



A Message from our Convener

For a long time The Friends have had good relationships with Christian Aid. Recently – especially since the horrors from October 7 2023 onwards – these relationships have blossomed. One obvious sign, and one obvious benefit for The Friends, is the presence on our Committee of Val Brown, Christian Aid's Head of Scotland. Val writes in this edition of our Newsletter: she writes warmly of the co-operation between Christian Aid and The Friends. Val points to the opportunity that Christian Aid has given to The Friends to share in welcoming partners, especially Palestinian partners, to Scotland, when travel from Scotland to meet them in their own homes has been difficult.



It was at one such occasion recently that I met Leila (left). We were talking about Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. I asked her if she knew of anyone living in the camps who had lived there from the day they opened. The first Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon were established in 1948, to provide a temporary home for people driven from their homes in 1948. “Is there still alive anyone in the camps who has been there since 1948?” I asked. “Yes,” Leila replied. “My mother.” And her eyes filled.

Thank goodness the UK government restored its funding to UNWRA, the UN body which is the principal source of aid to Palestinian refugees: but how much of that funding will survive the government's decision to halve (almost) our aid budget is anyone's guess.

What does all this have to do with The Friends? First, justice for the poor (and most refugees are desperately poor) is an obligation on all Christians. Second, the plight of refugees is a particular concern of the Bible. Third, our partner churches and organisations call on us to remember the refugees. Fourth, ever since 1948 the UN has recognised the Palestinian right of return. Fifth, we hear that some people even now, are calling for the creation of two million more refugees by driving out the population of Gaza. Sixth, the prospect of lasting peace without recognition of some form of right of return is very bleak indeed. Seventh, the ministers of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias will know personally many people who still wait for the return of their own families. Eighth, it was at a Friends/Christian Aid event in Scotland that Leila told me about her mother, longing to go home since 1948.

My time as Convener of The Friends comes to an end at the AGM in May. Thank you for the privilege it has been. I am particularly grateful to the members of the committee for commitment and hard work, and for kindness and support. I wish my last Newsletter contribution could have been sunnier. But, as Rev Dr Munther Isaac, minister of the Christmas Church in Bethlehem, says, “If you're silent that means you approve.”

The Very Rev Andrew McLellan

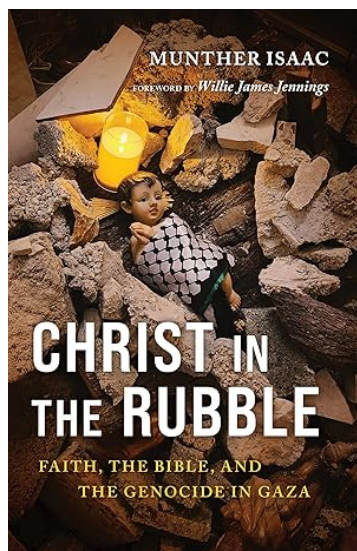
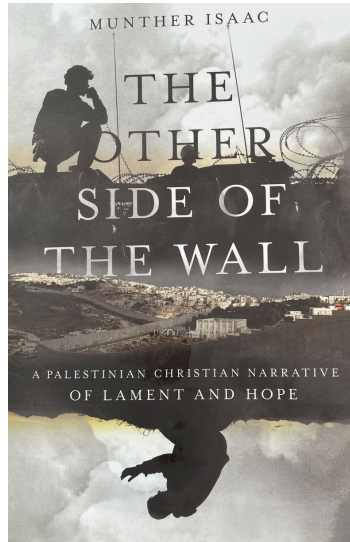
Christ in the Rubble

Last May, our newsletter contained a quote from Rev Munther Isaac's book, *The Other Side of the Wall*:

Let us love our enemies, forgive those who sin against us, feed the poor, care for the needy and oppressed, walk the extra mile, be inclusive not exclusive, turn the other cheek, and maybe then the world will start taking us seriously and believe our Bible!

This month sees the launch of a new book by Rev Isaac, *Christ in the Rubble*, described, by one reviewer, as 'a profound prophetic voice that comes along once in a generation. While there may not be universal agreement with his conclusions, Isaac offers - as a Christian pastor and leader from the Holy Land - a critical and invaluable perspective that demands attention and must not be ignored. The global Christian community must heed the cries of their brothers and sisters in Christ from Palestine, cries that are poignantly voiced in *Christ in the Rubble*. The very witness of the gospel is at stake.' **Mae Elise Cannon, executive director of Churches for Middle East Peace.**

Another USA reviewer, **Lily Greenberg Call** wrote: *Munther Isaac has written a heartbreaking indictment of world leaders, religious leaders, and humanity for failing the Palestinian people. With striking moral clarity, Isaac delivers an impassioned argument for the defense of Palestinian life and freedom, one that speaks deeply to universal religious and human values. He echoes the Jewish values and beliefs that I was taught regarding the value of all human life, G-d's presence with those who are suffering, and the obligation to speak up for the oppressed. Christ in the Rubble is an SOS and a call to action.....*



Given all of the above, our Convener's prayer shared with The Friends immediately after October 7, 2023 is well worth repeating. So sadly, it still needs to be prayed today:

Lord Jesus Christ, lord of life in the kingdom of death, when can we stop praying for peace?

We will not stop while your sisters and brothers hate and kill. We will not stop while your children are wounded beyond repair. We will not stop when your earth is ravaged by fire and bomb. We will not stop praying "Your kingdom come; your will be done" until that promised day comes when the killing stops and the hurting stops and all can live in peace.

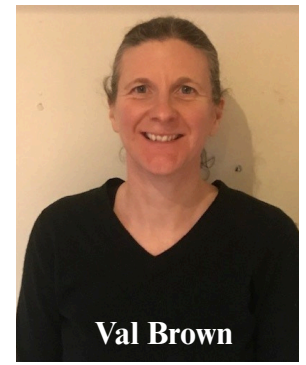
So hear our prayers today for Palestinians and Israelis, for Jews and Christians and Muslims, for those with cruelty and violence in their hearts, and those whose hearts are broken. Hear our prayers for Stewart and Muriel and their congregations. Hear our prayers for those we know and love; and hear our prayers for those whose names we do not know.

Lord Jesus Christ, lord of life in the kingdom of death, hear our prayers, and use our prayers to bring peace.



Working with Partners

Eighty years ago, Church of Scotland minister, Rev Douglas Lister, was serving as a chaplain in Germany. As the war came to an end, he saw first hand the plight of the German people, and the refugees in Europe.



When the army rebuffed his plea for help, he wrote instead to the Scottish churches – asking war weary people, living on rations to give generously to those who had until so recently been considered the enemy. And in responding, the churches not only showed they understood the gospel imperative to help other human beings who were struggling, but they gave birth to an organisation that would become Christian Aid.

It was the experience we gained working in Europe that meant we were well placed to offer support to Palestinian refugees in the 1950s. Today, as Palestinians continue to experience exile, blockade, relentless spikes in violence and huge increases in land dispossession, we work with Palestinian and Israeli partners to protect human rights and promote resilience for Palestinian communities and civil society. All our work aims to support the foundations of a just, lasting peace for all.

Many of our partners are also Church of Scotland partners, as I learned whilst serving on what was the old Middle East Committee. Working together means that we're able to share the stories of our partners with more people and offer them the chance to hear first-hand from partners, and to pray for peace together.

Working with The Friends has been a natural part of that on-going desire to share partner work more broadly. It has been excellent to co-host a number of events over the last year. We've heard from Israeli human rights partner B'tselem, showed the Tinderbox film and had a Q and A with the director of the film. We've also jointly hosted an event in Perth where Rev Stewart Gillan spoke about his work and the partnerships he holds, and more recently invited supporters to meet some of our Middle East partners while they were in Edinburgh.

On the 24th of each month, Christian Aid, alongside our partner churches, hosts a prayers for peace event online. This is a chance to hear directly from partners and to take time to pray. Please do join us when you can- you can sign up on our website.

Val Brown, Christian Aid, Head of Scotland

Join us in Prayers for Peace in the Middle East
Date: 24 of each month Time: 7 - 8pm UK time

Our next gathering will be on Thursday 24 April.
We will welcome Selina Abdallah from YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) in Palestine. Sign up via Christian Aid website,



Remembering Tuwani



The Palestinian village of At Tuwani in Masafer Yatta (south of Hebron) has been in the news recently. One of its young men, Basel Adara, has recently won an Oscar as one of the directors of *No Other Land*, which won the award for best documentary feature.

Between 2004 and 2009 I spent the best part of a year living in the village volunteering with Christian Peacemaker Teams. At that point there was no mains electricity, with just a village generator providing a few hours every evening, and no running water: like everyone else, we were reliant on throwing a bucket into the village well and hauling the water out.

We were there (along with Italians from Operazione Colomba) because violent Israeli settlers from the outpost of Havat Ma'on had been attacking Palestinian children walking to and from school from neighbouring hamlets.

In the first few weeks of this accompaniment the settlers attacked again twice, this time assaulting the internationals causing fractures, a punctured lung etc.

Following an international outcry the Knesset Children's Committee decreed that the Israeli military should accompany the children, which they did (though not always reliably) until 7 October 2023; the accompaniment has not restarted.



In 2006 the villagers, mainly subsistence farmers, suffered a dreadful blow. A number of their sheep and goats became ill, with some dying. The villagers discovered poisoned barley on some of their land, land which settlers had tried to take over. The milk from the animals had been a major part of the villagers' diet, but as a precaution (not knowing which animals had ingested some poison) they threw the milk away; I remember the anxiety of the pregnant women about the possible effects on their unborn children. It was impossible to sell any Tuwani animals at market. The village survived through the efforts of the women's cooperative, which was led by Keifah, Basel's mother.

In March 2009 Tony Blair visited Tuwani. Most memorably, he described electricity as 'a human right.' And, after several months and much persistence from the community, repeatedly reinstalling pylons the Israeli military had torn down, the villagers secured mains electricity.

I once asked a community leader if we had changed the village by living there. I was both surprised and touched by his answer: 'You have moved the village to nonviolence.' I never once saw a child throw a stone. The whole village turned out for nonviolent actions against injustice. I'm not sure that we did change the community. But they certainly changed us.

Maureen Jack



When war broke out between Israel and Gaza following the 7th of October Hamas attacks, it was little reported at the time that Hezbollah in Lebanon began daily rocket fire into northern Israel. This led to the evacuation of tens of thousands of people who called the north of Israel their home, all of whom needed somewhere to 'live' for a few months.

These few months turned into a total of almost 17 months, as rocket fire and then the war with Lebanon continued, until the end of February 2025 when they were all able to return home.

The Scots Hotel took in around 100 evacuees in 2023, and whilst some left, and some moved elsewhere, a core of around 50 stayed with us for the entire 17 months. This was both challenging and exciting for the staff. The challenge was that they were not really doing the jobs they were employed to do as they had long term house guests rather than short term visitors, but the excitement was that they were able to provide support to those in need. Throughout, the service from the staff of the Hotel was exceptional, with all the long-term evacuees incredibly appreciative of all that they had done for them.

Some highlights:

- the transformation of the upstairs public rooms of the Hotel into a kindergarten, a games room, and a soft play room;
- the Christmas tree and celebrations at Christmas, led by the evacuees, none of whom were Christian;
- the engagement of the staff with the evacuees, meaning that many of them helped out in various ways around the Hotel.

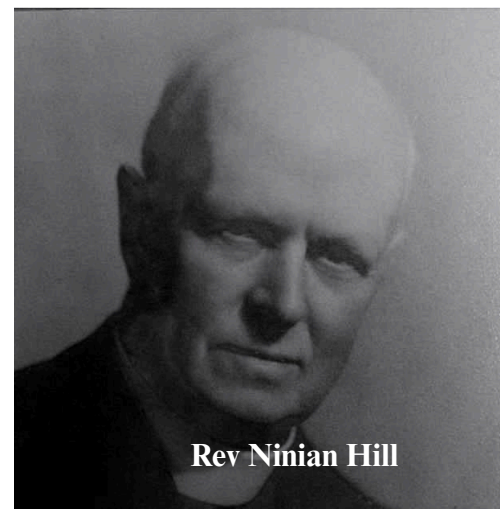
Of course the challenges were immense also. Many of the staff were unable to work due to the reduced workload and the fact that the income was much lower than normal. Tensions were regularly high as the evacuees struggled to adjust to living away from their homes, and not knowing whether their homes would survive. The Hotel is now in need of urgent decoration having been used in this way for 17 months.

The last 17 months have been exceptionally challenging, but have highlighted the good that our establishments in Israel can do, and the positive impact that they can have on society.

Kenny Roger, Resource and Presence Manager

From the closing words of 'Faith Rewarded' by Walter T. Dunlop

It is to one man that the church must owe the greatest debt of gratitude. Without Ninian Hill's stubborn determination and persistence in pressing forward when the target kept receding, his dream would never have been realised. To quote Hill's obituary by his friend Very Rev Dr Norman MacLean 'all this (the building and subsequent life of St Andrew's Jerusalem),' has flowed from Ninian Hill though he dreamed not of it – which shows that the ordering of life is in other hands than ours.'



Rev Ninian Hill



Howdy, Stranger!

Last October, The Convener preached at an Embrace the Middle East event at Adelaide Baptist Church, Glasgow.



If Embrace had done nothing else

If Embrace the Middle East had done nothing else in its 170 years but.....

Let's leave that there and come back to it later.

This sermon is about a word that changed its meaning. Bill Bryson, in a book about American English and British English, pinpointed the moment. When a tall cowboy rode into Dodge City strode towards the saloon, someone greeted him with the words “Howdy, Stranger.” That was the first time that the word **Stranger** was ever used in a positive, affirming, kindly way. So, at least, says Bill Bryson.

USA 150 years ago. Welcoming strangers with an enviable idealism. Do you not get a lump in your throat when you remember the words from the same time and place, on the Statue of Liberty? *Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!* And to think that at the very moment these words were being written, the dreadful fate of Native Americans was being sealed in the calamity of Wounded Knee.

“Howdy stranger!” “Give me your tired, your poor....” If only stranger were always a good word, an affirming word. Sadly, we know better. We know Windrush and we know the Nakba and we know Southport 2024 and we know that if you live in Springfield, Ohio these strangers from Haiti are going to gobble up all your pet cats. What a mess we make of the way we treat strangers, refugees, migrants. If Embrace the Middle East had done nothing else in the last 170 years but treat strangers properly and teach the rest of us to treat strangers decently and inspire us all to treat strangers decently then Embrace would deserve our gratitude. No, much more than that, we would owe our thanks to God for what Embrace had done.

Of course Embrace has done so much more than that. We have heard much more today for which we are glad and proud to thank God. But let us just stay this afternoon with strangers. With strangers and what a way of dealing with strangers might look like for those who are trying to follow Jesus. When you are ashamed of the vile language and the vile actions which are directed towards strangers remember what Embrace does.

Remember Embrace and the Armenian Genocide – as we heard this morning. Interestingly the Scottish and Welsh governments recognise the Armenian genocide, but the UK government does not. But leave these disagreements about international law aside. When Armenians were being slaughtered, every one a stranger to the British people, Embrace acted and prayed and gave and told the story. That is how you treat strangers when they are desperate. You could call it Christlike.

Remember Embrace and the Palestinians. We have heard how the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and lands in the newly formed state of Israel led to a huge increase in the demands which the Society tried to meet. Refugees and refugees and more refugees. But refugees are strangers if ever there were any: so the Society changed and grew and learned so that it might think of them as strangers no longer. You could call it Christlike.

Remember Embrace and Iraq. Twenty years on are you not still chilled by the memory of Iraq and the killing and the destruction? There are few more emphatic ways of turning people into strangers than by going to war with them. But then came Embrace and peace-building. Remember the story of Embrace's new work after the Iraq War and after the brutality of Daesh which followed on. Embrace hand in hand with Iraqi Christians rebuilding schools and hospitals serving the Christians and the wider communities. That is how you treat strangers who have been deeply wounded. You could call it Christlike.

Refugees. Armenians, Palestinians. Refugees from Daesh. If Embrace had done nothing else it would deserve praise and thanksgiving. To sit beside strangers with no place in the world to call their own. Strangers. Refugees. Migrants. That is the work of Christ.

And that is how my sermon was taking shape in my mind. Strangers. Embrace and strangers. Was the text to be the words of Jesus "I was a stranger and you took me in?" Or God's word to the people of Israel: "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt?" And just when I was thinking something like that might work as a sermon, who should be in touch with me but my dear friend Su McClellan. (No relation!). Su said, "Andrew, I wonder if you might be thinking about Ephesians 2:19 as a text, for that is the passage we are all thinking of for the 170th celebrations."

So I looked it up. And do you know what I read? "You are no longer strangers, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." Here am I working on a sermon about strangers and out of the blue Su offers me a text which says "You are no longer strangers". Wonderful. Does this woman have superhuman powers? Does it make you believe in providence?

Except. Except the text doesn't seem to fit. For the text is not about other people. About them, about refugees, about migrants. The text is about us. St Paul, or whoever wrote Ephesians, does not say "they are no longer strangers": instead he says to his readers – maybe even to us – "you are no longer strangers". That's a bit weird. What is his point?

His point is that all of us together are the beloved children of God. All of us together pardoned, healed, restored, forgiven. Today I have been talking about strangers as "them" But really we are all strangers, all wanderers, all refugees. In Lebanon and Gaza and Iraq and Egypt. And in Glasgow and in Aberdeen and in Dunfermline. All of us in one way or another far from home. God wants to call us home. And God does call us home.

Years ago I had the honour of preaching at the Embrace Day in London. I told this story, and I have told it many times since. A Guru asked his disciples how they could tell when night has ended and the day begun.

One said, "When you see an animal in the distance and can tell whether it is a cow or a horse."

"No," said the guru.

"When you look at a tree in the distance and can tell whether it is a neem tree or a mango tree."

"Wrong again."

"Well then, what is it?" asked his disciples.

"When you look into the face of any man and recognise your brother in him, when you look into the face of any woman and recognise in her your sister. If you cannot do this, no matter what time it is by the sun, it is still night."

Amen.



The Friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem & Tiberias

AGM

**Augustine United Church
George IV Bridge
Edinburgh EH1 1EL**

Friday 16th May 2025

11.00 - Coffee

11.30 - Meeting

13.00 - Lunch

**14.00 - Talk - Rev Muriel Pearson, Associate Minister, St Andrew's
Jerusalem and Tiberias**

*Both the meeting and the talk
will be live-streamed. The link
will be widely shared on our
website and Facebook page
nearer the time.*

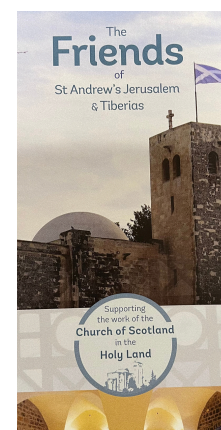
Our Annual Report and the Agenda will be issued in early May.

You will be made most welcome if you are able to attend.

Would you like to join 'The Friends'?

Check out Join the Friends at:

www.friendsofstandrews.com



Keep in touch.....

You can follow Stewart on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/stewart.gillan.7> and Muriel via X (formerly Twitter) on [@murielpearson60](https://twitter.com/murielpearson60) or through her blog <https://wordpress.com/view/murielpearson.com>

If you are on Facebook, please like & follow [The Friends St Andrews Jerusalem and Tiberias](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofstandrews).

Then there is our splendid new website: www.friendsofstandrews.com

And, finally, if you wish to contact us on any matter, please email secretary@friendsofstandrews.com