  
Rev Dr Sheilagh Kesting  
David Langworth  
Sr Margaret Ann Minards  
Richard Murray  
Dr Eila Williamson

**Visitors:**

Scottish Episcopal Church – Argyll & Isles Diocese (Chris Brett)  
Rev Dr Scott McKenna  
Colin Nimmo  
Marjory Williamson

**Apologies:**

Heart of Argyll Tourism Alliance (Jonathan Sheldrick); Sarah Kettles; St Cuthbert's Coffee Stop (Rev Margaret Pedersen)