



The Friends of St Andrew's

Jerusalem & Tiberias

July 2025

A short post-AGM newsletter as we pay tribute to our departing Convener, The Right Rev Dr Andrew McLellan and welcome our new Convener, Rev Dr Ian Alexander. Appropriately, it was Rev Dr Norman Shanks who finished a warm and comprehensive vote of thanks to all who had contributed to the success of The Friends this past year who paid tribute to his friend of over 60 years.

This is not an occasion for telling interesting and amusing revelatory personal stories my friend, but, rather, a time for paying tribute for all that he has contributed to the growth and flourishing of The Friends under his convenership - his dedication and unfailing commitment to the wellbeing of the churches at Jerusalem and Tiberias and the cause of peace and justice for for Palestinians; for the personal support, through regular monthly Zooms he has given Stewart and Muriel; his deft touch at chairing meetings and getting out of tricky situations; his conduct of worship and contributions to Facebook and the excellent newsletters, so full of information inspiration and encouragement; the talks he has given to Guilds and other organisations all over the country; the development of a significant partnership with Christian Aid in hosting events, the contacts with Hadeel, the revitalisation of links with the Glasgow Society of the Sons and Daughters of Ministers of the Church of Scotland and re-establishing of The Friends' scholarship programme. That's quite a catalogue – and I'm pretty sure there are things I've missed out.



But I'd like to finish by thanking Andrew, above all, for being himself in fulfilling his responsibilities as convener. I'm not sure that 'retiring' could ever be an appropriate description of him: he has such a winsome and warm personality, he will always be not only an outstanding preacher and communicator but a pastor at heart and in practice, with a real deep concern for people; he enviably combines the attributes of what I might describe as almost innocent vulnerability and supreme competence.

In facing adversity, not only the situation in the Holy Land, but also Irene's illness and his own 'episode' last month, he has consistently shown a remarkable positivity and resilience, born of Christian hope. One of our favourite Iona Community prayers speaks of Columba being blessed by God with the gifts of 'courage, faith and cheerfulness' and, for me, Andrew you epitomise and embody these qualities, not only in the way you have supported Irene through these difficult years – for which we admire you, but also in the way you have led The Friends. As you pass on your mantle, you leave The Friends in excellent shape. You will be a hard act to follow but I know that, in Ian Alexander, whom I've also known for rather a long time, its future lies in very good hands.

A Message from our new Convener

Hello. I am delighted to be able to greet everyone as the new Convener of The Friends. With all the military action of the past few weeks, we are glad that Stewart and Muriel remain safe – and appreciate them also pointing us to the many others in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza who do not have shelters from the bombs or missiles or from the Israeli settlers or Israeli military attacks on them, their homes, crops, animals.



God is, though, a God of justice, who calls us to be present where there is pain and struggle. The Anglican theologian, Clare Amos, reminds us: “Today perhaps the physical stones may be mute, but the ‘living stones’ cry with increasingly deeper frustration. The incarnation—the ‘enfleshing’ of Christ—means that such cries need to be heard.” Over many years now, we have heard the cries of the people of that land. From people like Naim Ateek, Mitri Raheb, Yohanna Katanacho and Munther Isaac, we have come to better understand that our theology and actions must address the lived realities of those whose home is the land of Christ’s birth and who feel the full effects of military occupation and oppression. One small action is to buy something from Hadeel to support producers whose lives are precarious. (<https://www.hadeel.org/>)

The AGM agreed some Directions for The Friends over the coming years. They are here on the next page. Raising awareness, supporting scholars, encouraging pilgrimages, sharing in events which highlight the situation and sharing financial support are ways to engage. For us as The Friends of St Andrew’s Jerusalem and Tiberias, there are opportunities to support our churches and ministers and the whole cause of justice and a holistic peace for all the people.

The sign outside St Andrew’s Jerusalem says it is a church within the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). The WCRC released a prayer in late June, “They Shall Learn War No More”:

*We pray that we may learn the ways of peace and not of power,
that we may walk the paths of justice and not violence,
that we will see your face in the face of the other,
recognising each other as humans bound together in one common life,
connected by the Earth on which we walk, the air we breathe, and the blood that
flows through our veins. Amen.*

Wishing you a very pleasant summer.

Rev Dr Ian Alexander



Thanks to Rev Trish Archibald for capturing the moment of handover from The Very Rev Dr Andrew McLellan to Rev Dr Ian Alexander as Convener of The Friends.

The Friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias

Directions 2025-2030

Identity: The Friends bring together people with an interest in the work of the Church of Scotland in Palestine and Israel, particularly through the congregation of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias, which offers a ministry to local residents and international visitors, and a witness to Christ's call to seek "the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps 122.6) – an holistic peace which offers love and justice for all. In addition:

- The Friends seeks to bring a distinctive approach in its relationship to the ministers, congregations, work and witness of the Church in Jerusalem and Tiberias.
- The Friends honours the historic status of St Andrew's Scots Memorial Church in Jerusalem as a national memorial to Scots who died in the 1914-18 War.

Awareness: It remains important to help people in Scotland, and beyond, better appreciate how the Church of Scotland presence has come about, how the realities on the ground impact the witness and service of the Church in Israel and Palestine, and how the ministers in Jerusalem and Tiberias practice their ministry today in the land of Christ's birth. The Friends can have a role in awareness raising amongst congregations and ministers and help them be more conscious of the situation in which the churches and ministers serve and witness. Blogs, newsletters, podcasts etc. can highlight particular situations, raise awareness, and encourage people to support The Friends' work.

Scholarship Support: Seeking to familiarise Church of Scotland ministers, particularly those recently entering the ministry, the scholarship grant supports a visit to Israel / Palestine. As well as pursuing an agreed research topic, the scholar will get a fuller introduction to the Church of Scotland presence in the land of Christ's birth, and the realities of life in Palestine and Israel, particularly for the Christian community, but more widely also, through a programme devised with the ministers and Committee to ensure they have a good understanding of the situation on the ground and the Church's work and witness there.

Justice Pilgrimages: Justice pilgrimages are a strategic way to help individuals get a better and deeper understanding of the realities on the ground, which would also change the way they engaged with the situation back home, in prayer, political involvement, and giving. Encouraging, supporting, organising, justice pilgrimages would help people get exposure to Israel and occupied Palestine. The Friends might organise a pilgrimage, with some financial support for key leaders or participants. Some ministry candidates already get the opportunity to make a pilgrim trip, and ways to encourage all ministry candidates to have such an opportunity should be explored and encouraged.

Events: Sharing events with Christian Aid or others is a cost-effective and positive way of working and is encouraged. It gives opportunity to amplify partners' voices and enable members and the wider community to become more informed, and energised. It also gives better awareness of The Friends.

Finance: It is important for members to contribute regularly to the work of The Friends. The Friends has some invested funds which could be used to trial some new ideas or initiatives, such as pilgrimages, or additional scholarships. Using money creatively often encourages people to get involved and be more engaged and supportive.

Inevitably, in these challenging times, our thoughts and prayers are focused on Israel / OPT. Below, strong words from the end of a speech by Tom Fletcher, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, quoted by Rev Muriel Pearson at The Friends AGM followed by a reminder from Maureen Jack of the impact of the current situation on visitor numbers in Bethlehem.

‘So, for those killed and those whose voices are silenced: what more evidence do you need now? Will you act – decisively – to prevent genocide and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law? Or will you say instead, “We did all that we could.”

Humanity, the law and reason must prevail. The Security Council must prevail. Demand this ends. Stop arming it. Insist on accountability. To the Israeli authorities: stop killing and injuring civilians. Lift this brutal blockade. Let humanitarians save lives.

To Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups: release all hostages immediately and unconditionally. Stop putting civilians at risk during military operations.

And for those who will not survive what we fear is coming – in plain sight – it will be no consolation to know that future generations will hold us (in this chamber) to account. But they will. And, if we have not seriously done “all that we could,” then we should fear that judgement **Tom Fletcher**

Missing in Bethlehem

I was first in Bethlehem in February 2001. My most recent visit was last month. What was most striking was how deserted the whole city, including Manger Square, was: so many hotels, restaurants, and olive wood shops were closed. I went into the Church of the Nativity, and there was hardly anyone there. Usually pilgrims queue for one or two hours to go down the few steps into the grotto, but there was no queue at all that day; indeed, for a while I was alone in the grotto. I have just read an article reporting that the hotel occupancy rate in Israel is only 10%. I doubt if it reaches anything like that in Bethlehem. Visitors are missing from Bethlehem. And Bethlehem is missing them greatly.



Just down from Manger Square there is a café/gelateria owned by the Catholic Church. Since Pope Francis visited Bethlehem in May 2014 the Popemobile he used then had been on the café terrace. When I was there on Christmas Eve 2015 a minister friend sat on it and persuaded me to take his photograph. But the Popemobile was missing last month. I asked about it and was told that it was being renovated. After Pope Francis’s death ten days later I discovered the significance of this: it was more than the running repairs I’d assumed. It was announced that the Popemobile was to be converted into a mobile health clinic for children in Gaza, and this was the renovation that was underway.

I assume that the Popemobile won’t return to Bethlehem. But I hope that the tourists will. And soon.

Maureen Jack