



A Message from our Convener

This is a terrible time. As I write this there are still 100 Israelis kept hostage, and at least 27000 adults and children dead in Gaza. These are both war crimes. I know that several members of The Friends have been writing letters and appearing on demonstrations: and I thank God for that, since our government and other western governments seem too weak or too afraid to call war crimes what they are.



And what of the ministers? Of course I am thinking of Stewart and Muriel: Stewart recently returned to Jerusalem, Muriel waiting to return to Tiberias. You can read their latest news elsewhere in this newsletter. What is the gospel there just now, Sunday by Sunday? If you were flown out on a magic carpet just now to Jerusalem or Tiberias on a Sunday morning and you were told you had fifteen minutes to say something helpful, what would you say? What of the congregations? What of all the groups and organisations and partners we have links with? Sometimes you can find some answers to these questions on The Friends Facebook page: answers which can be both heart-breaking and inspiring.

Since October 7th it is not sermons which have been sticking in my mind: it is hymns. There are two hymns in particular I have been singing to myself. Both of them contemporary, both of them with links to Scotland and to the Iona Community. They have both been my companions since the killing started. Each of them is a prayer for healing. You could do worse than carry them with you also.

One is by Anna Briggs:

***We lay our broken world in sorrow at your feet
Haunted by hunger, war and fear oppressed by power and hate
Come Spirit on us breathe, with life and strength anew
Find in us love, and hope, and trust, and lift us up to you (CH4 721)***

The other is by John Bell and Graham Maule:

***We cannot measure how you heal or answer every sufferer's prayer
Yet we believe your grace responds where faith and doubt unite to care
Lord let your Spirit meet us here to mind the body, mind and soul
To disentangle peace from pain and make your broken people whole (CH4 718)***

The Very Rev Andrew McLellan

St Andrew's Memorial Church - A Testimony of Faith

Our most recent St Andrew's Service at St Cuthbert's Edinburgh was a memorable occasion, for the venue, the music, the readings and prayers, and not least for the fine sermon preached by The Very Rev Iain Greenshields (right). An edited extract follows.



We gather today to celebrate and give thanks for the continuing witness of St Andrew's in Jerusalem at the heart of the Holy Land. We gather to acknowledge the much good that has been done in the name of our Lord, and continues to be done, often in the face of adversity and uncertainty. Those who support this worthy place ought to be proud of the association you have to it and the opportunity you have to contribute to such a worthy witness. It would be the ultimate tragedy if the current circumstances led us only to despair with no hope – understandable as that would be - because that would be to dishonour the vision of this worthy and visionary organisation – the friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias.

Those without a voice need that persistent voice that calls out for justice. To quote part of Andrew McLellan's prayer in a recent newsletter:

"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."

Amen and amen to that!

The Memorial Church continues to be a testimony of faith – this place that was born out of inspiration and innovation, and never can the need for such faith and commitment be than it is today. To quote from ***Faith Rewarded***, *"It is simply the story of an enterprise unique in the Church of Scotland, a story of faith, commitment and persistence in the face of considerable obstacles."* The situation in Israel/Palestine needs that grit and determination of faith today as never before.

How hard that is – especially for those who have had to leave loved friends and brothers and sisters behind – grieving the loss of what they have experienced and now see, and yearning for peace, a peace that seems so far off. It is that refusal, steeped in faith, to abandon hope and expectation, friends and brothers and sisters – those who long for peace and justice, that we remember today.

We look today beyond ourselves to Jesus for help and inspiration.

I remember preaching in Glasgow Cathedral when I was Moderator, on the theme of love and the conclusion by Jesus in Matthew chapter 5 when he calls us to love our enemies and pray for them. One of our nation's leaders spoke at length with me after the service about how difficult, even impossible, he found it to love his enemy. At one level, he was right. It is difficult, but not without example – Jesus himself showed that example in full. Yet we are not called to love our enemy in a vacuum – we are called also to pray for our enemies and that cultivates an entirely different relationship.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, of Israel, of Gaza, believing that such prayer is never in vain.

A retiring collection for the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) / The Quakers raised £879 in a retiring collection supplemented by donations of £150 and a further £425.90 from Aberdalgie and Forteviot Church leading to a grand total of £1454.90. Sincere thanks to all who contributed.

‘Holding the Space’

On 7th October 2023 it took a while for the enormity of the Hamas attack in Southern Israel to sink in. There was a catastrophic failure of military intelligence and people in Israel have been left fearful and vulnerable. There are still more than 100 hostages held in Gaza by Hamas, and many hundreds of Palestinians arrested without charge held in Israeli prisons. The people of Gaza, more than half women and children, have been paying an impossibly heavy price. People in the



West Bank have been effectively locked down since 7th October and there have been many arrests without charge, many violent incidents involving settlers now in army uniform, and repeated incursions in search of Hamas sympathisers. The economy and civil society have almost ground to a halt. While attention has been on Gaza, nearly 200 families in the West Bank have been driven off their land and it has been impossible to tend crops and harvest. Arab or Palestinian Israelis have felt great fear too. People have lost their jobs and there are stories of people being arrested for a comment or ‘like’ on social media. This has been the longest and most bloody outbreak of open hostility since 1948.

Early on, when it was not clear if Hezbollah would join hostilities from the north and what would happen across the country, I chose to return to Scotland. I felt that most of what I would be able to do in Israel I could do from there.

While in Scotland I led worship in different congregations each week, took part in webinars and prayer vigils, spoke at events, online and in person, and kept up to date (as much as possible) with news and with our partners. A particularly challenging event which took a lot of preparation was an hour long reflection for the Scottish Laity Network during Advent, for which I had been given the title ‘Guilty Bystanders’. This allowed me to take people back to the Balfour Declaration and Britain’s role (with the help of the Balfour Project) <https://balfourproject.org/> and also to reflect on our role as those who stand alongside, and Emmanuel, God-with-us as One who stands with those suffering. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07efjyqT654&ab_channel=ScottishLaityNetwork

My observation, through listening to and talking to and reading different news media and social media is that society in Israel/Palestine has become very polarised indeed. The narratives are dominated by extreme views on both sides. There is little common ground to meet and listen and negotiate. This is very dangerous. And yet, there are people who bravely and counter culturally continue to seek to see the other as human and like one another rather than unlike. ‘Holding the space’ for conversation will be very difficult, but I believe this is what I am called to, and I am hopeful that I will discern how.

Rev Muriel Pearson

Extract from *Faith Rewarded* by Walter Dunlop. When fighting raged in Jerusalem in 1948, the minister of St Andrew’s, Rev Clark Kerr, remained alone and isolated. This is an extract from his diary. *“Wednesday 8th September. Today I entered the 23rd week of my solitary confinement at the Hospice. I feel a great mental fatigue and spiritual deadness and am weighed down by an awful feeling that the morale and spiritual emptiness and powerlessness of the Christian church and world is being more clearly revealed from week to week. The thing that saddens me is that I do not feel challenged by such a thought but rather enervated and weakened.”*

'Not easy' does not mean not possible



'Good morning. I am fine. It's very difficult the situation here.'

A master of understatement, Aziz Hethalin (left) of the Umm Al Khair Bedouin community in the south Hebron Hills in a text he sent today. Using funds received from the Friends we were able to get relief to him just before Christmas, asking Hamed of the Hebron International Resource Network to



serve as intermediary. Taxis played their part. Nothing easy. And yet we thank God for showing us that 'not easy' does not mean not possible. Even now. However small is the part we play in the network of prayer and practical action that is the Church of Jesus Christ in a time of trial in this land.

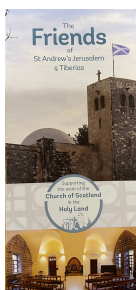
But the war goes on, intensifying the crushing, shattering reality of daily bombing and kill squads in Gaza, with trucks bearing aid blocked by settlers at Kerem Shalom/Karem Abu Selem crossing, and Rafah itself targeted now.

Nor has it been a 'good war' for Israelis. Many have been killed, and many others wounded in the fighting, some of it self-inflicted. The families of hostages have gotten nowhere with their government for months, after the first releases. The charge of genocide has, if nothing else, told Israel that it is not immune from legal challenge and will not be given a moral pass for its conduct of this war.

That said, some one hundred Israelis, displaced in the north, have been sheltering in our Hotel in Tiberias. It is creche, school, and refuge for them, as they get through these days. Our commitment is to all of God's children, holding all in our hearts before the Lord. It is a commitment that is testing us, trying us, in spirit not least. And yet, to be present and at work on both sides of the wall places us in a world of pain and service. Praying that the Spirit of God be its usual free-ranging, wonder-working self.

The congregation takes heart in our presence, be it ever so humble, as we take heart in their support in prayer, conversation, and shared reflections on God's word and life in this situation. We continue to worship in a hybrid service, with a small congregation gathered in St Andrew's Jerusalem, with a company of regular worshippers joining on zoom, from Galilee and the south.

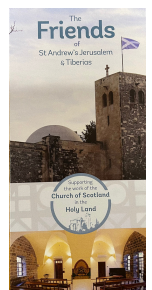
Last night I joined an evening Taizé prayer service on the Mount of Olives. The reading, in four languages, began with Jesus affirming and challenging his early followers with the words, 'You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world.' What I took away was what came next. Roughly speaking, 'If the salt loses its salt, it can't get it back. It is no longer salt and must be thrown out.' I was minded to reflect again on the charge of abandonment of Palestinian Christians that has been levelled against Western Church leaders and theologians. Where are we in this? Have we the salt anymore? Are we hiding our light? As we sang the beautiful choruses of the Taizé community in German, Latin, French and English, over and over again, I sought an answer that answers. Commitment is measured in service. Let's see what answer we can give together. Day by day.



The Friends of St Andrew's
Jerusalem & Tiberias

Would you like to join 'The Friends'?

Check out Join the Friends at www.friendsofstandrews.com



Every Village has a Story.....

At The Friends/Christian Aid meeting in Augustine United on 27 November (see recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmcOteFVK-Q&t=1s>) Sarit Michaeli of B'Tselem played a video which showed an Israeli settler shooting a young Palestinian man in the stomach from just a few feet away. The man shot was Zachariah Adara. He is home after eleven operations: next time the surgeon will try to restore his digestive system.

I've known him since he was a boy: I lived in his village, At Tuwani, in the south Hebron hills, for almost a year between 2004 and 2009, volunteering with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT).

The villagers are subsistence farmers; life was simple, without mains electricity (a few hours each day from a communal generator) or running water (water was hauled up from wells). Close to the village, on the villagers' land, settlers had built the settlement of Ma'on and the outpost (illegal under Israeli law) of Havat Ma'on, where some of the settlers were violent. This loss of land greatly reduced the Palestinians' income.



A school was built in Tuwani, which also served children from smaller neighbouring villages; extremist settlers often attacked the children on their way to and from school. CPT was invited to place volunteers in the village to accompany the children. Settlers then attacked these CPTers, resulting in serious injuries. After an international outcry (tellingly, there was no outcry when the Palestinian children were attacked) the Knesset Children's Committee decreed that the Israeli military should accompany the children (left), and this they continued to do until 7 October 2023, though not reliably.

In 2005 the villagers suffered a further blow. After twenty sheep died unexpectedly the shepherds found poisoned barley scattered on the land where they grazed. Because of the risk that other animals had ingested some poison, they threw away their milk for months, and it was impossible to sell their sheep at market. The income from men working in Israel and from the women's needlework and hosting visiting groups saw the village through this crisis.

Things are difficult for the people of Tuwani in this current crisis. Local settlers have been given military uniforms and weapons, and are abusing their position. One friend was brought supplies of flour, rice and oil by Israeli activists: the next day settler soldiers slashed the bags containing flour and rice, and poured out the oil, in their 'search' of his home.

Impressively, the villagers are committed to resistance to injustice and to nonviolence. A wonderful example of this was in 2008 when a settler shot from the outpost at a shepherd and his flock, killing



two sheep. The next day, in an act of nonviolent resistance and solidarity, shepherds came from all around with their flocks to graze them close to the outpost. Once the sheep had eaten their fill and left the villagers enjoyed a picnic.

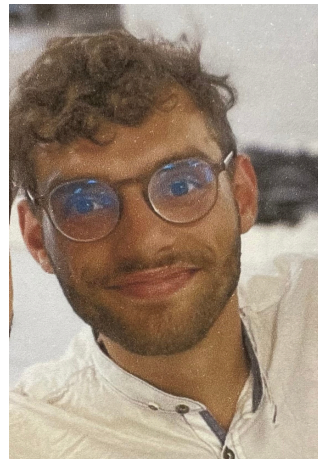
Every village has a story.

This is part of Tuwani's.

Women to the fore removing a settler road block

An Alternative Pilgrimage Experience

Joe Nockels (right) successfully applied to the Friends of St Andrew's, Jerusalem and Tiberias for funding to attend a Sabeel-Kairos Young Adult Conference, based in Bethlehem. Here, Joe sums up the highlights of his trip.



The aim of the conference was to engage Palestinian youth and gain a broad understanding of the lived realities of being under occupation. With ongoing events, it is surreal to think back on this time. Perhaps because we were travelling with local guides, there were few moments of tension which seems inconceivable now.

This was especially the case in Hebron, where we visited the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Al-Shuhada Street, a residential street abandoned by the Palestinian population near the main market on account of settlers moving in and checkpoints being placed at either end of the road. We breezed through these checkpoints, a huge indication of our privilege and the mettle of our guide.

Joe Sacco, the illustrator, made the same observation in his graphic novel 'Palestine' (1993) (re-released since the Gaza bombings) that a double standard is present in the way authorities treat tourists and Palestinian locals. As such, I cannot nearly pretend to have achieved a complete view of the occupation. It would be unjust on those suffering to say so. What we did learn through Sabeel, the organisations we met and the Palestinians who graciously educated us, was that it is their voices that need to be lifted up.

I placed emphasis on deepening my academic understanding of the Israeli occupation in my original application to the Friends – something which I did progress. We visited Dr Qumsiyeh of the Palestinian Natural History Museum, who linked the climate crisis to ongoing settler colonialism, citing redirected water, invasive species and the widely reported destruction of Palestinian olive groves.

Jonathan Kuttub of Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA) also joined us to explain his role at the Oslo accords (1993, 1995) and the West Bank's current A, B and C areas as the Israel government's method for distinguishing their levels of control over the land. Alongside my work as a PhD researcher of manuscripts, I am finding time to continue reading, protesting and meeting with other Sabeel delegates in-person and online.

Sabeel's programme was described as 'an alternative pilgrimage experience' by presenting opportunities to meet local youth. We visited projects like Wi'am and gardened at Osh Ghorab with local volunteers. It was at Osh Ghorab where, in a spontaneous intermingling of Palestinian heritage, we exchanged traditional dances. We danced Dabke to varying degrees of success and, in reply, the West Bank – just maybe – had its first ceilidh!



Learning to See Through New Eyes

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.” Marcel Proust was so right. During the almost four years that we spent living in Israel/Palestine with the British Embassy, we were able to experience this voyage through new perspectives as well as through new eyes.

My Bible was our essential Guidebook. The words came alive and understanding of Christianity was strengthened through first hand witness of places that had seemed so familiar. Watercolours by David Roberts provided us with subjective images of life two hundred years ago. Black and white photographs by Elia Kahvedjian, guided us through Old Jerusalem of the 1930s.



We followed in the trails of pilgrims along wadis, and through monasteries; we met remarkable people surviving in remarkable conditions. We had our breath taken away as we stopped to absorb what was around us, often in areas where time seemed to have stood still. Goats and sheep, surviving on apparently nothing; birds hovering over the Golan Heights. We discovered flowers that appeared for perhaps only the briefest of times and in the unlikeliest of places. We explored lengths of the Jordan as it meandered from Mount Hermon via the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea.



We visited sites and read harrowing accounts recorded by soldiers, including my grandfather (near left), who fought in the Palestine Campaign, many of whom are now remembered in St Andrew's Scots Memorial Church. And we remembered them in the peace of the Commonwealth War Graves throughout the country, including in Gaza.

We were able to further understand the astonishing feats of those who came before us. Father Jerry Murphy O'Connor's monthly on-site tours were an essential grounding to uncovering the archaeology of the country. Mosaics; aqueducts; fortresses; amphitheatres; tunnels; caves and scrolls - all give life to different civilisations and are well detailed through our now tattered pages of The Holy Land.

Time was spent with people of all nationalities, religions, and backgrounds. Working, volunteering and visiting; being enlightened and shocked. So much was shared that we understood how little we knew, about so much. We learned to see things from different perspectives through our new eyes.

However, The Church of Scotland provided the basis of familiarity. Worshipping and socialising, working at Tabeetha (that was me) and being part of the wider St Andrew's community, provided respite from the frenetic pace of our diplomatic existence. Moments that gave a sense of belonging, a sense of family, a sense of home – senses that still exist. Another perspective of life in Israel and Palestine.

Twenty years on, things would be so very different, and we look back with gratitude for the privilege we were afforded. The privilege to have made friends and now making even more Friends. And we continue to see things through new eyes.

Carol Miller



Commonwealth War Graves at Be'er Sheva, Southern Israel.

New Committee Member – continuing our brief bios of new committee members.



I am a retired educational psychologist, living in Fife. I am passionate about issues of justice and human rights.

I first worshipped in St Andrew's Jerusalem in April 2002. Then for a part of each year until 2015 I volunteered in the West Bank, mainly with Christian Peacemaker Teams but also with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel. I was made welcome at St Andrew's, especially by the Musgraves, the Abusharrs, and Helen, Rita and Mary. So joining The Friends was the obvious thing to do. I manage The Friends' Facebook page and seek, through it, to keep our members and supporters informed and to amplify the voices of organisations with which we have connections.

Maureen Jack

Let us all pray

Let not our hands be useless this week. Let our hands touch some sore place with tenderness, give some gift generously, hold up some weak one with strength.

Let not our lips be useless this week. Let us say some word of forgiveness, tell others of some act of kindness, encourage one who is afraid.

Let not our ears be useless this week. Let us hear the cry of the poor, let us listen to a carefully worded call for help, let us be ready to hear the whispering of the Christ who stands at the door and knocks.

Most of all let not our prayers be useless this week. However ill-formed our prayers may be, use our prayers for good. However half-hearted our prayers may be, use our prayers for good. So that by our prayers the sick may be healed, the mourning may be strengthened and our loved ones blessed. **AML**

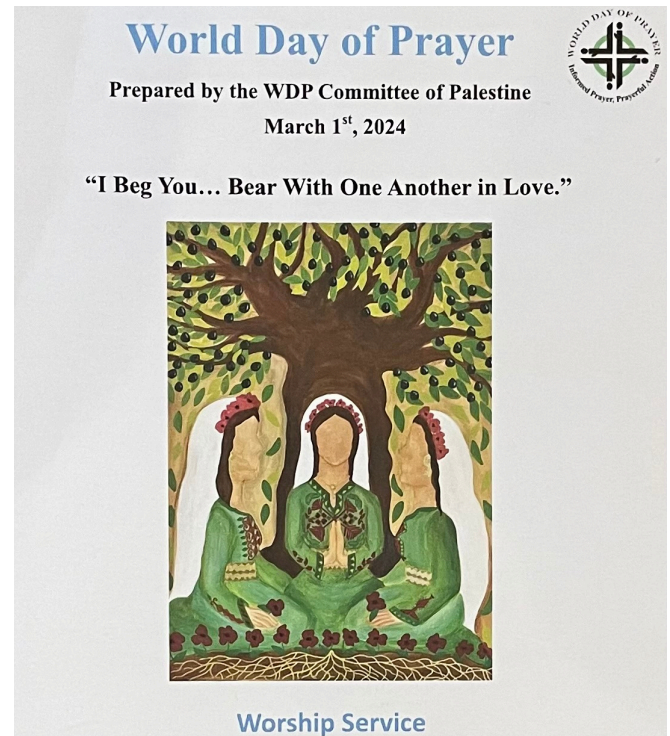
Keep in touch.....

You can follow Stewart on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/stewart.gillan.7> and Muriel via X (formerly Twitter) on @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.

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



This year's World Day of Prayer on March 1st, prepared by the WDP Committee of Palestine, has an added poignancy, relevance and urgency. Let us all play our part.

Friends AGM -Note the Date

Date: Friday 17th May

Venue: St Cuthbert's Church, Edinburgh

Coffee from 11am followed by AGM at 11.30

Lunch 12.30 followed by speaker - name tbc

Look forward to seeing you there!