

# Ireland Retreat

Hosted by Brian Ammons & Gareth Higgins  
With Special Guests  
June 20th-27th, 2025: Over the Rhine  
July 7th-14th, 2025: Kathleen Norris  
August 4th-11th, 2025: David Wilcox  
September 8th-15th, 2025: Diana Butler Bass

KILKEEL & CULTRA,  
NORTHERN IRELAND

**A FEAST FOR THE SENSES AND NOURISHMENT FOR THE SOUL, LED BY FRIENDS WHO ARE EAGER TO SHARE THEIR STORIES WITH YOU, AND INVITE YOU INTO A NEW WAY OF TELLING YOUR OWN STORY.**

You're warmly invited to join us on a journey of hope, healing, creativity and community - staying in historic restored rural accommodation in lovely natural surroundings and a retreat centre on the grounds of a converted country house by the sea on the edge of Belfast with a group of friends old and new.

We'll enjoy the landscape on amazing walks, hear music and story, meet locals, experience the peace process in encountering people directly involved in activism and change, and get to know the culture of northern Ireland, immersed in a community rooted in the depths and creativity of Celtic spirituality.

Good food, inspiring art, and beautiful journeys on foot will form the heart of this soulfully unique and transforming experience. Led by warm-hearted and thoughtful guides including northern Irish writer and peace activist Gareth Higgins and Spiritual Director Brian Ammons, along with special guests, this will be weeklong experience - for around 25 guests only - that might just last for the rest of your life.

Read on for more information on how you can join us!

## **AN INVITATION FROM OUR HOSTS BRIAN AMMONS & GARETH HIGGINS**

Many people have taken trips to Ireland, but few have wandered off the beaten path, forming communities of pilgrims who wanted to experience Ireland in authenticity rather than the more antiseptic/corporate tourist trip where feet don't touch the ground and souls might as well have stayed on the plane. Growing up in northern Ireland I (Gareth) often wished I could share with folks the beauty of our landscape, and the depth of our stories, not to mention the hard and rewarding task of peace-building.

We've been privileged to co-lead a few similar trips in the last couple of years in Gareth's home of northern Ireland, with the amazing musicians, writers and spiritual teachers Kathleen Norris, David Wilcox, Karen Moore, Brian McLaren, Micky ScottBey Jones, Kaitlin Curtice, David LaMotte, and Eric Elnes. We're delighted to be joined on our upcoming 2025 trips once more with our great friends Karin Bergquist and Linford Detweiler (Over the Rhine), Kathleen Norris, and David Wilcox, and (for the first time) Diana Butler Bass, whose gifts for expanding our stories, cherishing community, and walking through difficult journeys will animate us beautifully.

Our trip is full of surprises, but we can tell you that mornings will often feature gathered conversations, afternoons we will explore the landscape, and in the evenings there might be music, storytelling, and maybe even a touch of mischief! You'll meet friends and colleagues with whom we have been honored to travel some of the journey, peacemakers and poets and politicians, you'll walk by the sea and on mountains, and there'll be plenty of time to take by yourself to seek whatever you need.

JUNE 20TH-27TH, 2025  
OUR SPECIAL GUESTS:  
OVER THE RHINE



The core of Over the Rhine is the husband-and-wife team of musicians **Linford Detweiler** and **Karin Bergquist**. When you listen to Over the Rhine, you quickly fall under the spell of Karin's timeless voice "which has the power to stop the world in its tracks" (Performing Songwriter). But then the songs start hitting you. Paste Magazine writes, "Over the Rhine creates true confessional masterpieces that know neither border nor boundary" and included Bergquist and Detweiler in their list of 100 Best Living Songwriters. Their songs have been rigorously road tested and burst at the seams with loss, lament, and resilient hope.

*Linford & Karin say We're thrilled to participating in our third storytelling and peace building retreat with our friends, Gareth & Brian. Getting to spend this time in Ireland with Gareth and Brian will be a gift to all of us who are able to be present. The retreat will offer ample beauty, laughter, music, a few healing tears and warm hospitality. But perhaps most importantly, we will all receive the gift of new stories to tell, new stories that can change the narrative of a heart. We would love to share with you what we can only describe as the trip of a lifetime.*

Over the Rhine will participate in the first four days of the retreat, including a private concert for retreat guests; and there will also be an opportunity to attend a public concert the night before the retreat begins. Contact us for details.

[Learn more of Over the Rhine here.](#)

JULY 7TH-14TH, 2025  
OUR SPECIAL GUEST:  
KATHLEEN NORRIS



**Kathleen Norris** is the award-winning poet, writer, and author of *The New York Times* bestsellers *The Cloister Walk*, *Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life*, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*, and *The Virgin of Bennington*. Exploring the spiritual life, her work is at once intimate and historical, rich in poetry and meditations, brimming with exasperation and reverence, deeply grounded in both nature and spirit, sometimes funny, and often provocative.

Kathleen says, *"This is my third Ireland Retreat, and I'm very much looking forward to it. The beauties of Northern Ireland are not to be missed, and with Gareth and Brian as our guides we learn more about how a people who suffered terrible violence and division have learned to live with each other in peace. Meeting some of the people who laid the groundwork for the peace accords of 1998 is a highlight of the retreat. And the quiet settings on a working farm in County Down and on the outskirts of Belfast offer us a place for reflection and renewal. I hope you'll join us!"*

AUGUST 4TH-11TH, 2025  
OUR SPECIAL GUEST:  
DAVID WILCOX



**David Wilcox** is a penetrating storyteller. The revered folk musician has an effortless talent for spinning lyrics that quietly cut deep, and crafting melodies that seamlessly ride the plot twists and turns. Wilcox handily exemplifies the power of lyrical and musical catharsis.

This is the fourth time Dave has joined us on an Ireland retreat. Here's what he says: *I get a renewed sense of hope from participating in these Ireland trips with Gareth and Brian. I have been on three such trips with them and I always come home feeling hopeful about finding a way to resolve conflict and bring peace — because we meet people who have lived that journey and we hear their stories about sustaining that work and keeping that vision alive. I enjoy being part of the group discussions and I love playing my songs as a soundtrack to help us feel the possibilities that awaken in our hearts. And to have life-changing conversations in such a beautiful place is even more inspiring.*

[Learn more of David Wilcox here.](#)

SEPTEMBER 8TH-15TH, 2025  
OUR SPECIAL GUEST:  
DIANA BUTLER BASS



**Diana Butler Bass, Ph.D.**, is an award-winning author, popular speaker, inspiring preacher, and one of America’s most trusted commentators on religion and contemporary spirituality.

Diana’s passion is sharing great ideas to change lives and the world—a passion that ranges from informing the public about spiritual trends, challenging conventional narratives about religious practice, entering the fray of social media with spiritual wisdom and smart theology, and writing books to help readers see themselves, their place in history, and God differently. She does this with intelligence, joy, and a good dose of humor, leading well-known comedian John Fugelsang to dub her “iconic,” the late Marcus Borg to call her “spontaneous and always surprising,” and Glennon Doyle to praise her “razor-sharp mind” and “mystical heart.”

[Learn more of Diana Butler Bass Here.](#)

## OUR HOSTS

**Gareth Higgins, Ph.D.** is a writer, storyteller, and community leader who grew up near Belfast during the northern Ireland Troubles, and now lives in North Carolina. Author of *How Not to be Afraid and Cinematic States*, and co-author of *The Seventh Story: Us, Them, and the End of Violence* and *Religion, Civil Society and Peace in Northern Ireland*, he writes and speaks about connection to the earth, storytelling and the power of dreams, peace and making justice, and how to take life seriously without believing your own propaganda. He was co-founder of the Wild Goose Festival, [The Porch Magazine](#), and [www.moviesandmeaning.com](http://www.moviesandmeaning.com). Gareth leads trips to his native Ireland every year, inviting participants to go beyond the beaten track, to experience the landscape and history through the lens of a story about people learning to live at peace with one another. You can find more about Gareth's work at [www.garethhiggins.net](http://www.garethhiggins.net)



## OUR HOSTS



**Brian Ammons, M.Ed., M.Div., Ph.D.** is an educator, spiritual director, coach, writer and ordained minister. A former faculty member in Duke University's Program in Education and for over eight years Chaplain & Director of Spiritual Life at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, NC, Brian was named Interfaith Youth Core Outstanding Educator in 2017. Brian holds a PhD in Education with a certificate in Women's and Gender Studies from UNC-Greensboro, and is a minister in the Alliance of Baptists tradition. Brian is trained as coach in an International Coaching Federation accredited program jointly sponsored by Pinnacle Leadership and The Center for Congregational Health and formed as a spiritual director through Shalem Institute's spiritual guidance program.

Brian has written and spoken widely on themes of vocational discernment; interfaith work in higher education; and the intersections of gender, sexuality, and spirituality.

Find out more about Brian's work here:

<https://www.theporchmagazine.com/coaching-spiritual-direction>



# What People Say

"I am so grateful for the incredible experiences of our Ireland Retreat. It was a deep, rich, educational, spiritual, and personally challenging time that I will hold dear for life. It was a true delight!" - *Donna, Arizona*

"Words can't express my gratitude for the experience you provided for all of us. What a gift to the world." - Sharon, Nebraska

"It was a lovely, valuable, very interesting adventure. I look forward to next time."  
- TG, North Carolina

"This retreat was a beautiful, creative, and transformative experience. The leaders and participants were some of the loveliest people I have had the opportunity to know. In my own nation of many divisions, it was good to hear stories of peace-making, transformation, and hope. Thank you for these meaningful, powerful, and playful days." - *Michael, Pennsylvania*

"This trip was **on the short list for best experiences of my life**. I will never forget the beauty, love, joy, and acceptance I found here."

"The **perfect combination** of vacation, retreat, education and sight-seeing."

"The Ireland Retreat is a unique and transforming travel experience. The retreat offers plenty of important Irish sights and places but the retreat gets you closer to the land and lives of "real" (not just tourist) Ireland through a well crafted balance: breathtaking nature, and powerful learning from voices and places shaped in the crucible of struggle and turmoil in Northern Ireland. The retreat brings new awareness of our common humanity and creates friends out of strangers."

"Impressed by how affordable this trip was compared to others I have looked at. Thank you for building community, feeding us, transporting us - all without any glitches and making this spiritually rich and soul relaxing!" - *Susan, Illinois*

"The spiritual immersion in Ireland was sublime. Ancient Celtic spirituality, local culture and beauty, and the combined wisdom of the leaders was soulfully transformative. I highly recommend!"

"The experience opened doorways to find my spiritual anchors at this stage of life. I discovered myself through the eyes of other loving attendees and was able to return that gift to others."

"Seekers of mystery, magic, beauty, and uncertainty... This is for you. But for those who are cynical, it's especially for you."



*Silent Valley*



*Tropical Ravine, Botanic Gardens*



"This is a fabulous opportunity to experience the physical beauty, the political culture and history and the warm, friendly people of Ireland. Also an opportunity to slow down, reflect and connect with interesting, diverse people in substantive, heart-level ways."

# Trip Details

**Applications are open now**, and places are strictly limited - we can accommodate approximately 25 guests, and expect the trip to be over-subscribed. If you're interested and ready to apply, or have any questions, visit us at [irelandretreats.com](http://irelandretreats.com).

We are eager to welcome you!

**Cost (excluding airfare) of \$3700 per person\* includes:**

- The services of all guides and retreat leaders, support staff, and guests from the world of arts, politics and peacemaking.
- Four nights in historic restored rural accommodation including cottages in exquisite natural surroundings
- Four nights in a retreat centre in the grounds of a converted old country house by the sea on the edge of Belfast.
- Breakfast (including traditional Irish options) every day, and lunch or dinner most days.
- Transport from Belfast hubs to accommodation, and on organized trips throughout the tour.
- All admission fees to sites such as cultural centers, museums, etc.
- The use of all accommodation facilities including lounges, gardens, etc.
- A life-changing experience of spirit, imagination, and community.

*When You Apply with a Friend or Family Member, Full Registration is discounted to \$3,400 per person.*

**Learn More & Apply at [irelandretreats.com](http://irelandretreats.com)**



*Wandering the North Coast*



*Retreat Group at Dunluce Castle*



*Belfast Peaceline*





"This retreat truly was magnificent. Beautifully planned, it filled both mind and soul with beauty, historical context and perspective and rollicking good times. It was a prescient reminder of why we must all remain vigilant and committed to respectful dialogue across seemingly unbridgeable gaps in our own lives and in our country." -  
*David, Nebraska*



A final note: In order to make the tour widely accessible, we're glad to help people raise financial support to join the retreat, including folk with continuing education and sabbatical funding. If the cost of the tour is a stretch, please let us know, we'd love to hear from you! We'd be glad to help you find ways to join us if we can. **Just visit [irelandretreats.com](http://irelandretreats.com) to be in touch or to apply.**

*Landscape photos taken on Ireland Retreat courtesy of Scott Griessel & Creatista*





[www.irelandretreats.com](http://www.irelandretreats.com)