



A Message from our Convener

There was a complaint that I did not care about Israeli hostages. The basis for the complaint was that I had asked for prayers for the people of Gaza: which meant to the complainer that I did not care about Israeli hostages.

I was wearily familiar with this argument. For seven years I heard it every day, although on a different subject. When I was inspecting prisons I regularly called for better conditions for prisoners. Invariably that produced the response: “that shows you don’t care about victims”. It was a silly argument. There is no logical connection; every parish minister knows and cares about victims of crimes; I was once asked to join the Board of Victim Support Scotland; the reason we should have better prison conditions is to reduce the number of victims by reducing re-offending. So I knew that the complaint that I did not care about victims was nonsense. But no matter how often I argued that it was nonsense I don’t think I ever changed the mind of a complainer. That takes more than argument.

So it is with the hostages complaint. Of course I care about the hostages. Of course I care about their families. Of course I pray for them. Of course I long for their release. But that must not stop caring for Gaza. That must not silence our lament for the children, the bereaved, the wounded, the starving, the terrified in Gaza. A member of the committee of The Friends has a Martin Luther King quote on her Facebook page: “In the end we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

There are two steps to take which make at least some response both to those who call out on behalf of the hostages and to those who call out on behalf of Gaza. One is to demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire. The other is to keep listening. Listening to all those who are living in agony. Without listening there is no learning.

The Very Rev Dr Andrew McLellan



Watch, dear Lord, with those who wake or watch or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep.

O Jesus Christ, tend your sick ones, rest your weary ones, bless your lonely ones, soothe your suffering ones, shield your joyous ones, and all for your love's sake. Amen

(St Augustine)

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION (CWGC) IN GAZA

The CWGC was founded by Royal Charter in 1917 and works on behalf of the Governments of Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom to commemorate the 1.7 million men and women from the Commonwealth who lost their lives in the two World Wars. It believes that remembering individuals who have died in conflicts is of universal, perpetual relevance, and that reflecting on their deaths is of continuing and paramount importance for us all.



The CWGC owns two cemeteries in Gaza. The Gaza War Cemetery contains graves of 3691 dead from over 14 countries and the vast majority are burials of men in their 20's and 30's from the First World War. The other cemetery is located in the north of Deir-al-Balah where 714 soldiers lie, all of them British. Between them, they are known locally as the British graveyards, and are regarded as a major cultural and archaeological site in the Palestinian enclave.

In more peaceful times, the Cemetery is tended by a small team of workers whose dedication and expertise are so apparent. Remarkably, they all come from families whose jobs have been passed down through generations. The current head gardener is the great grandson of the person who held that role 100 years ago. The team and their immediate families were evacuated, safely, to Egypt in early 2024 and are now working alongside their Egyptian colleagues for the foreseeable future.

While scores of Palestinian graveyards have been left in ruins, at one point it was thought the British graveyards had been consciously avoided and that the two cemeteries had been subjected to only partial damage as a result of attacks nearby while neither the graves nor their headstones had been touched. However, a series of satellite images would appear to show heavy damage to the Gaza War Cemetery.

What is very difficult to confirm is the extent of the damage and, while in no way diminishing the cost this conflict is having on human lives and on Gaza as a whole, it is hoped that one day the two cemeteries will be repaired to their former state, will once again be tended by those who have done so through generations and will be open to visitors who come to pay their respects to those servicemen from around the world who gave their lives in the name of peace.

Jamie Erskine



Speaking with a Prophetic Voice



As I write to you, Friends, I am in Tiberias and it feels like we are in a critical week. Peace talks are being trailed, Blinken is here to push, families of hostages are demanding it, and it seems the appetite to expand the war, taking on Iran or provoking a wider war with Hezbollah is waning.

I have just listened to the BBC news which talks about cease fire and hostage release and how this might be the last chance before war escalates. I am conscious as I listen that the Palestinian perspective is missing from this summary of affairs. There are nearly 10,000 Palestinian prisoners held in Israel, nearly 3000 without charge or access to lawyers. These people and their families are hostages too.

Here in Israel, very little attention is being paid to the devastation in Gaza, the more than 40,000 deaths, the numbers of women and children used by both sides as human shields. When the conflict is described, we imagine it as an equal struggle. In fact, it is not at all. News recently of horrific sexual abuse by Israeli soldiers carried out on Palestinian prisoners received almost no attention in Israel.

The claim to be the ‘most moral army in the world’ rings very hollow indeed. And the psychological effects on the Israeli soldiers, never mind the effect on Gazans, starved, bombed, moved about from pillar to post, suffering from disease, lack of access to food and fresh water, are almost unimaginable. Even if a peace deal is signed, what will it mean as the tiny strip of land called Gaza is almost completely destroyed. Where will people go?

Part of my role here as Mission Partner in Israel/Palestine is to support and amplify the voices of those who do see. One of those is Maoz Inon an Israeli entrepreneur whose parents were both killed in the attack on their kibbutz on October 7th 2023. Maoz speaks with a prophetic voice. He describes a dream he had where his tears washed the blood from his face and his body and made a road for him to walk. He realized he must forgive all those responsible and look not backwards but forwards to a future built on hope. Along with a Palestinian friend, Aziz Abu Sarah, and many others, he is trying to grow a new peace movement. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0juLRi90kRg>

Another prophetic voice is that of Rev Munther Isaac of the Bethlehem Christmas Church. He is the inspiration behind the Gaza Nativity scene which galvanized prayers around the world. Rev Isaac is extremely critical of the Christian church and most Christian leaders who have not called out the illegal occupation by Israel of the West bank and Gaza, who have been slow to name the slaughter as genocide, and who for fear of being labelled antisemitic are quiet in the face of the hugely unequal struggle which can hardly be called a war.

What Stewart and I and our colleagues in the hotels and the school are doing here is a small contribution, but we continue to hold a space where all are welcome, and where we see the face of God in each of our neighbours’ faces.

The Church of Scotland Speaks Out

At this year's General Assembly it was inevitable that many members would have wished the Church of Scotland to have responded loudly and publicly to the dreadful attack by Hamas terrorists on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent response by the Israeli defence forces resulting in the deaths of over 37,000 Palestinians (the majority being women and including over 14,000 children).



The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) reports to the Assembly and has as part of its responsibilities, consideration of the situation in Israel/Palestine. Before its report was considered in detail, Maureen Jack stood up to state that many had wished the Church of Scotland's (COS) leadership team had been more outspoken about the suffering of the people in Gaza and the West Bank as she felt it had been far too silent after its statement in November welcoming a temporary cease fire.

The FAPLT in its lengthy report had included two deliverances on Peace in Palestine, Israel and Lebanon

- *Instruct the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team to share the voices of Palestinian Christians, and to continue to support the Church's contribution to interfaith dialogue.*
- *Call on the whole Church of Scotland to pray for peace in the conflict in Gaza between Israel and Hamas and in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah, and restate the 2015 General Assembly call urging the UK government to recognise without delay the State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel, as a contribution to securing lasting peace and justice for all.*

These two deliverances were carried without debate.

But I, with support, certainly felt stronger action was required since for 15 years Palestinian Christians have been calling for the Churches to stand against the injustices they are experiencing. They have repeatedly appealed to us (Kairos Appeals) as brothers and sisters in Christ, to support them in many ways - so the following deliverance was proposed :

- *Encourage Church members to take note of the requests from Palestinian Christian Communities for help in their non-violent struggle to bring peace with justice, including consideration of previous General Assembly Statements and to refrain from buying goods from illegal Israeli settlements.*

This was carried unanimously. I then proposed a second new deliverance:

- *Call on the Church of Scotland to publicly and explicitly call on the UK Government to call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, to cease granting export licences for the sale of armaments to Israel and to reinstate the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) funding immediately (UNRWA delivers lifesaving humanitarian Aid to Palestinians - which Israel has tried to get donor nations to discontinue).*

This deliverance was also unanimously accepted.





Maureen Jack (left) then proposed a deliverance asking that the FAPLT give consideration to restoring the annual Church of Scotland grant to help fund the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) and report back to the General Assembly of 2025, as this grant had been withdrawn for 2024. Again this was unanimously accepted.

We hoped with the acceptance of these additional deliverances that it would be clear to all, that the General Assembly on behalf of the whole Church of Scotland wished to make it very clear to the UK Government what actions we wished to see as our response to the horrendous events in Gaza, the West Bank and in Israel.

Allan Gordon

PS: Following the deliverances at the General Assembly in May, a letter was sent on 13 August from the Church of Scotland to the Foreign Secretary. Please see this link:

<https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/articles/church-writes-to-foreign-secretary-on-israel-gaza-war>.

Maureen Jack

From North to South.....introducing our furthest north and furthest south UK members of The Friends



Hi – I’m Moira, a minister in Orkney. I was fortunate to be able to go to the Holy Land on a scholarship in June 2022 with fellow ministry candidates from New College and Trinity College, Glasgow. I cannot even begin to explain the impact that trip had on me. We visited many biblical sites, names I had heard read from the pages of my bible, brought to life, Galilee, Mount of Olives, Jerusalem.....

No matter how incredible that was, what was more moving was meeting the people – the living stones. Visiting places like Tent of Nations, House of Grace, Aida Refugee Camp provided such insight into life in the Holy land, and in particular the human face of the political systems in that region.

I joined The Friends as soon as I got back because I want as many people as possible to hear about the situation in the ‘Holy’ land and hope that Friends will continue to fund study trips so that students experience it first hand and then share with the wider church. **Rev Moira Taylor-Wintersgill**



“I have a very good doctor. When I am ill, he tells me to rest and have a bottle of beer. But when I am very ill, he tells me to rest and have two bottles of beer!” Memorable words spoken at dusk by Father Yaakov, a Melchite priest, as we sat on a rickety, monastic veranda in the Galilean hills, near the village of Deir Hanna.

Day had started with pre-dawn prayers in the hillside, cave chapel – begun by the light of oil lamps, concluded in the light of the new day. Just one place and one person that remains a treasured memory from my first visit to Israel and Palestine in the early 1990’s, courtesy of The Friends of St Andrew’s, Jerusalem scholarship. Training for the Church of Scotland ministry at the time, the opportunities and experiences that I received from The Friends’ scholarship continue to shape views and beliefs decades later. In time it led to organising a pilgrimage of British Army Chaplains to Israel and Palestine to mark the Millennium; years later, to the invitation of author, Walter Dunlop to speak at St Columba’s, Pont Street, London on St Andrew’s, Jerusalem - WWI Memorial, Living Church. Long may the ripples continue outwards. **Rev Angus MacLeod, St Columba’s Pont Street, London 5**

‘I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope’ Psalm 130:5

I write on day 326 of the war, with the Haaretz headline, ‘Regional war has been averted for now,’ before me. We are over 41,200 deaths into this war and headlines come and go, digital blips. The feeling grows that the war is permanent. It is a dangerous feeling. We are called to see beyond the war, praying daily for God to allow us to see with the eyes of Christ and continue to live his peace and bring it. But it is a difficult thing with the war in everyone’s face.

I awoke today to the sad news that one of our partners, Salwa Duaibis, Co-Founder of the Military Court Watch, has passed. She had a stroke two weeks ago and had surgery which appeared to work. But she had a series of strokes last Thursday and was taken into intensive care and placed on full life support. Her mother, Cedar, will be known to many of you who have been close to Sabeel.

Seeking to prepare myself for Salwa’s funeral, I think of the toll the occupation has been taking on people’s lives. The damage to physical and psychosocial health. And now the war, yet another war, accelerating the lethality. A line from a lecture on pastoral care from a feminist theologian in Toronto comes to mind; ‘Listen to what your body is telling you.’ What, if I may ask the question, is Salwa’s body telling us? What is the body of Christ in Palestine and Israel telling us?

Muriel and I had the pleasure of meeting Salwa on 20 June at the King’s Birthday Reception at the British Consulate in East Jerusalem. A wonderful evening of encounter and conversation. A photo of us is all sunshine and smiles, as you can see. Makes me cry now to see it.



Yesterday the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem issued a Statement On the Urgent Need to Conclude the Present War and Turn from the Pursuit of Death and Destruction Towards the Promotion of Life and Peace.

Decrying the horrors and terrors of the war, promoting the peace of Christ, they conclude with an appeal to the body of Christ worldwide, and to all peace-loving people, to hear the call to be peacemakers in our time. Here are their words:

Finally, we appeal to Christians and all those of goodwill around the world to promote a vision of life and peace throughout our war-torn region, recalling Christ’s words, quoted above, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God’ (Matthew 5.9). ... Let us all recommit ourselves towards working and praying together in the hope that, in the grace of the Almighty, we might begin to realise this sacred vision of peace among all God’s children.

Update on Umm al Kheir

I wrote in the previous newsletter about the village of Umm Al Kheir in the south Hebron hills. Sadly, there is more to report. On 26 June, the Israeli military entered the village and destroyed the homes of fifty villagers, as well as the community centre and the building housing the village's electricity generator. The generator is a loss to everyone, as the Israeli authorities do not permit the villagers to have access to mains electricity; ironically, electricity cables pass above the village from the illegal settlement of Carmel (built on Umm Al Kheir land) to the settlers' chicken barn.

The following day diplomats from several European countries, including the UK, visited the village. The diplomats called on the Israeli authorities to halt demolitions in Umm Al Kheir, citing the risk of forcible transfer; this is significant in legal terms because forcible transfer, whether individual or mass, is prohibited by Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949).

On 3 July settlers destroyed the village's water pipe. In late July there were to be two weddings in the village. The villagers hired a wedding tent and got permission from the Israeli civil administration to erect it for a few days. However, once the tent was up settlers from Carmel dressed in uniform arrived and demanded that the villagers take it down; the villagers did so, under threat of it being destroyed. Meantime, settler incursions into the village have continued. Then, on 14 August, the bulldozers returned. This time they demolished the homes of 28 people, including 20 children. The homes demolished had been built in the previous few weeks to replace those demolished on 26 June.



Appallingly for the community, this is the 18th occasion on which the Israeli authorities have carried out demolitions in Umm Al Kheir. This trauma is not something in the past: as one of the young men in the village commented that day, 'It is our present, and it is our future.'

So it's good that the villagers have good friends. One long-term friend is the organisation Hebron International Resource Network (HIRN). HIRN has supported a number of village projects over the years. It is good to see that this year they have provided funding for a summer camp for the children; pleasingly, some members of The Friends donated towards this.

And it's especially good to know that HIRN's founder will be in Scotland in October. **The Friends are delighted to be co-hosting his speaking event in Dunblane Cathedral at 2pm on Thursday 17 October 2024. This will be an excellent opportunity to hear about HIRN's work.**

A Warm Welcome to Two New Committee Members



Rev Dr Ian Alexander *I am presently the staff person in the Church of Scotland working on International Partnerships. Building on the legacy of international mission work, today the Church of Scotland is a partner to churches in other parts of the world seeking to share faith, life and resources, and standing in solidarity on issues of social justice with partner churches and organisations around the world.*

I started getting involved with justice issues relating to Palestine and Israel when serving the Presbyterian Church USA in their office to the United Nations from 1992 -95. I was later Middle East Secretary for the Church of Scotland and part of the creation of the EAPPI Programme in the UK in 2001 with the Quakers and Christian Aid. I worked with the World Council of Churches in the Middle East Area, with Sabeel Theology Centre in Jerusalem as a mission worker sent by the Church of Scotland and the United Church of Christ/Disciples of Christ USA, and also spent some time in Italy working with the Waldensian Church. Despite the reality, my hope remains that justice will prevail as each of us work for it; Naim Ateek reminds us: “Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, for they shall be filled. (Matt 5:6)



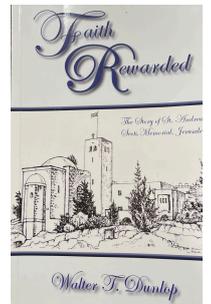
Val Brown

I'm delighted to have been asked to join The Friends and I look forward to working alongside you all over the coming years. My day job is with Christian Aid where I have been since 2003, although I have recently taken over as head of the team in Scotland. It's a varied and interesting role that lets me engage with partner churches nationally and locally, as well as get to work with advocacy partners as we seek to challenge the structures that keep people poor.

Longer ago than I care to admit, I was on the Church of Scotland's World Mission council and was put on the Middle East Committee, which I later convened. Having come in with little to no knowledge of the church's work there, I have been fortunate enough to have travelled to IoPt a few times to meet partners and get a glimpse of what life is like for people. On the back of that a few of us started the 24th of the month prayers for peace, as a means to share the stories and pray for the peoples of the land. I look forward to being part of a group that continues to do that.

From “Faith Rewarded” by Walter Dunlop

In front of the Communion Table in St Andrew's Jerusalem there is a brass plaque which bears the words: *In remembrance of the pious wish of King Robert Bruce that his heart should be buried in Jerusalem. 1329+7th June +1929. In celebration of the sixth centenary of his death. Given by citizens of Dunfermline and Melrose.*



Keep in Touch.....

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

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

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