

The Order of St. Aidan

The Aidan Way

THE TEN ELEMENTS

STUDY AND APPLICATION OF THE CELTIC CHRISTIAN WAY
THE ANMCHARA OR "SOUL FRIEND"
A DAILY RHYTHM OF PRAYER, WORK AND REST
INTERCESSORY PRAYER
SIMPLICITY OF LIFESTYLE
CARE FOR AND AFFIRMATION OF CREATION
WHOLENESS NOT FRAGMENTATION
OPENNESS TO THE WIND OF THE SPIRIT
UNITY AND COMMUNITY
MISSION



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The Order of St. Aidan

*"For the healing of the land through men, women
and children who draw inspiration from the Celtic saints."*

AIDAN (Died 651 AD) - the bold and gentle evangelist and teacher -:

"Aidan gave an inspiring example of self-discipline and continence, and the highest recommendation of his teaching to all was that he and his followers lived as they taught. He never sought or cared for any worldly possessions, and loved to give away to the poor who chanced to meet him whatever he received from kings and wealthy folk. Whether in town or country, he always traveled on foot unless compelled by necessity to ride, and whatever people he met on his walks, whether high or low, he stopped and spoke to them. If they were heathen, he urged them to be baptized; and if they were Christians, he strengthened them by word and deed to live a good life and to be generous to others. His life is in marked contrast to the apathy of our own times."

Venerable Bede "Ecclesiastical History of the English People" Chapter III, 5.

What is the Order of St. Aidan?

The Order of St. Aidan is a body of Christians who wish to live wholeheartedly as disciples of Jesus Christ, and to express this in a distinctive way that draws inspiration from the lives of St. Aidan and other Celtic saints. Members of the Order share the belief that God is once again calling us to the quality of life and commitment that was revealed in the lives of these Christians whose witness was so effective.

How does one join the Order?

1. Identify your Soul Friend: The Soul Friend is the key element in this process. It is this person who works with you to develop your personal spiritual discipline. It is this person with whom you reflect on the "fit" of the personal Way of Life you have developed. It is this person, who with you determines your readiness to enter each stage of the process.

2. Making the Explorer's Covenant: The Explorer is one who has reviewed the Aidan Way and decided to pursue it and who has found a soul friend to be a companion on that Way. Explorers make a covenant witnessed by their soul friend, sometimes in the company of friends or their local church. The Explorer's Covenant is similar to the first vows of the traditional religious communities. In the period following the covenant service the Explorer and soul friend work together to build the Explorer's personal Way. When this process is complete, the Explorer is ready for the next stage.

Composing your personal Way of Life:

What is a "spiritual discipline?" A spiritual discipline, also known as a "Rule of Life" or "Way of Life" is a set of practices that we undertake to strengthen and deepen our lives as disciples. If you are unfamiliar with this practice we recommend Richard Foster's work **Celebration of Discipline**.

Some Guidelines: Begin where you are, not where you think you ought to be. For instance, if you read the Bible only on rare occasions, it's probably not wise to begin your discipline by committing to 3 hours intensive Bible study each week. In many ways taking on a routine of spiritual discipline is like beginning an exercise program, if you start too ambitiously you'll end up immobilizing yourself and feel too sore and discouraged to continue.

The Aidan Way of Life encompasses ten elements outlined below. Address each element as you compose your personal Way of Life. Working with your soul friend you can identify which of the elements of the Way are already expressed in your lifestyle and which need to be incorporated. Further, you may want, at least initially, to focus on one or two elements rather than taking on a radical life changing pattern all at once.

Beyond these guidelines the composition and approval of your Way lies between you and your soul friend. While you are always welcome to write or e-mail to our office for clarification or advice, please note that none of us are professional spiritual directors, but ordinary Christians living by God's grace. These months are a time of testing your Way of Life. The actual living out of your discipline will show you where you have been both too hard and too easy on yourself. One good measure of assessing one's Way of Life is through the guideline given by the late Fr. Martin Thornton in his book, **Christian Proficiency**. (The notes in parentheses are ours.)

In general, therefore, I think that Rule (*way of life*) should be such that is invariably kept without strain but *occasionally* makes a definite demand on the will. It should normally be kept with no fault (*fault - a failure to live up to an obligation taken on in your way of life*) occasionally, a few faults frequently, and if it goes all to pieces very rarely there is little to worry about."

3. Making the Voyager's Covenant: The **Voyager** stage begins with a covenant similar to the Explorer's. In the period following this covenant service Voyagers test their Way and the realities of being part of a far-flung community. The Way is tested as to its realism: Is it concrete enough to provide accountability? Does it accurately reflect the Voyager's life circumstances? Is it gentle enough to fit well, but challenging enough to enable growth? The realities of scattered community may be difficult for some. We are as yet a small fellowship, scattered across North America. The member of the Order of St. Aidan may often feel isolated. At the present our primary contact is through e-mail and an Internet chat site. The determination of when to enter the final stage is left up to the Voyager and the soul friend. This stage is Life Profession.

4. Life Profession: Having completed the Explorer's and Voyager's stages, the member makes the covenant of Life Profession. This covenant is renewed annually on its anniversary or on the Feast of Aidan of Lindisfarne, August 31.

What is a soul friend?

The *anmchara*, as the Irish called the soul friend, is a combination of close friend, spiritual director and mentor. The soul friend relationship is a personal relationship rather than professional or technical. The soul friend relationship is not hierarchical. Although there are sometimes elements of the master-disciple relationship, the persons involved primarily consider themselves as companions along the way. It is a relationship of mutual blessing. While we may expect that common values are essential to any mentoring relationship, the soul friend relationship also includes common vision. The life of St. Ciaran tells of a meeting between Ciaran and Enda in which both share a vision of a great tree covering and protecting Ireland and dropping its fruit in the lands beyond the sea. Enda interprets the vision as Ciaran's place in the work of the Gospel. Ciaran goes on to found a monastic community at Clonmacnois, which in turn becomes an important center of learning and evangelism. The soul friend relationship involves accountability. This willingness to challenge one another springs from the trust and affection of deep friendship rather than from an unequal relationship. "The relationships are centered on God, the soul friend in whom all other friendships are united. True soul friends do not depend on each other alone, but root their relationship in God." Finally, the soul friend is someone who is familiar with the Order of St. Aidan, and who seeks to discern with us where we are on that journey, what the Spirit is doing in our lives, and how God is leading us.

Boundaries in the Soul Friend Relationship

Due to the emphasis on friendship in the soul friend relationship, keeping appropriate boundaries is an essential element in modern soul friendship. Neither romantic nor sexual involvement is appropriate in this relationship. For this reason we recommend that the choice of soul friend be restricted to a person of the same sex as the aspirant. The exception to this would be those occasions where the aspirant's spouse is the soul friend. Where a same sex soul friend is not available, the issue of the boundaries of the relationship should be part of the overt understanding between the aspirant and the soul friend.

THE ST. AIDAN WAY OF LIFE

In common with many communities within Christianity we have three vows. These are **SIMPLICITY**, **CHASTITY**, and **OBEDIENCE** which we understand as principles, not rules. **SIMPLICITY** means the willingness to be poor or rich for God according to his direction. We resist the temptations to be greedy or possessive, and we will not manipulate people or creation for our own ends. We are bold to use all we have for God without fear of possible poverty. **CHASTITY** means accepting and giving to God our whole being includ-

ing our sexuality. We love all people as Christ commands, but the specific emotions and intimacy of sexual relations are expressed only in married life. Some will be given a gift of marriage, others a gift of celibacy. Both are to be equally respected and rejoiced in. We respect every other person as belonging to God, and we are available to them with generosity and openness. **OBEDIENCE** is the joyful abandonment of ourselves to God. The root of obedience is in attentive listening to God, because the longing of our hearts is to obey him. We honor those whom God has placed in authority over us, and we seek to recognize and respect the gifts, roles and authority of those who work alongside us in the community of the church.

1. Study and Application of the Celtic Christian Way

Daily Bible reading is at the heart of this Way of life. In addition, we study the history of the Celtic church, becoming familiar with such saints as Aidan, Bridget, Caedmon, Columba, Cuthbert, David, Hilda, Illtyd, Ninian, Oswald and Patrick. We remember their feast days and consider them as companions on our journeys of faith. We also bear in mind their strong link with the Desert Fathers and the Eastern Church, and wish to draw them also into our field of studies. It is essential that study is not understood solely as an intellectual exercise. All that we learn is not for the sake of study itself, but in order that what we learn should be lived. We encourage the Celtic practice of memorizing scriptures, and learning through the use of creative arts.

2. The Anmchara or "Soul Friend"

We meet with our Soul Friend at least twice a year. The Soul Friend gives guidance on two disciplines which the Order considers to be important: 1) Regular retreats: The outworking of this depends on the individual's own lifestyle, but we encourage regular days of quiet and reflection, and also an annual retreat. 2) Pilgrimage: The Celtic Christians knew two kinds of pilgrimage. The most commonly known form of pilgrimage is to tread in the shoes of Christ or his saints in order to make contact with the many rich experiences which are to do with being a pilgrim. Such pilgrimages draw us into deeper devotion to our Lord Jesus and will inspire us to mission. In North America, members might seek out communities of prayer such as monastic foundations and retreat centers. However, the Order also recommends pilgrimage to sites of the Celtic Christian tradition in Europe, such as Iona and Lindisfarne, when possible. The second form of pilgrimage was peculiar to the Celtic Christians. Referred to sometimes as "White Martyrdom," it entailed leaving home, family and land to become wanderers for Christ, *peregrinati pro Christi*. The most famous of such Celtic pilgrims was St. Columbanus who brought revival to the church in Gaul (France) and whose companions introduced the Gospel in parts of Central Europe. This form of pilgrimage is characterized by taking risks for God. Such risk taking can include taking new directions in worship, in ministry, in exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Soul Friends give guidance about different ways of making pilgrimage.

3. A Daily Rhythm Of Prayer, Work And Rest

Prayer: We commit ourselves to a regular discipline of prayer. If required, our Soul Friend can give us guidance about this. The Order recommends the use of daily office. The St. Aidan Trust provides offices which are suited to the Way. Ways of praying will vary according to temperament. The Order encourages a renewal of "all kinds of praying" (Ephesians 6:18), and we are therefore committed to discovering new ways of praying, from contemplative prayer to celebratory praise.

Work: We welcome work as a gift from God. Every member should engage in work, whether it be the routine activities of life or paid employment. Work motivated by values which conflict with the Way should be avoided as much as possible. In humility we accept what God gives us. If we have no employment and are not clear what our work is, then we seek the advice of our Soul Friend. We seek not to overwork, standing firm against all pressure to do so, because it robs us, others or God of the time we should give to them.

Rest: The hours of rest and recreation are as valuable as the hours of prayer and work. The Lord Jesus reminds us that "The Sabbath was made for human-kind, and not humankind for the Sabbath;" (Mark 2:27) In the Scriptures even the land was given a Sabbath in the seventh year (Leviticus 25:3-5). The need for rest was built into creation (Genesis 2:1-3). A provision for this kind of holy rest should be part of each member's Way of Life.

4. Intercessory Prayer

The Order affirms a world view that recognizes the reality of the supernatural and of spiritual warfare. As Cuthbert and others "stormed the gates of heaven," so we also need to engage in and to become familiar with intercessory prayer. We do not project on to the supernatural what belongs to the sphere of human responsibility. We affirm national initiatives in intercessory prayer.

5. Simplicity of Lifestyle

We wish to "live simply that others may simply live," to avoid any sense of judging one another; and God will make different demands of each of us. Our common responsibility is to regularly hold before God (and as appropriate to share with our Soul Friend) our income, our savings, our possessions, conscious that we are stewards, not possessors of these things, and making them available to him as he requires. A simple lifestyle means setting everything in the simple beauty of creation. Our belongings, activities and relationships are ordered in a way that liberates the spirit; we cut out those things that overload or clutter the spirit. We are not seeking a life of denial, for we thoroughly rejoice in the good things God gives us. Our clothes and furniture should reflect God-given features of our personalities. There is a time to feast and celebrate as well as to fast. Our commitment is to openness. We stand against the influence of the god of mammon in our society by our lifestyle, by our hospitality, by our intercession, and by regular and generous giving.

6. Care for and Affirmation of Creation

We affirm God's creation as essentially, good, but spoiled by the effects of human sin and satanic evil. We therefore respect nature and are committed to seeing it cared for and restored. We aim to be ecologically aware, to pray for God's creation and all his creatures, and to stand against all that would seek to violate or destroy them. We look upon creation as a sacrament, reflecting the glory of God, and seek to meet God through his creation, to bless it, and to celebrate it.

7. Wholeness Not Fragmentation

We renounce the spirit of self-sufficient autonomy, and are committed to a much more holistic approach which was the strength of the Celtic church. We encourage the ministry of Christian healing. We not only lay hands on the sick and pray for their healing, we also "lay hands" on every part of God's world to bless it and recognize its right to wholeness in Christ.

8. Openness to the Wind of the Spirit

We allow God to take us where the Spirit wills, whether by gentle breeze or wild wind. The Celtic Christians had such faith in the leading of the Spirit that they gladly put to sea in small coracles, and went where the wind took them. We desire this kind of openness to the leading of the Spirit. Essential to this is a proper affirmation of the gift of prophecy. St. Paul urges us all to prophesy (I Corinthians 14:1). We honor this gift and encourage its proper and appropriate use. Learning to listen is a skill that has almost been lost, and which takes many years to acquire. We seek to cultivate an interior silence that recognizes and sets aside discordant voices, to respond to unexpected or disturbing promptings of God, to widen our horizons, to develop "the eye of the eagle" and see and hear God through his creation.

9. Unity and Community

As we study the history of the Celtic church we discover the unity we once had as one Christian people within the one universal church. We are constantly ashamed of our divisions, and we repent of the schisms that have occurred from the Reformation onwards. We look upon all fellow Christians not as "strangers but pilgrims together," and we honor those in oversight in all denominations. We resist all gossip and destructive talk about our own denomination or others. We resist in our own lives things that damage the unity of Christ's body, and will not do separately what is best done together.

The Celtic church was thoroughly indigenous to the people in a way that the church has never been since. Aidan lived alongside the people and refused to accept practices and customs that would distance him from the people and make him seem superior. The Celtic church honored, trusted and went with the grain of the human communities it worked among. We seek to cultivate a soli-

parity with all people in everything except sin, to value all that is truly human in them, and to shed attitudes and practices that put up barriers between the church and the people. We desire the healing of peoples divided by class, color or creed and repent of our own part in these divisions.

10. Mission

Our aim is that "the whole created order may be reconciled to God through Christ" (Colossians 1:20). We seek to live as one Christian community so "that the world may believe." (John 17:21). The goal of the way of life is to develop a disciplined spirituality that will make us effective in our witness to Christ in the world. The Celtic church evangelized from grassroots communities such as Lindisfarne, Iona and St. David's. Our evangelism springs naturally from the community of our local church, and out of the community of this order. Bishops like Chad and Cedd were irrepressible evangelists as they traveled around. As we live out this life, the Holy Spirit leads us into new initiatives to bring God to the people. These will usually be through our churches at local or wider levels. Sometimes it may be appropriate to form a mission task group with other members of the order to pray, study and accomplish a particular God-given task. We seek to share our faith wherever opportunity is given. We evangelize not simply out of a sense of duty, but because the Spirit of God is giving us a heart for the lost. We ask God to work through us in signs and wonders for his glory, not ours.

Our mission also includes speaking out for the poor, the powerless and those unjustly treated in our society, and to minister with them as God directs. As our gifting and opportunity permit we counter all false, materialistic, new age or occult teachings through love, sound argument, prayer and demonstrations of the power of God, in the spirit of St. Patrick's Breastplate. Celtic evangelists worked hand in hand with those in authority to bring regions and kingdoms under the rule of God, and to open the doors to the gospel. We seek to dialogue and work with people of good will in places of authority and influence so that our lands may be led by people who are led by God, and become healed lands of the glorious Trinity.

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