

FR. MICHAEL'S SABBATICAL
Report for June & July 2025

Dear Friends,

I know it's been a while since my last Sabbatical report. A lot has happened and I have been fairly busy during this time. But I have finally gotten my act together enough to prepare another report, even as I prepare to officially wrap up my Sabbatical on Sunday, July 27th.

When we left off, I had just returned from my trip to New Mexico (May 24th). I was then home for a couple of weeks before heading off to Scotland, which was designed as the centerpiece of my Sabbatical travels. I was supposed to fly out of LAX on Wednesday, June 11th. Well, that did not go as planned. Thanks to problems with the aircraft, American Airlines had to cancel the flight and reschedule for the following day. Since I was supposed to fly to London and then catch a connecting flight to Glasgow, the delay completely messed up my travel arrangements. My primary concern was the arrangements to get to Iona, where I would be spending the first week of my Scotland trip. It is not exactly easy to get there. From Glasgow, you have to take a train to Oban, a ferry to Craignure on the Isle of Mull, a bus across Mull to Fionnphort (which only runs a couple of times a day), and then a ferry from Fionnphort to Iona. The whole trip takes the better part of a day and requires some careful coordination. With the delay in getting to London then to Glasgow, things were looking pretty iffy as to whether I would make it to Iona on schedule.

To make a very long and frustrating story short(er), the plane did leave LAX on Thursday, June 12th, as rescheduled. Albeit a little later than scheduled. I got to London just fine on Friday the 13th. I managed to catch the last flight from Heathrow to Glasgow. I think I got one of the last seats on that flight. After getting to Glasgow, I had to rebook a train trip to Oban, catching the last train of the day. I finally got to Oban about 10:00 PM and settled into my hotel room. I was relieved to be there, as it meant I was on-track to make my pre-arranged ferry, bus, and ferry trips the following day. Meaning I would make it to Iona when I was supposed to. Whew! Good thing I had actually planned a bit of a buffer in my travel arrangements. The whole ordeal was definitely an exercise in patience and in trusting God. Trusting the airlines, not so much.



Needless to say, I was greatly relieved to step foot on the ferry from Oban to Craignure the morning of Saturday, June 14th. Breathing a sigh of relief and a prayer of thanksgiving, I felt as if my Sabbatical journey to Iona had truly begun. And it did, in an unexpected way. I was sitting on the deck of the ferry as it pulled away from the dock.

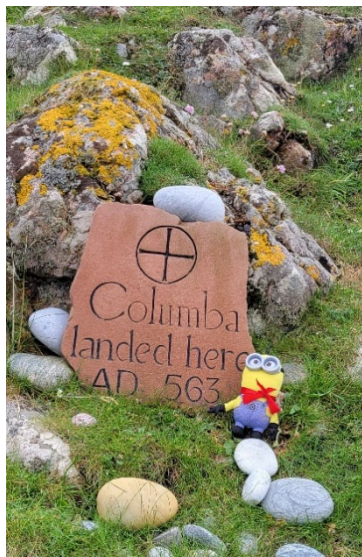
An older woman came up and asked if the seat next to me was taken. I said no and invited her to sit. We started talking and it turned out she was part of a group of pilgrims that were going to be spending the week at the Iona Abbey, as was I. She and her group of about a dozen (all from England) have been making regular pilgrimages over the last decade or so. Over time, the group had grown from a few parishioners of a Methodist congregation to an extended "family" as additional people managed to get sucked into their orbit. Little did I know that by the end of the week, I, too, would be a part of that family.

Just by way of a little history, the original monastic community on Iona was founded by St. Columba in 563. He and his group of monks had been exiled from Ireland, their punishment being that they had to leave and go far enough away that they could not see Ireland. After several other



Iona Abbey

stops at islands along they way, from which they could still see Ireland, Columba and crew landed on Iona, which met the requirements. Although, some of the locals said that on a really clear day (few and far between), you can actually see Ireland in the distance. Columba established a monastery on the sight of the current abbey. Over time, it grew into a thriving



St. Columba's Bay

community and a site for pilgrimage. Despite surviving over a thousand years, including various Viking raids, the abbey fell into disrepair and was eventually abandoned. Then, in the 1930s, a Church of Scotland (i.e., Presbyterian) minister established the Iona Community with the intent of restoring the Abbey to its former glory. The mission of the Iona Community and the Abbey is to be an ecumenical worshipping community and a place of pilgrimage, and has been instrumental in the modern revival of Celtic Christianity.



Similar to my time at Monastery of Christ in the Desert, the accommodations at the Iona Abbey were a bit austere. Shared rooms and communal bathrooms down the hall. But it worked out just fine. My roommate John and I hit it off very well. He is a Baptist minister from England who



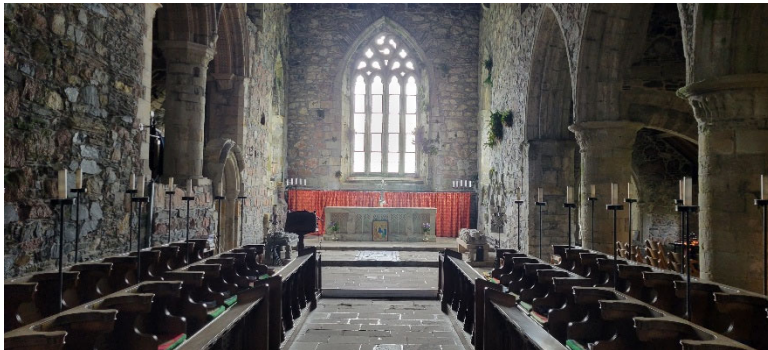
View from Dun I (highest point on the Isle of Iona. Abbey is on the left.

was also on Sabbatical. As it turns out, of the 45 people staying at the Abbey that week, at least eight were clergy on Sabbatical.

While the theme of the program for the week was "Time and Space," it was actually pretty loose, with the experience focused more on communal life. We had

morning and evening worship services, shared meals, and each had daily chores to contribute to the life and support of the community. My chore was to clean up after dinner: clearing off and wiping down tables, then sweeping and mopping the floor of the dining hall. There was plenty of time in the daily routine to just spend time with other people, as well as to enjoy the beauty of the island. Much time was spent in the Common Room, talking with new friends and, of course, sharing a cup of tea. And roommate John, being an avid birder, was always looking for opportunities to go hiking, which I often accompanied him on. Iona is not very large—just about four miles long and one mile wide—but offers plenty of hiking opportunities.

While I had expected to spend my time at the Abbey in quiet contemplation, God apparently had other ideas. God seemed to think that I needed to spend time with the bunch of British pilgrims I fell in with and developing new friendships. Talking together, eating together, worshipping together, and,



Iona Abbey Chapel

several times during the week, making “pilgrimages” to the local pub for a few drinks and non-stop laughter. At this point, I cannot say that I had any profound spiritual insights or experiences (other than discovering a few new favorite Scotches). But I can say that my time at the Abbey provided me with just what I needed at the time: a loving community of amazing people.



through the Scottish Highlands. While the highest point in Scotland (and all the UK) is only 4,413 feet (a mere hill by our standards), the landscape is quite striking and dramatic—some peaks appearing to be much higher.

Sadly, I had to leave the Abbey and my new friends on Friday, June 20th. Instead of taking the ferry—bus—ferry—train option back to Glasgow, where I would begin the next phase of my Scotland travels, I hitched a ride with one of my new friends. This gave an opportunity to see some different areas as we drove

In the “it’s a small world” category, I ran into a clergy colleague from our Diocese while on Iona. I posted a picture (the one above taken from Dun I) on Facebook. Almost immediately, I got a Facebook Message from the Rev. Kelli Grace Kurtz, the Rector of All Saints in Riverside. Turns out she was leading a pilgrimage for some parishioners, which included a few days on Iona. We did manage to connect and spend about an hour catching up.

I spent another two weeks traveling through Scotland. During that time, I saw so many things: beautiful and amazing landscapes, historical sites, and of course, a number of churches. Trying to include pictures and reflections on everything would take way too much space, as well as time to prepare. So, for purposes of my report to the parish, I will merely provide a list of what I saw and did, and include pictures of religious sites. We are, after all, a religious community.

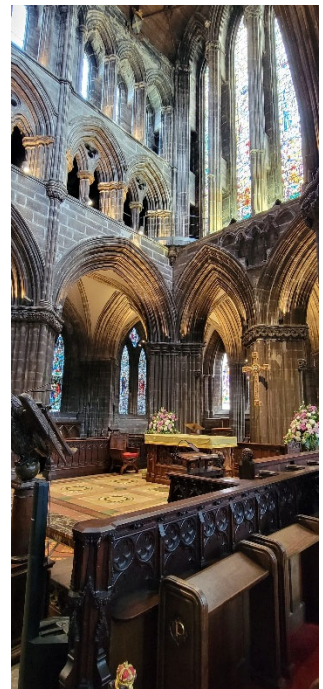
Glasgow

I spent a total of five days in Glasgow, Scotland's largest city. Glasgow is filled with history and, because of its location, proved to be a good jumping off point for several day trips to the Highlands. Highlights of my time in Glasgow included:

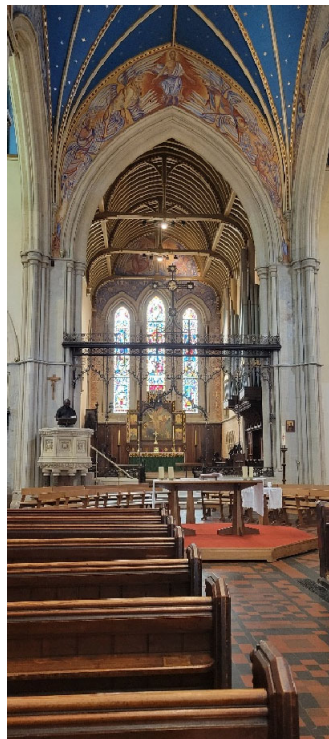
- Glasgow Cathedral – Church of Scotland (Presbyterian)
- St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art
- Necropolis
- Provland's Lordship – oldest house in Glasgow
- City Chambers (City Hall)
- Buchanan Street shopping area
- St. Mary's Scottish Episcopal Cathedral, where I attended Sunday Eucharist
- Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum
- The Riverside Museum – museum of various forms of transportation
- Glenlee Tall Ship
- Govan Old Church and Govan Stones



Glasgow Cathedral (exterior above, interior right)



Offices of the Diocese of Glasgow & Galloway



St. Mary's Scottish Episcopal Cathedral (exterior left, interior above)





Govan Old Church

In addition, I took two day trips, both into the Highlands. One was to Glencoe, Fort William, and Glenfinnan. The other was to Loch Lomond (the largest lake in Scotland) and included a cruise on the Loch. That tour also visited Stirling Castle.

One of the fun things, showing unexpected connections between places, was at The Riverside Museum. They had an exhibit of the Queen Mary, including a painting and a model of the ship. What a delight to be halfway around the world and to find reference to something I see at least a couple of times a week as I walk along the beach back home.



Painting of the Queen Mary in The Riverside Museum

Inverness

After Glasgow, I took the train north to Inverness, where I spent three days. Highlights of my time in Inverness included:

- Culloden Battlefield – site of the decisive battle ending the Jacobite Rebellion
- Clava Cairns – ancient burial mounds and stone circles, dating back about 4,000 years
- St. Andrew's Scottish Episcopal Cathedral, where I attended Sunday Eucharist
- Old High Church (Church of Scotland)
- Hiked along the River Ness



In addition, I took a day trip to the Isle of Skye, which included a stop at Urquhart Castle overlooking Loch Ness (the Loch Ness Monster did not make an appearance), Eilean Donan Castle, Portree (town on Skye), The Storr, Lealt Falls, Kilt Rock, and Quiraing.



St. Andrew's Scottish Episcopal Cathedral (exterior above left, interior above right)

In another in the “it’s a small world” category (well, sort of), the Sunday I worshiped at St. Andrew’s Cathedral, the presider and preacher was the Most Rev. Mark Strange, Bishop of the Diocese of Moray, Ross, and Caithness. He is also the Primus (Presiding Bishop) of the entire Scottish Episcopal Church. After the service, I introduced myself and we chatted briefly. Turns out he is friends with John Taylor, our Bishop Diocesan.



Old High Church

Aberdeen

After Inverness, I took the train east to Aberdeen, a port city on the North Sea. The third largest city in Scotland, it is also a major port for Scotland. I came to think of it as the Long Beach of Scotland. While the city is only half the size of Long Beach, it feels much larger and the port is definitely a prominent feature. Not only geographically, but also in terms of its historic importance. Highlights of my time in Aberdeen included:

- St. Andrew’s Scottish Episcopal Cathedral
- St. Nicholas Kirkyard
- King’s College Chapel
- St Machar Cathedral (Church of Scotland)
- Maritime Museum



St. Andrew's Scottish Episcopal Church (exterior above, interior left)



St. Machar Cathedral (exterior left, interior right)



In addition, I took a day trip to Dundee and St. Andrews. In Dundee, I visited the Victoria & Albert Museum and in St. Andrews, I visited the ruins of St. Andrews Cathedral and the ruins of St. Andrews Castle.

Ruins of St. Andrews Cathedral

The primary reason for my wanting to visit Aberdeen is that it plays a significant role in the history of The Episcopal Church. After the Revolutionary War, The Episcopal Church was formed as the American expression of the Church of England.



While there were priests, we did not yet have any bishops. Samuel Seabury was elected to become our first bishop. In order to be made a bishop, the bishop-elect needs to be consecrated by three existing bishops. Not having any here, Seabury went to England to see if the Church of England would do the honors. Being a little testy over having just lost a war in America, Parliament would not allow it. At that time (and still to this day), priests and bishops are required to swear an oath of allegiance to the monarch (as titular head of the Church of England). Seabury was not about to do that, as we had just fought a war gaining independence from said monarch. The Scottish Episcopal Church came to the rescue. With no love lost between the Scottish and the English, the Scottish Episcopal Church was more than happy to help out the fledgling American church while also thumbing its ecclesiastical nose at the Church of England. So, Samuel Seabury went north to Aberdeen to be consecrated as our first bishop.

I had always assumed that the consecration took place at St. Andrew's Cathedral. Wrong. The cathedral did not even exist at the time. Seabury was consecrated in 1784 and the current cathedral was not built until 1817. Turns out the consecration actually occurred in St. Andrew's Chapel, on the second floor of the house of the



*St. Andrew's Scottish Episcopal Cathedral, Aberdeen
Stone commemorating the consecration of Samuel Seabury as first bishop in
The (American) Episcopal Church*

Bishop of Aberdeen, located several blocks from the current cathedral. That building no longer exists, having made way for the parking lot of a nearby college. But St. Andrew's Cathedral has preserved the significance of Seabury's consecration through its designation as The Bishop Seabury Memorial. The cathedral contains a stone near the altar commemorating the consecration, symbolism in one of its stained-glass windows, an American flag presented by President Eisenhower, and an Episcopal Church flag presented by a group of Americans. So

while I did not get to see the actual site of the consecration, I was at least in the neighborhood. Which, as is often the case when it comes to history, is about the best one can hope for.

In addition to seeing the sites, another joy of the trip was trying local cuisine. Of course, I did try different Scotches (or just “whisky” as they refer to it in Scotland). And yes, I did have haggis, the national dish. Several times, because, yes, I do like haggis. Of course, I had fish and chips several times. As well as some other fish dishes. And I had some really good soups, including a Scottish favorite called Cullen skink, which is very similar to clam chowder, but made with smoked haddock. Very tasty! I think I liked it better than the clam chowder at The Original Fish Company in Los Alamitos (which I think is the best clam chowder around).

While everything I ate was wonderful, my one struggle was over vegetables. Sometimes it was almost impossible to get a salad or any vegetables at all with a meal. In fact, when I was at The Riverside Museum, I decided to have lunch in their café. I was ecstatic to find Chicken Caesar Salad on the menu. I jumped on it because I was so hungry for something green. Not the best Caesar salad, but it filled a need. The other frustration was that most of the places to get Scottish fare are pubs (not a problem in and of itself). There are, of course, other restaurants, and I did have Indian and Italian while there, but when in Scotland, I wanted to stick primarily to more authentic local foods. So, that primarily meant pubs. Unfortunately, most pubs tend to have limited menus. And usually have pretty much the same things as every other pub in town: fish and chips, steak pie, hamburger, a curry, and a few other things. But I did manage to find a variety of foods and felt I had a sufficient sampling of local cuisine. So, all-in-all, I was pretty pleased with my Scottish culinary experience.

On July 23rd, I will leave for Boston for the last bit of my Sabbatical and a little vacation time. I will spend the final three days of my Sabbatical at the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Cambridge, Massachusetts. While there, I intend to do some review of and reflection on my Sabbatical time. With the conclusion of Sabbatical on Sunday, July 27th, I will begin two weeks of vacation. During that time, I plan to see Boston, then rent a car and see other parts of New England. I will fly home on August 7th and return to the parish on August 12th.

I look forward to seeing you all upon my return!

Love and Blessings on the remainder of your Sabbatical Journey,



Haggis, neeps, and tatties (haggis, pureed turnips, mashed potatoes in gravy)