

PILGRIM CONSTITUTION

Aisling Árann (The Aran Project)

version February 2005

Aisling Árann is a spiral network of people who share a common vision or Aisling. The Aisling is of a transformed church and a transformed society based on right relationship. A group of people who share this vision have settled on Inis Mór, Aran Islands. These people, with the help of others in the network, are working on a project to give expression to the Aisling on Inis Mór. Living in various independent households, they make visible the Aisling by their lifestyle and their work. The common Aisling draws households together in friendship and mutual support. This in turn makes visible the possibilities for realising the Aisling wherever one chooses to live and provides a focus for mutual support and inspiration.

The people of the Aisling are rooted in Celtic spirituality and culture. They seek right relationship with the divine, with nature, with others, and with oneself . They work for an awareness of the sacred, respect for nature, just distribution and gender balance. Their lifestyle is spiritual, frugal, simple, hospitable, self-reliant, balanced and whole.

CONTENTS

Historical Background.....	p.2
The Aisling Vision.....	p.3
Practical Objectives.....	p.4
Tackling Global Issues.....	p.5
Tackling National Issues in Ireland.....	p.8
Notes.....	p.9

Historical Background

Enda or Éanna came to Aran fifteen hundred years ago in 485 C.E.. On Aran, he and his friends created a way of life which others found exciting and inspirational. In a short time, many settlements developed across the island and people began to visit from far and near. At the heart of this experiment was a desire to give clear expression to shared spiritual values and to do so in a creative way, drawing on the Irish cultural and spiritual tradition. The result was the beginning of the Celtic church in Ireland, an indigenous church that was monastic or community based. Historically, Enda is classed as the patriarch of Irish monasticism.

On an island only nine miles in length, the stone remains of over ten monastic settlements, lived in for more than a thousand years, are still to be seen. Many of the most well-known founders of Irish spiritual communities are known to have spent time there. These saints included Colmcille of Iona, Ciarán of Clonmacnoise, Finian of Clonard, Jarlath of Tuam, Surnaí of Galway Bay, Colman of Cill MacDuagh and Brendan the Navigator.

The growth of the Celtic church in Ireland was a transformational process that led both church and society to its finest hour – Ireland’s golden age. In this age, through the influence of spiritually based communities of both lay and cleric, people found the inspiration, the space and the support to extend themselves to extraordinary degrees. Remarkable results were achieved across a broad spectrum – sanctity, leadership, scholarship, arts, crafts and travel. These accomplishments remain remarkable even today, over a thousand years later.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the Celtic church was its influence on Europe. History shows that, from the 6th to the 12th century, Celtic spiritual communities played a central role in the rebuilding of Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire. It was the Celtic monks who laid the foundations for modern Western civilisation.

This glorious history of the Celtic church, and the role of Enda and of Inis Mór as a seed-bed within it, is the backdrop and inspiration behind Aisling Árann.

The AISLING Vision

The essence of the AISLING vision is contained in the phrases:

- ❖ Rooted in the Celtic
- ❖ Living in Right Relationship
- ❖ Working for Transformation

Those who live by this vision do so in a creative and personal way, giving it their own unique expression and emphasis.

Aim: The prime aim of Aisling Árann is that people will give expression to the Aisling vision on Inis Mór. These people will be identifiable by the way they live their lives, by their work and by their professed values and beliefs. Through this will grow a sense of belonging and identity, an experience of community. Essential to the vision is a process of integration with the local people and culture.

Practical Objectives

The practical objectives of Aisling Árann are:

- the nurturing of a lifestyle that is simple and frugal, hospitable, spiritual, whole, just and balanced. At the heart of this lifestyle will be the achievement of right relationships – with ourselves, with each other, with living things, with the cosmos, and with the divine.
- the creation of social structures that reflect Irish traditional values such as friendship, service, participation and sharing, and that give the most vulnerable support, protection and healing.
- the study of Irish spirituality, culture and language in such a way as to bring into the present day anything that is of value from the past and to live it.
- the creation of a new theology that weaves strands of Celtic mythology and Christian theology into a new mythology suited for people today.
- the creation of new forms of worship relevant to people of today that connect with the Celtic spiritual tradition and develop it.
- the creation of a wide network, nationally and internationally, of people whose vision, lifestyle, or work overlaps with that of Aisling Árann, maintaining this network through mutual communication and support.
- the promotion of relevant learning and personal development for all, including and especially, the children.
- the revival, maintenance and development of arts and crafts native to Ireland and especially to Inis Mór.
- the practice of organic and permacultural farming and its promotion.
- the obtaining of food locally, from land, sea and shore while respecting the ecological balance.
- the generation of usable energy from renewable sources – e.g. sun, wind, water and biomass.

Tackling Global Issues

Lifestyle: Participants (cf. note 2) choose to live a lifestyle that resists a consumerist mentality and materialist values. In this way, they oppose – and offer an alternative to – the gross destruction of nature and the oppression of people for purposes of western 'development' and economic growth.

Wealth and Poverty: Participants work to understand world structures and the reasons for the ever widening rich—poor divide. They seek to find ways to bring about limitation, fairer distribution and proper use of material wealth, beginning on Inis Mór.

Local Autonomy: Participants work to reclaim power for themselves and the local community. They do this by marginalising the influence of the macro-economy and other national or multinational institutions, through self-reliance, barter and local currency, and by encouraging participative democracy and the structures that support this. Applying the principle of subsidiarity, decision-making is kept as near to the base as possible.

Globalisation: Participants oppose the negative forces of globalisation which

- ❖ rob people of their local culture, lifestyle and traditions
- ❖ force people to leave the countryside and to live in large towns and cities
- ❖ replace local economies with a global economy
- ❖ impose global products in place of local products
- ❖ enslave people economically to transnational bodies
- ❖ remove much of everyday life from personal or democratic control
- ❖ put control in the hands of corporations that put profit before people
- ❖ change the way people live and turn the world into a monoculture

Religious Globalisation: Participants recognise that the promotion of global institutions began historically with certain religions. Today, the global promotion of the institutions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism offer, in some cases, a more serious threat than that of the secular corporations. In this situation, participants make a distinction between the practice of a spiritual tradition, which people freely choose to take on, and the imposition of an institutionalised tradition which takes away people's freedom to choose.

Unemployment: Participants attempt to create structures for work that allow all to participate in a constructive and productive way in the local economy and to find their right place in it. Principles include:- respect for each person's calling/aptitudes; facilitation of each individual's giftedness; and a basic minimum income for everyone.

Diminishing Non-Renewable Materials: Fossil-fuels and other non-renewable materials are used sparingly. Long-distance travel and transportation is avoided where feasible. Renewable materials, obtained locally, are the preferred option. Waste is minimised or avoided by good maintenance, sharing, recycling, composting, simplifying or doing without.

Alienation: Participants work to restore a sense of identity, individual and communal, among people. They do this by creating conscious links with one's history, personal and communal; by recognising and promoting each individual's role as part of a community; and by seeking to work together towards a better future for all.

War, the Armaments Industry, Terrorism and the Nuclear Threat: Participants work for peace with justice through non-violent means. They oppose violence and the threat of violence. They promote dialogue among opposing forces, and search for ways of reducing fear and distrust. They start among themselves, working to resolve local disputes and find ways of living together peaceably. They will sometimes use non-violent actions, including civil disobedience, to make their point in particularly serious cases.

Technology: Technology can hardly be avoided. It includes the wheel and the pen. However, modern technology has significant new and sinister dimensions. It can be used to manipulate and control the lives of people. In its manufacture and use it may cause abuse to animals, damage or destruction to nature, or waste non-renewable materials. Unjust means can be used in its production, including the abuse of people and even children. It can be used obsequiously to create or promote injustice in trade. Participants are cautious therefore in their use of modern technology and try to be conscious of what they are implicitly supporting through it. Their preferred option, where technology is necessary, is a 'soft' technology which is appropriate to a simple, convivial and spiritual lifestyle.

Masculine / Feminine Balance: Participants of both sexes work to incorporate the feminine dimension into a grossly distorted masculine world. The masculine emphasis on rational thought, on specialisation, and on material productivity has devalued the more feminine emphasis on right relationship, nurturing and intuition. The imbalance is at every level of society, from the human psyche to structures of church and state. Participants seek to achieve masculine / feminine balance within their own relationships, in domestic structures, work structures, decision-making structures and in worship and ritual. They also work for the redress of this balance at national and global level, within church and state.

Oppression: People are particularly vulnerable to oppression and exploitation when they are dependent or lack awareness. Participants work to develop conscious and critical awareness among themselves and others. The process ranges from personal awareness – one’s psychological processes, behaviour patterns and available choices – to awareness of the influence of systems, structures and dominant attitudes and values within society and church on personal and interpersonal behaviour. Participants promote personal and local empowerment, and challenge thought-patterns and structures that promote injustice, oppression and domination.

Tackling National Issues in Ireland

The Celtic Church: The Celtic church, which flourished in Ireland in the early Christian centuries, offers a model and an inspiration for the transformation of church and society today. Its rich store of spirituality and culture is a treasure underused in contemporary Ireland. Connections back into this heritage have been damaged by centuries of religious and political oppression. The contemporary Irish churches do not reflect this heritage. Historically, they have opposed and oppressed it. Over the centuries the Irish spiritual tradition has been latinised and Europeanised, so that the indigenous church, with its authentically Irish expression, has been suffocated. Participants seek an indigenous church, where beliefs and practices that come from outside the country are thoroughly inculturated into the Irish tradition. They seek a church that, in essence, is a local spiritual community, linked to others by sharing the same spiritual tradition. It is a church that is locally controlled, without a hierarchy and is not institutionalised.

The Northern Conflict: Participants see the resolution of the Northern conflict in Ireland as a priority. Their approach to the problem is through interpersonal networking, offering hospitality to all, irrespective of creed or politics, and operating out of a spirit of compassion and a desire to understand. Their commitment is to name and confront evil wherever it is found. They offer a spirituality and a tradition that is common to both sides of the conflict.

Emigration and Migration: Forced emigration and migration, like unemployment and alienation, are the result of many forces at work within Ireland and globally. These forces however are neither random, unpredictable, nor uncontrollable. They are mostly caused or effected by political and economic decision-making. Powerful decision-makers have imposed upon Ireland and the western world a multinational, industrial and technological model of society. It is the imposition of this model which forces people to leave their homes and their homeland in search of paid employment. Participants in the Aisling reject this model and propose in its place a model:

- ❖ where people are more important than profits
- ❖ where home and lifestyle are as important as work
- ❖ where being is as important as doing
- ❖ where people work where they live, rather than live where they find a job

Notes:

1. This document is a 'pilgrim' constitution because it travels with the authors. It is always open to change and will never have a set form.
2. 'Participants' are those who live out a belief in all or part of this vision. The word is used loosely.