INTRODUCTION

Living by a Way (or “Rule”) of Life is commonly associated with the spiritual discipline taken on by monks and nuns in religious orders. In fact the practice of setting out the key elements of what it means to live as the people of God in a particular time and setting is well-established in the Bible and the early church. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) given to Moses summarise how God wanted the Israelites to live. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) taught by Jesus shows how he wanted his disciples to live, especially in the setting of 1st century Palestine. Most of Paul’s letters contain practical teaching on how to live the Christian life for his mixed Jew-Gentile churches in Roman cities. The English historian Bede tells us that when the Celtic missionary, Bishop Cedd, worked among the East Saxons, he “taught them to observe the discipline of a Rule, so far as these rough people were capable of receiving it” (Bede, The Ecclesiastical History III.22).

Adopting a Way of Life is about seeking to live responsibly by bringing God into every area of our lives. The pace of 21st century life confronts us with constant choices and demands which leave many people feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. By contrast, Jesus promised “life to the full” (John 10:10 NIV). He spoke of taking on “his yoke” but promised that through it we would find rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28-30). Living by a Way of Life therefore is not about legalistic rules which can cause further guilt, but rather about having God-given guidelines which allow us to say no to what is not essential in order to flourish and find freedom by doing what really matters. Christianity is about grace, not law, what God has done for us rather than what we have to do for God. Paul wrote, “I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:19-20). A Way of Life shows us what this Christ-filled life looks like in practice.
THREE LIFE-GIVING PRINCIPLES

Most early Christian communities were self-supporting and centred on people who were single. Their Way of Life was built on the traditional monastic vows of poverty, chastity (practised as celibacy), and obedience. A Way of Life was however always open to adaptation to fit changing circumstances. Most 21st century people have families and working lives so flexibility is essential, and these vows are best understood today as guiding principles rather than strict rules. Our three foundational principles are therefore defined as SIMPLICITY, PURITY and OBEDIENCE.

• Simplicity

Jesus said: “Seek first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things [food and clothing] will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). The essence of simplicity is to put the priorities and values of God’s kingdom first in every area of life. This leads us to regard all that we have as gifts not as possessions, to be used as God guides us, and to trust that God will provide for our essential needs.

• Purity

Jesus said: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8). The essence of purity is being open before God in all our thoughts and feelings, including our sexuality. We show love, openness and generosity to all people following the example of Christ, but reserve the sexual expression of love for a life-long partner. We honour marriage, respect those who choose to remain single, and affirm those for whom this area of life is a struggle.

• Obedience

Jesus said: “those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25). The essence of obedience is the joyful abandonment of ourselves to God, giving up our will for his in the service of others. The root of obedience is therefore in learning to listen to God to learn his ways. We also give due respect to those whom God has placed in positions of leadership or seniority in church, family, the workplace and public life.

ONE ESSENTIAL PRACTICE - SOUL FRIENDSHIP

The early church in these islands and elsewhere practised the ministry of “Soul Friendship.” A Soul Friend is a mature Christian who is in sympathy with our Way of Life, and who helps us to discern and respond appropriately to God’s will, grow in maturity, responsibility and wholeness, and to deepen our relationship with God. Our Soul Friend helps us to work out our personal application of the Way of Life, reviews it with us at regular intervals, and is a companion to us on our spiritual journey.
TEN WAYMARKS

1. Be a Life-Long Learner
2. Journey with a Soul Friend
3. Keep a Rhythm of Prayer, Work and Re-creation
4. Live as Simply as Possible
5. Celebrate and Care for Creation
6. Heal Whatever is Broken
7. Be Open to the Holy Spirit and Listen
8. Pray for Good to Overcome Evil
9. Pursue Unity
10. Share Jesus and Justice

1. Be a Life-Long Learner

Jesus said: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me . . . you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29). The definition of a disciple is one who learns.

We learn from the Bible and from creation. At the heart of our Way of Life is learning from God through daily Bible reading, and also through study, meditation, and any other means of creative engagement with the Scriptures. The Bible also urges us to consider God’s creation and to draw lessons from what we see there.

We learn from other people and from our life experiences. In particular we seek to learn from the lives and examples of the Celtic saints - the founders of the church in our islands, and from people of all ages whose example illuminates our Way of Life. We celebrate the lives of these saints and regard them as our companions and encouragers (Hebrews 11:1-12:2). Since all truth is God’s truth we seek to increase our knowledge and understanding of all things which are life-enhancing and enrich our God-given personalities and gifts.

We seek to grow in knowledge not for its own sake but that we may live more wisely and fully.

2. Journey with a Soul Friend

We regard the Christian life as a journey and like St Paul we “press on toward the goal . . . of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). We meet with our Soul Friend at least three times a year to share with them the progress we are making or the difficulties we are facing. They help us to discern what God is doing in our lives at the present time and where he might be leading us. Our Soul Friend is not however expected to act as our pastor, counsellor, spiritual director, or confessor unless we choose to seek out a person who has those specific gifts.

We regard two particular practices as important in helping us on our journey with God.

Regular retreats

A retreat is an opportunity for quiet and reflection with God. Individual circumstances and lifestyles mean that this will be worked out in different ways, but it is vital that we take such time regularly. This may take the form of a designated “quiet day,” or we may only be able to set aside a period of a few hours. An annual retreat away from home is encouraged if at all possible.

Pilgrimage

The Bible is full of people making journeys. The Celtic missionaries to Britain were adventurous travellers. Pilgrimage is about visiting significant places and seeking new experiences which will stimulate and inspire us on our journey with God. We visit, reflect, and pray at places which are part of our spiritual heritage, such as Lindisfarne and Iona, and places which have become significant to our own spiritual
history. When we are able to, we take these opportunities to travel as an outward reminder that God is always on the move and we are called to follow where he leads us.

3. Keep a Rhythm of Prayer, Work and Re-creation

Prayer
The life of Jesus was fuelled by prayer and he taught the need to pray always (Luke 18:1). We commit ourselves to a regular pattern of daily prayer, alone or with others. Ways of praying will vary according to our personality but we affirm and encourage every kind of prayer from silent contemplation to celebratory praise. Set forms of prayer can be provided, as can guidance about how to establish and deepen our personal prayer life.

Work
Jesus spoke frequently about work (e.g. Luke 12:42-43). God intended from the beginning that human beings should engage in beneficial work (Genesis 2:15). We therefore welcome work as a gift from God and seek to engage in it whether through paid employment, the necessary tasks of daily life, or other constructive activities. Work involving values or practices which conflict with our Way of Life should be avoided as much as possible, but we seek the presence of God in every task, even unattractive ones. If we are unemployed or unclear what our work should be we seek advice and guidance. We seek to resist pressures to overwork because it misuses time which should rightfully be given to God, others, or ourselves.

Re-creation
Jesus taught that “the Sabbath was made for humankind” (Mark 2:27) because God himself rested at the end of creation (Genesis 2:1-3). In the Old Testament even the land had a Sabbath rest every seventh year (Leviticus 25:1-4). Since time spent in rest and recreation is as essential as time spent in prayer and work, we build regular time for restoration and renewal of body, mind and spirit into our personal Way of Life.

4. Live as Simply as Possible

Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and wealth . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:24, 21) He also encouraged us to trust that God will always give us our daily bread (Matthew 6:11). We seek to be open and accountable before God (and if appropriate, our Soul Friend) for the way we use our money and possessions, handle our time and activities, and the quality of our relationships and hospitality. We are conscious that we are stewards, not owners of these things, and we are ready to make them and ourselves available to others as God guides us.

Faced with global poverty and environmental crisis we seek to “live simply that others may simply live.” This will mean different things for different people and we do not judge one another. We also enjoy and celebrate the good things God gives us and understand that there is a time to feast as well as to fast. We seek to order our possessions, activities and relationships in a way which frees us to be fully attentive to God, others, and ourselves, and we seek to get rid of those things which overload or clutter our lives. Our clothing and surroundings should reflect our God-given individuality, expressing beauty while rejecting extravagance. We also stand against the spirit of materialism by practising hospitality wherever possible and by committing to proportionate and generous financial giving.

5. Celebrate and Care for Creation

Jesus called himself “the light of the world [literally, the kosmos]”
(John 8:12), and John declares that “all things came into being through him” (John 1:3). There are many stories of the Celtic saints and other holy people living in harmony with wild creatures. We affirm that God’s creation is essentially good, but is corrupted and damaged by the effects of human sin and the influence of the spiritual powers of evil. We believe that creation reveals the glory of God (Psalm 19:1) so we celebrate creation and seek ways to meet with and learn from God through it. We likewise seek to be environmentally aware, living in a way which respects and cares for God’s creation and which stands against those values and practices which continue to damage it.

6. Heal Whatever is Broken

Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:18-19). Paul wrote that “through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). St Irenaeus (2nd century) said, “the glory of God is a human being fully alive.” In the name of Christ and through his power we pursue wholeness in body, mind and spirit for ourselves and for others. We seek to be peace-makers between estranged individuals and in divided communities. We also pray for the “healing of the land” in places polluted by human sinfulness (2 Chronicles 7:14).

7. Be Open to the Holy Spirit and Listen

Jesus told his disciples, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). He also spoke of the Spirit as the wind which blows wherever it chooses (John 3:8). Some Celtic Christian missionaries had such faith in the leading of the Spirit that they were willing to put to sea in small coracles, and go where the wind took them! Whether as a gentle breeze or a wild wind we seek the same kind of openness to the leading of the Spirit. We cultivate a willingness to let God move us beyond where we are comfortable and into what is new or unfamiliar.

The New Testament gift of prophecy has an important part to play in this. This is the spiritual gift of being able to receive insights from God which build up, encourage, console, guide or challenge, either for ourselves or for others. Paul encourages all Christians to desire this gift (1 Corinthians 14:1). Such insights must be carefully weighed (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21) and learning to listen to God is a skill which requires time to develop. We seek to cultivate an inner stillness which can distinguish the voice of God from all the other “voices” and influences within us. We also listen for God’s voice through Scripture and through his creation.

8. Pray for Good to Overcome Evil

Jesus understood his ministry to be a conflict between the kingdom of God and the spiritual powers of darkness (John 12:31, Luke 11:14-20). We recognise the reality of this unseen dimension and the ongoing warfare between the spiritual forces of good and evil (Ephesians 6:10-13). Prayer is a key weapon in this struggle (Ephesians 6:18) as we pray both for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, and to be delivered from evil (Matthew 6:9-13). To pray in this way for people, places, and situations is intercession. In doing so we do not project onto the unseen dimension things for which human beings need to take responsibility but we do seek to discern the spiritual influences at work there. Intercession is always related to positive action because our ultimate goal is to “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).
9. **Pursue Unity**

Jesus said, “I will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32), and prayed that his disciples, both then and now, “may all be one” (John 17:20-21). Paul taught that we should all regard ourselves as members of the one body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12). The church today is marred by divisions between Eastern and Western traditions, Protestants and Roman Catholics, and many other smaller splits. In the Celtic period the distinctive features of these different strands of Christianity were still woven together. The early church in Britain had the emphasis on Scripture and mission reflected today by Evangelicals, the emphasis on incarnation and sacraments reflected by Catholics, and the emphasis on the Spirit and the Trinity reflected by Pentecostals and Orthodox. It held in balance both the contemplative and the active life. The Celtic missionaries also adapted themselves to the culture, patterns and practices of the society they sought to reach for Christ. Aidan rejected anything which would make him superior or separate from the people. Hilda was regarded as a spiritual mother by many ordinary people.

Our first expression of unity is by making it a priority to worship and meet regularly with the other members of our own church fellowship. We also seek to welcome all Christians as fellow travellers with Christ, to express solidarity with them by actions as well as words, and to emphasise the things which unite us while we seek to overcome those which still divide us. We seek to cultivate solidarity with all people in everything except sin and to value and affirm what is good in all people and cultures. We seek to identify and remove attitudes and practices which create barriers between church and people. We act to overcome divisions based on gender, colour, or social status, wherever we find them.

10. **Share Jesus and Justice**

The last command Jesus gave to his followers was to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19-20) as the final stage of God’s “plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:10). The reason we are called to live in united community is “that the world may believe” (John 17:21). An essential goal of our Way of Life, therefore, is to develop a disciplined spirituality which will make us effective witnesses for Christ. Centres of Christian community like Iona and Lindisfarne were mission bases for the spread of the Gospel in the British Isles. Leaders like Aidan, Hilda, Cuthbert, Columba, David and Patrick made Christ known to others through words and actions wherever they went. They shared the Gospel in ways which respected and began from the existing culture and beliefs of their hearers.

All Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses (Acts 1:8), so motivated by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14) we seek to share our faith wherever God gives us an opportunity, taking time to listen to others before we speak. We seek to be led by the Spirit into new ways of sharing Christ which fit the culture in which we live, and to be open to demonstrations of the Spirit’s power through prayer for healing and prophetic insights.

By speaking the truth prayerfully and in love we also seek to introduce God’s peaceful rule wherever material or spiritual powers have taken his place. Following the example of Jesus, we also seek to minister to, and speak for, those oppressed by poverty and injustice (Matthew 11:25). The Celtic missionaries actively sought to bring a Christian influence to bear upon people in power to cause them to act justly and to open wider doors for the Gospel. We seek to work with all people of good will in positions of influence so that our nations may reflect the values of the kingdom of God.
Followers of the Way: Ancient discipleship for modern Christians
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Explaining in more depth what a Way of Life is, why it matters, and full of practical advice about how to follow the ten waymarks.

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