

What does it mean to do church as, “A school of love?”

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
~ John 13:34-35 (NIV)

We believe that, as Brian McLaren so wonderfully phrases it, “the church... must be above all a school of love.”¹ Worship, mission, biblical study, evangelism, and all else we can do as a church have their origins and fulfillment in love. More specifically, in our ability to hold loving relationship between God, self, and other. Our focus in “doing church,” then, is to be a place for people to gather in the Spirit of God, to explore our spirits together, and to strengthen our practice of engaging in loving relationship, according to the example of the Christ.

While we gather to look deeply at our personal spirituality, and to do so in the context of an intentional community, this is not intended to be the extent of our faith lives. The inward exploration is always meant to lead to outward action. That is, we don’t work on our own spiritual practices of loving relationship just for self-improvement. We work on these spiritual practices with the intention that they will move all that we do toward living closer to the Christ’s Way in the world. By learning better how to meet others in loving relationship as the Christ does, we are aware that all of our interactions with others, and perhaps all that we do, is done with greater love. As we do our spiritual work, and are intentional about how we interact with the world, our inward work of learning to relate like Jesus improves our outward expressions of love for all of God’s creation.

What does it mean when we say we are “Inspired by Celtic new-monasticism?”

New Monastic Influence –

The concept of new monasticism comes from the writings of German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer had a growing concern about the direction of the Church and, in 1935, he wrote, “*the restoration of the church will surely come only from a new type of monasticism which has nothing in common with the old but a complete lack of compromise in a life lived in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount in the discipleship of Christ. It is high time to gather people together to do this...*”²

Though communities had been intentionally trying to live out Bonhoeffer’s idea since at least the 1970’s, the term “new-monasticism” was not officially developed until 1998, by Jonathan Wilson, author of *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World*. And, while there is no set list of rules in order to be considered new-monastic, there are common themes that have come to be associated with new monasticism. One simple list suggests 4 primary practices of new monastics, including:

- Thoughtful, prayerful, and contemplative lives
- Communal life (expressed in a variety of ways, depending on the community)
- A focus on hospitality
- Practical engagement with the poor^{3,4}



At Companions on the Way, we are inspired by each of these practices, and live into them (respectively) as:

- We dedicate ourselves to deep self-exploration of how we bring ourselves into relationships with others – our expectations, assumptions, boundaries, claims, and personal truths. We commit to living with intentional awareness of how we affect and are affected by our relationships with God and others around

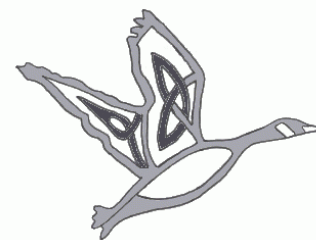
us. And we maintain a regular practice of prayer, both to keep us spiritually connected with others in the community, and to keep us aware of the presence of God in and between all members of creation.

- In our common life, we gather each week to deepen our personal spirituality, in community. We stay connected through prayers and an awareness of our constant spiritual connection with one another and with God. Together, we learn new practices to help us move toward living Jesus' Way of Love in relating to God and others, and to support, encourage, correct, and risk hard truths with one another, as a community of trust, on the journey.
- We welcome **all** who wish to explore with us – believers, seekers, wanderers, wonder-ers, doubters, the faithful, the weary... Adopting from the Celtic new-monastic community of Northumbria, we live with a “Belong, then believe,” attitude. That is – first, welcome into deep community; then, what beliefs are you working on and how can we help?
- While the work that we do helps us to look deeply at ourselves and practice intentional community with others who are gathered, the focus is not ultimately inward. These practices are not just so we can be “better people,” but so we can be people who are truly better equipped to bring the Christ's kind of love into the world. By living intentionally, we keep an awareness of the poverty – financial, emotional, and spiritual – that is all around us. By making a regular practice of relating like Jesus, we meet that poverty in responses that show love, understanding, and respect, as the Christ has shown us.

Celtic Influence –

While Celtic Christianity is difficult to define, there are some generally agreed upon identifiers that have influenced Companions on the Way. First, Celtic Christianity was influenced by the early Desert Fathers (and Mothers) – monks and nuns of the third century A.D., who moved into the deserts around Egypt. Tying in with our new-monastic influence, the Desert Fathers' communities had a rule of life, took vows, valued the mysticism of

Christianity, and sought and connected with God in all areas of creation. Through pilgrim-saints, their influence came to Celtic regions, and had tremendous influence on monastic and new-monastic communities there. Two contemporary Celtic new monastic communities that have especially influenced Companions on the Way are those of Northumbria and Iona, both of which have inspirational Rules of Life, deep appreciation of mysticism, and a strong expression of faith through our connection with God's creation.^{4,5}



What does it mean to be, “grounded in the Reformed Tradition?”

“Reformed Tradition,” generally refers to the theology of Calvinism, named after John Calvin. Two of the most well-known contemporary Reformed churches (in America) are Presbyterian and United Church of Christ (UCC). Companions on the Way originated in a Presbyterian Church (USA) church, and are currently led by a minister from that denomination. Finding continued connection with many of the Reformed ideas, we continue to be grounded in that theology (though we explore all kinds of theology together). In particular, Reformed theology (and Companions) lifts up great thankfulness for the holy gift of God's loving grace; believes in the importance of the bible as a sacred text to inform our faith journey (though not as an inerrant text); holds that God works through all of us as God's children – often called the “ministry of all believers;” and believes in the real, constant, and active presence of the Christ's Holy Spirit in, through, and between all members of God's creation.⁶

¹– “A New Kind of Christianity: 10 Questions That Are Changing the Faith,” by Brian McLaren

²– www.prayerfoundation.org

³– http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Monasticism

⁴– www.northumbriacommunity.org

⁵– http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celtic_Christianity

⁶– Rev. Kevin Hershey

