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## *Slowing Down for the Sacred*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by Canon Cathy Zappa**

Do you remember the story in 2 Samuel about King David and the Israelites carrying the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem? They were so excited that they were dancing with all their might before the Lord! And that's not all: "when those bearing the ark had gone six paces, David made an offering of an ox and a fatling" (2 Samuel 6:13). You could read this a couple of ways: they made one sacrifice after their first six paces; or they made several sacrifices, one after every six paces. I find the latter reading more interesting. It suggests that this journey wasn't about getting to their destination as quickly as possible, but rather about remembering and celebrating God's presence with them—and about being present to that Presence.

This detail struck me because of a pilgrimage I took this summer, with some of you, to Iona, Scotland. A small, remote island, where sheep far outnumber people, Iona has been a popular destination for pilgrims since the sixth century. In the middle of our week there, our hosts, John Philip and Ali Newell, led us around the island to visit its historically holy sites.

Like David and the Israelites, we paused often, to pray, sing, dance, listen, reflect. Not every six paces, but enough that it was clear that we were in no hurry and that these prayerful stops were essential to our journey.

Somewhere around the middle of the day, we made our way to St. Columba's Bay, also known as the Bay of New Beginnings; and we stopped again, on a deep beach of rounded stones. Here, John Philip invited each of us to find two stones: one that represented something we wanted to throw into the sea and leave behind, and one that represented a longing—something we wanted to take back home.

Searching for those two stones, I started noticing all the other stones under my feet. I saw how beautiful they were, and how different from one another. I couldn't walk even six paces without stopping and dropping to my knees to get a closer look. It was raining, and they were wet; so their colors and patterns stood out even more vividly than usual. Time had written a story on each of them, with little pencil lines that marked thousands or millions of years. These ancient stories put my own into perspective and connected me to something bigger than I; they assured me of God's eternal presence here, in this very spot where I was.

When I left the bay, I continued to see those sacred stones, scattered all over the island, mixed in with the sheep dung and dust on the trails I'd been tromping over all week.

I don't know which came first, the slowing down, or the reverence—the awe. Did I slow down because I recognized something sacred here, or did I recognize something sacred here because I had slowed down? I do know that the two go together.

What else, or who else, might be transformed before my very eyes, if I slowed down enough to really see them and hear their story—or if I took for granted God's presence in them? What would our world be like, if we all did that? Perhaps this is where justice begins.

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