



The Art, Science & Practice of Sacred Relationship

AN INVITATION TO THE 2022 INTERNATIONAL ANAMCARA APPRENTICESHIP

Since 2006 **The Anamcara Project** has been offering a first-of-its-kind apprenticeship rooted in the ancient Celtic Wisdom Tradition of the same name. + This year our *school for spiritual integration* has been updated to focus even more deeply on the urgent needs of our times particularly related to eco-spirituality. True to the ancient and modern mentors of our tradition: *The art, science and practice of sacred relationship* extends beyond ourselves and the human persons we care for. The Celts believed that our relationship with *Great Mystery whose presence is everywhere* is intimately interconnected with all of creation. The *Anamcara Way of Seeing* recognizes that *Nature is the Face of God*. The renewed **International Anamcara Apprenticeship** is delighted to be associating with wise mentors around the world+ who can help us stand in the ‘tragic gap’ of our times with hope and resilience. We are especially delighted that the voices of many wisdom keepers from across the Celtic lands will offer timely teachings and healing practices in the 2022 renewed International Apprenticeship.*

+ To date 850 people have graduated from the Anamcara Apprenticeship worldwide. Of these, 80+ have completed the two-year apprenticeship from Europe, 50+ apprentices have participated from Asia, India, Australasia and the Middle East. The remainder are from many parts of North and Central America.

* For a list of Anamcara mentors and associated organizations, go to: www.apprentice.sacredartofliving.org

AN URGENT INVITATION

The **Anamcara Project** agrees with the observation that our world is at a critical crossroads either of a *Great Unraveling* or a *Great Turning* (Joanna Macy).¹ Our times desperately need to recover the ancient belief that the sacred can be discovered in every aspect of life. In a culture where the idolatry of materialism and personal individualism have taken a heavy toll on our planet, the mystical instincts of our ancestors may be the only sane path forward. Celtic spirituality is about the joining of heaven and earth where *nothing is too common to be holy and nothing is so exalted that it cannot be found in the ordinary* (Welsh mentor, Esther deWaal). **Anamcara Spirituality** is committed “to recovering the wonder and beauty of creation compared to a misguided philosophy that humans have the right *to rule over and have dominion* over the rest of creation.” (Irish philosopher, John Moriarty)² Our apprenticeship is an invitation to consider with whom we will now lock arms to bring the healing *anamcara* presence back to our world.

1 Check out the YouTube video by Joanna Macy, Buddhist teacher, on the Climate Crisis as a Spiritual Path: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQAYVKqTkKo>

2 View the YouTube video by John Moriarty: Seeking to Walk Beautifully on the Earth: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ot0Be-Azao>

A REMARKABLE LIVING HISTORY

The Anamcara Project is not interested in promoting *Celtic-light*. **Anamcara Wisdom** draws deeply from an ancient well that leads into a tender relationship with nature which is at the same time powerful and savage. For such a bold journey we need the wisdom of special guides. The ancient term, *anamcara*, has a remarkable history and lore rooted in the Celtic genius that ‘heart-centered relationship’ is the essence of soul. The old Irish concept of *anam chara* (literally, soul friend)³ embodies what every native wisdom tradition teaches—that the circle of life IS fundamentally relational. In the Celtic experience, soul friends were considered a necessary and integral part of spiritual development.⁴ *Anamcara* was originally associated with early Irish monastic tradition where a soul friend was a teacher, spiritual companion and guide; an expanded notion of the term is associated with Brigid of Kildare, the 6th c. “goddess and saint.”⁵ Both Irish and Welsh records reference Brigid’s advice that, “Anyone without an *anamcara* is like a body without a head.”⁶ And so for centuries, the concept of soul friendship was woven into Celtic Spirituality and, unlike Anglo-Roman practices of the time, a soul friend could be anyone, regardless of gender, clerical or lay. ⁷ Historical evidence also shows that *anamcara* were the earliest recorded ‘confessors’ whose role was radically different from their European clerical counterparts. ⁸ The Celts believed that creation is an original blessing in contrast to a belief that the natural world is *a fallen state from which we need to be redeemed*. In this sense, *anamcara* mentors both support and challenge spiritual seekers to be obedient to their own inner teacher and divine light. Finally, “the bond between *anamcara* cannot be broken by space, time or even death itself.”⁷

³ The phrase *anamacara* is an anglicization of the Irish word, *anamchara* (*anam* meaning "soul" and *chara* meaning "friend"). In the last generation, many works have been published referencing the term.

⁴ Edward C. Sellner traces the origin of the terms, ‘*anamcara*,’ to the early Desert Fathers and Mothers: "This capacity for soul friendship and ability to read other people's hearts became the basis of the desert elders' effectiveness as spiritual guides."

⁵ Reference Anamcara mentor/Irish scholar, Sean O’Duinn, OSB: [The Rites of Brigid: Goddess and Saint](#).

⁶ *Féilire Óengusso* (Martyrology of Oengus) an early 9th century literary Irish work drawn from the Martyrology of Tallaght. (808 CE).

⁷ One early source for the ancient *anamcara* practices are preserved by the 4th c Christian monk, John Cassian, who expounds that such soul guides could be clerical or lay, male or female.

⁸ Research of Richard Groves on Celtic and European sources for the unique role of lay *anamcara confessors* prior to Roman practices that emphasized wrongdoing and clerical absolution. *Absolutio: Remedium versus Poena* (Absolution as Remedy vs. Punishment), JCL thesis, Catholic University, Wash. DC., 1988.

UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL WISDOM

In recent times there has been a global renaissance of Celtic Spirituality due, in part, to the timeless wisdom of the *anamcara* tradition. Psychotherapist William P. Ryan describes the Celtic notion of soul friendship as a supreme expression of profound, “compassionate presence.”⁹ Sacred relationships have the potential to transform suffering and bring meaning and healing to oneself and others. For the *anamcara*, how we are with ourselves, with each other, with the earth, and with the Divine, however we imagine it, affects everything that we do and are in the world. **The Anamcara Apprenticeship** is unique in that it does not seek to supplant any spiritual path; instead, apprentices are invited to discover the mystical roots of their own “mother tongue.” The fact that our *anamcara apprentices* have come from five continents and represent very diverse religious and cultural backgrounds is a testimony to the universality and accessibility of its wisdom. In a time when our culture is being torn by seemingly insurmountable division and polarization, Celtic Spirituality offers a bridge of awareness and common ground beyond the limitations of science, politics or theologies. At the same time, *anamcara wisdom* has remarkable resonance with many key insights from quantum science, contemporary neurobiology and classical depth psychology (e.g. “Pain which is not transformed is always transmitted...” Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM).

Another reason that Celtic Spirituality is appealing and accessible relates to how it honors the *scripture of nature* through the four *gospels of Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn*; and, of course, the *seasons* of nature also parallel those of our inner journey. (Fionntulach, Ceili De, Scotland). When we realize that nature is a place of revelation and that we ourselves *are* nature, a radical shift occurs in how we are in the world.

Anamcara Spirituality is an invitation *to awaken to the ordinary—through a homecoming to our humanity* (W.B Yeats). It is also a spirituality that believes nature is the supreme teacher in how to be with suffering and pain.¹⁰ No wonder *anamcara apprentices* discover profound similarities between Celtic Spiritual Wisdom and the Native Wisdom whose prophetic voice we are finally being made aware of. Today, as in ancient times, the *anamcara* voice is a call of re-formation to challenge modern culture and supplant any *man-made* religious belief of repression and exclusion with one of integration and inclusion.¹¹

⁹ William P Ryan, [Working from the Heart](#), Jason Arenson, 2011

¹⁰ For more insight into our essential nature connection, consult the insights of our Anamcara Apprenticeship mentor, Michael Kearney, MD, in his book, [The Nest in the Stream: Lessons from Nature on Being with Pain](#)

¹¹ Moriarty wrote about a newly imagined Christianity, for example, that might go back to its roots and include Taoists, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, atheists, scientists, plants and animals, the Earth, the stars and the galaxies.

LOVE & DEATH: THE TWO GREAT ADVENTURES

The Anamcara Project was envisioned by Richard and Mary Groves, co-founders of *Sacred Art of Living Community* more than twenty-five years ago. Their work, their relationship and their commitment to end-of-life care resulted in the ***Art of Living & Dying/Healing the Healers*** workshop series which have been facilitated in a wide range of countries around the world. The **Anamcara Apprenticeship** was created to be a deeper dive into the work of spiritual integration for self and others. As such, *anamcara apprentices* stand within the mystery of life and death—not as opposites, but as the great, complementary teachers that they are.

Under our broad ‘*anamcara umbrella*’ mentors for our apprentices offer diverse but complementary insights from the mystical traditions of Judaism, Christianity, Sufism, Buddhism, Taoism as well as Native and scientific materialist perspectives.

Here is just one such rich perspective in the words of Mary McGillicuddy, a contemporary Irish author on the life and works of the mystic and philosopher, John Moriarty:

“In life we go through two great adventures, the love adventure and the death adventure. (John’s) claim is that the death adventure, which should normally start somewhere in our fifties, is by far the more enriching one. He felt that, sadly, most of us refuse the death adventure, to the enormous detriment of the individual and also the larger community. It is really a life-long process, that is rarely possible to undertake alone, and the absence of, or failure of, institutional religion for many in the modern world, leaves a profound sense of emptiness and chaos.”¹²

The call of the *anamcara* voice in our times is to reconcile a deep divide... not only for our sakes but for the sake of all with whom we share life and space at this time in history. The *anamcara* heart courageously names and challenges the delusions of our age while offering profound hope and resilient possibility. The *anamcara* soul refuses to be complicit with what society says we must settle for. **The Anamcara Apprenticeship** is an invitation to enter into the dreamtime of our unique moment in history. Consider the call to learn and pass on the wisdom of the ancient order of healers called *anamcara*.

¹² John Moriarty: *Not the Whole Story* by Mary McGillicuddy, Lilliput Press, 2018

“Our job is to rekindle Brigid’s flame in our time.”

The heart of **The Anamcara Project** in the words of our co-founder,
Mary Groves 1939-2009

For more information on details about **The Anamcara Project** with its requirements, go to:
<https://www.apprentice.sacredartofliving.org>

For more information about **Sacred Art of Living**, sponsor of **The Anamcara Project**, go to:
[sacredartofliving.org](https://www.sacredartofliving.org)