



A Message from our Convener



How I wish I could write happy stories in the Newsletter every time. Happy stories of the enriching and fulfilling work that the ministers in Tiberias and Jerusalem are doing day after day. Happy stories of little improvements to the church buildings which The Friends have been able to support. Happy stories of the creative and energetic achievements of our partner churches and organisations. These are the stories we want to hear: and when we have been able to hear any of them recently it has been wonderful.

But these kind of stories are often made almost impossible by the killing, by the misery, by the cruelty: by the daily repetition of the news of tears and death. We are in danger of “normalisation”: of believing that violence and hatred and war are just the way things are. So of course the announcement of a ceasefire is important and welcome and to be celebrated. But even the announcement of a ceasefire is hedged around by so many doubts and hesitations and fears that it brings little relief. So far at least. Which makes it so difficult to know what to write which will not immediately be out-of-date.

But I have two examples to follow. One is the Bishop. I had never heard of Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde, the spiritual leader of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, until her courageous, beautiful, and heartfelt sermon after the inauguration of President Trump. Her gentle but firm call for mercy, compassion, justice, and moral clarity is an example for us all and an example for The Friends. In the uncertainty that follows the ceasefire a call for mercy, compassion, justice and moral clarity is always right and always necessary and always right for The Friends. When she said that now is a time to stand with those who are vulnerable, marginalized, and plagued by fear she was speaking for The Friends.

The other example is St Paul. When he was writing his letters I am sure that – like me writing this one – he would have loved to tell touching stories of brave lives and good works. But over and over again he found himself overtaken by events: conflicts and rows and dissent kept getting in the way of what he wanted to write about. So he wrote about dissents to the Romans and the Corinthians and the Galatians. But he never allowed the uncertainty and unhappiness and fear to erase what he knew he needed to write about. In the midst of all the mess staring him in the face he needed to write about God. He needed to write about faith and hope and love. He needed to write about peace.

This is perhaps his most famous passage, 1 Corinthians 13, in “The Message” version. “We don’t yet see things clearly. We’re squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won’t be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We’ll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us! But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.”

The Very Rev Andrew McLellan

Narrowing the Road

The Very Rev Sally Fulton's sermon at The Friends St Andrew's Day service was much appreciated. There follows a flavour of what she shared.



Christian Aid has a unique Bible Study model called 'Just Scripture', where we bring groups from the UK and the global south together to discuss a text, sharing the insights of their traditions and lived experience. They work and get to know each other over several online sessions. One of these studies focussed on The Good Samaritan, and during a conversation something new to me emerged.

One of the participants said, "Perhaps the deep power of encounters like these is that they narrow the road to the point where you cannot walk by - you can no longer cross over and pretend not to notice. Perhaps walking humbly with our God calls us to not only cross over, but to narrow the gap to the point where there is no them and us, only us."

In a world where we are more divided, where the lines are drawn so rigidly, where we can and do exist in our own echo chambers and where inequity is threatening to suffocate empathy, walking humbly calls for more than a brief foray into the lived experience of others ... What if, instead of saying and living a 'thereby the grace of God go I', we lived a deeper truth – a 'when it happens to one, it happens to us all - no, it happens to me' life that insists we are one body, not a lot of various parts, some critical, others expendable.

But the Good Samaritan still has a deeper story to tell. And as I re-read it, it dawned on me that there is a character consistently overlooked but whose response merits our consideration - the innkeeper. True, the Good Samaritan braves the return of the thieves and binds the wounds of a complete stranger, a stranger most would immediately consider an enemy. True, he models admirable, inspirational empathy and care. But, then, he hands the innkeeper a couple of quid and leaves the real gritty, gruelling, who-knows-how-long-this- will-go-on-for work to someone else.

It is the innkeeper who has to finish the job. It is the innkeeper who will care and toil and nurse and nurture day after day. It is the innkeeper who will listen to the fear and the anger and the frustration of this abused and wounded person. It is the innkeeper who takes on the responsibility to keep on caring even when he's had more than enough or when fear drives recovery backwards and the day of release for both of them seems as far off as it ever was.

It is the innkeeper who has taken on this daunting but desperately important task in faith ... trusting the Samaritan is good on his word that he will return. Feels familiar somehow.

Friends of St Andrews Jerusalem, lovers of God, trusters in Christ ... you are in kinship with this overlooked, under-rated, critical character in a story teetering on the brink of cliché. And you know, don't you - that there is still a new story to tell. Friends of St Andrews Jerusalem, lovers of God, 'trusters' in Christ, keep narrowing the road so that the world cannot walk by, can no longer cross over and pretend not to notice. Keep walking humbly with your God, closing the gap until there is no them and us, only us.

Remembering Christmas 2024 in Tiberias

With small and gathered congregations it is hard to predict what will happen, especially since some are displaced and the war in Lebanon was just moving into a ceasefire as we planned for Christmas. So, in Tiberias we decided to focus on Christmas Eve and held a service of lessons and carols. It was a traditional format but shorter than the familiar, with some new carols included.



About 50 people attended, and the feedback was warm and appreciative. With a mainly Israeli audience in a heavily polarised situation it made sense to let the texts speak for themselves with a few lines of commentary from me in between. We sang *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, but we sang the traditional words, although I told the congregation that because of the situation in Bethlehem today several new versions have been written. There is a tightrope to be walked between challenge and uplift, and it is not easy to balance. Having heard the famous words of John 1:14 in the Message translation, *The Word put on flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood*, we sang a relatively new carol by Shirley Erena Murray:

I found a lovely version on YouTube with an original tune by Jim Strathdee which I played as a reflection. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ImtQmgXbWg We finished our service with 'Let there be peace on earth...and let it begin with me.'

Rev Muriel Pearson

*There is no child so small,
no scrap of life so precious
who is not born like Jesus,
whose cry is like us all.*

*There is no child unfed,
left hungry now at Christmas
but God will ask for justice,
for shelter and for bread.*

*There is no child so lost,
no refugee so nameless
that God will leave us blameless,
who share no care or cost.*

*There is no child so cheap,
in warfare or destruction
that love cannot take action
when God is made to weep.*

*There is not one of us
who could not be more giving,
and in the gift more loving,
to light a star for peace.*

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From *Faith Rewarded* by Walter T Dunlop

When the Rev Colin Morton arrived (in Jerusalem) in 1988 to take up his post as Minister of St Andrew's, the First Intifada was well underway. At an early stage in his ministry, it was very clear to Colin that to understand more fully and address the difficulties Palestinians were facing, required the Church of Scotland to have much closer ties with the indigenous churches and the many community organisations working in the areas. By working alongside its Partners the Church achieved a deeper insight into the issues facing local churches and their associated organisations.

After a long period of illness, Colin died in June, 2011. At the Thanksgiving Service in Edinburgh, The Rev Clarence Musgrave said of Colin's ministry: 'It was his absolute conviction that God's love was not limited to one person, one group, one tribe, one nation, or adherents of one religion, God's love embraced all, and because of that, we also have to embrace all. So, through his ministry in Jerusalem, two words were like guiding beacons - Justice, from which flowed a recognition of the Humanity of everyone. Justice and Humanity, to love God was to love all his creatures- be they, Christian, Jewish or Muslim.'

From Scholar to Dog Collar

In September 2021 I left my job at St Michael's Parish Church as their Youth and Family Outreach Worker to begin training for ministry. Since then, lots of things have happened that you might expect from ministry training. Family life and academic study, church placements, NHS chaplaincy, sermons, funerals, weddings, school assemblies, Guilds, hospice visits, holiday clubs and even fancy dress. One thing I never, ever expected was Israel and Palestine becoming such a hugely significant part of my journey.



One afternoon at the University of Glasgow, Rev Dr Doug Gay, explained that candidates for ministry were invited on a trip to the Holy Lands, as part of the training. An all expenses paid trip for one week. I could not believe it!

That week was so meaningful for each of us who went. I never thought I would get to walk where Jesus had walked, and see places I had only read about. A highlight was getting to spend time with local Christians. We visited Wi'am and The Tent of Nations in the West Bank and Sindyanna of Galilee in Cana, and The House of Grace in Haifa.

As part of my Masters Degree I had to write a dissertation on a subject of my choosing. I chose to write about hope, what the Church in Scotland can learn about hope from our partners in Palestine and Israel. The Friends of St Andrews Jerusalem and Tiberias awarded me the scholarship and I went back, this time on my own. I spent two weeks learning, one week with the women of Sindyanna, and one week with the people of Wi'am. In Bethlehem I stayed in the Bible College where I learned from Palestinian Christians about the unique challenges of training for ministry in their context. I learned much about hope, about faith and about love, even love for enemies. And I never even imagined I would ever go to the Holy Land. God is good. He is full of unexpected blessings for each of us.



Rev Trish with friends from 'The Friends' at her ordination in December

In December, I was ordained as a Church of Scotland Minister. It was a wonderful evening, overwhelming and full of joy. It was a real blessing to have some of the committee members there with me. I am just beginning a new adventure with Jesus. What I saw and experienced in Israel and Palestine, and what I learned from people there, will stay with me and I know will have a huge impact on my future ministry.

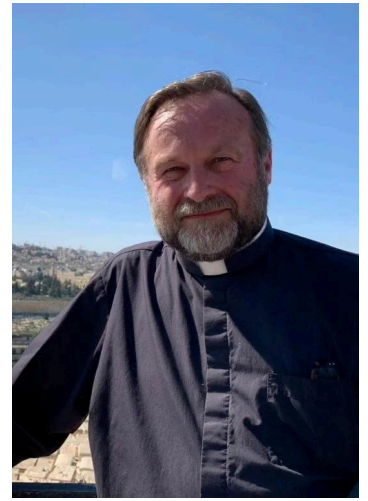
Rev Trish Archibald

Reflections on the Ceasefire

But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.

1 Peter 3.15

Though our members, staff and partners are giving thanks for the ceasefire, responses to it vary with the identity and location of the speaker. Many are feeling happy and sad at the same time, conflicted, not knowing what will happen next.



Having prayed and worked for the ceasefire, there is a relief at the news, but strong mistrust as well of the ceasefire among Palestinian partners, with respect to Gaza itself and to the West Bank. It is a kind of disbelieving relief. That said, we have members who are rejoicing, feeling that the release of hostages in particular, lifts the whole country. Here are two quotes, which I have anonymised:

The ceasefire? Happy and sad at the same time. Happy because they've stopped. Sad because people can't find where they live. Because all their houses were demolished. Most have lost their families. Or they don't know if they are dead or alive. Or with the Israelis, in prison. They have no food.

And every day the check points are really tough. It is affecting our staff. Long hours to get to work. In Jericho two days ago, for example, the Greek Orthodox went to the site where Jesus was baptised. The Jordan. Every year they go. (The baptism of Jesus is one of the early observances in the season of Epiphany.) And they had a very hard time at the checkpoint after it, getting back.

We are feeling they will increase difficulties again on the West Bank. Every day – in Nablus, Jericho, Jenin. A member of Staff at St Andrew's Scots House Hotel, Jerusalem

The ceasefire? To be honest it's conflicting. We are very happy about it. We were praying for it and working for it. But it doesn't change anything on the West Bank. And in Gaza, we are asking will they resume bombing? I don't know what will happen next, or what it will mean. We are mistrusting the ceasefire. We don't know how to react right now.

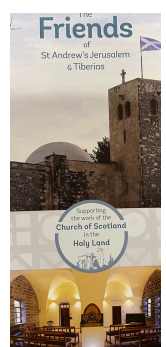
Pastor of one of our Partner Churches



**The Friends of St Andrew's
Jerusalem & Tiberias**

Would you like to join 'The Friends'?

Check out Join the Friends at www.friendsofstandrews.com



The Friends - Recent Donations

Thanks to the generosity of our members The Friends have been able to make donations to a number of organisations. Here are brief updates on three of them provided by Maureen Jack (left).



Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)

Teams from the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) returned to the West Bank in early 2024, after a few months' absence in the immediate aftermath of the attack of 7 October 2023. Strikingly, the number of applications from the UK and Ireland to serve in 2025 was significantly higher than in previous years. For more information about EAPPI and to read the latest eyewitness stories from Ecumenical Accompaniers please see www.eyewitnessblogs.com.



Dr Hussan Abu Safiyah

Dr Hussan Abu Safiyeh was the Director of Gaza's Kamal Adwan Hospital, last seen on 27 December 2024 as he walked towards an Israeli tank after a devastating attack on the hospital. Initially, the Israeli authorities denied all knowledge of his whereabouts. It was only after a legal action by Physicians for Human Rights Israel (also a recipient of a donation from The Friends) that the authorities acknowledged that the Israeli military had indeed arrested him. His detention without charge has



been extended until 13 February 2025. It is not clear where he is being held, and there is grave concern about his condition, with unconfirmed reports of torture.

The Parents Circle

Part of the work of the Parents Circle, an organisation whose Israeli and Palestinian members have all lost close family members to violence, has been to hold meetings in schools. Despite an April 2024 court ruling against a decision to bar them from schools, in December 2024 The Haaretz newspaper 15/12/24 confirmed Israel's Education Ministry ban as follows:

'To justify the renewed disqualification of the Parents Circle, the Education Ministry claimed that during wartime, "a platform for remarks that weaken the IDF's aims" must not be permitted and that what the organization's representatives said to the students could "undermine [their] faith in the justice of [Israel's] path." It also said that "the programme conflicts with the ministry's overall goals – educating for social solidarity.'"



On a more positive note, however, two bereaved fathers, Palestinian Bassam Aramin and Rami Elhanan had private audiences with the Pope in the Vatican in March and August 2024.

The Friends hope to be able to continue to support fine organisations such as these through your continued generosity.



Why Justice Pilgrimages?



The Rev Dr Ian Alexander's recently completed doctorate explored the impacts of pilgrimages for justice and peace to the land of Christ's birth. This short summary is a 'taster' for a longer version on The Friends website. Check it out.

The Kairos Document, originating from a group of Palestinian theologians in December 2009, was a "call to remember that injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere and that the Israeli occupation is unjust and a sin against humanity and against God". Seeking a practical outcome, the writers encouraged people from the churches around the world not just to think and pray and advocate for peace, but to make a physical journey to meet the people, from all different identities, and especially the contemporary Christians in the land of Christ's birth, based on their understanding that such journeys, or pilgrimages, can help in developing awareness of the situation and such pilgrims can then be better equipped for advocacy on their return to their homes.

My exploration sought to gather enough qualitative information to gain insight and a better understanding of how participation in a justice pilgrimage affected the participants: if the pilgrims better grasped the reality of life in Israel and the oPt, and particularly for the Christian community living alongside their Jewish and Muslim neighbours; of how Palestinian life was lived under occupation; as well as whether there was an impact on the pilgrim's faith, their prayer life, and any social and political actions undertaken in support of peace and justice for all peoples of the land of the Holy One.

Karl Barth insisted that righteousness (justice) always requires favouring the, "threatened innocent, the oppressed poor, the widow, orphans and aliens..." Munther Isaac sees the need for lament in our lives and political processes. Just as the ancient Israelites, dealing with "their own Nakba" found help in crying out to God from their weakness. Isaac sees such lament as the first steps necessary towards effecting change and bringing a new reality.

Moving from lament into action is a way for the justice pilgrim to turn their experience into ongoing engagement and support in the pursuit of justice for the weaker party. Key themes from the indigenous Palestinian Christians are for outside friends to journey with them, accompany them with a ministry of presence; stand up and speak out for justice in the situation; and support their work for peace and reconciliation through practical action. Pilgrims sharing in the lament for present day injustices perpetrated on the Palestinian people by the State of Israel can practise the Palestinian tradition of "sumud", an Arabic word translated as steadfastness or resilience.

A Sample of Pilgrim Responses:

- **Did meeting and conversing with local Jewish, Muslim or secular people on the modern-day situation change your understanding of current social, political and economic realities in Israel and Palestine? Yes 93% No 7%**
- **Has your experience had any impact on your prayer life. Yes 73% No 27%**
- **Have you been more politically engaged on the situation since returning? Yes 70% No 30%**

Of equal interest are the comments from those surveyed in more detail. One example: Could you identify a moment of transformation?

Transformation happened gradually as I began to hear Palestinians share their stories. But it was a "Come and See, Go and Tell" trip in 2002 that had the greatest impact. I heard stories of oppression I had never heard before, and kept hearing, "Go back home and tell the people we are not what you see on CNN." That became a sacred "call" to me, and I have been speaking and teaching ever since. **Much more on The Friends website. 7**

Let us pray....

Into your hands, O Lord,
we place our families, our neighbours,
our brothers and sisters in Christ,
and all whom we have met today . . .

Pause.

Lord, have mercy

Into your hands, O Lord,
we place all who are victims
of prejudice, oppression or
neglect; the unwanted, the frail . . .

Pause.

Lord, have mercy

Into your hands, O Lord,
we place all who are restless, sick,
or prey to the powers of evil . . .

Pause.

Lord, have mercy

Into your hands, O Lord,
we place the work of Christian Aid,
its staff and volunteers

Pause.

Lord, have mercy

Into your hands, O Lord
We place The Friends,
the congregation and ministers
of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias,
and all our partners

Pause.

Lord, have mercy

Amen

The Very Rev Andrew McLellan



The Israel - Gaza war severely impacted our business, particularly the tourism sector, which is the main source of revenue for our hotel. Occupancy rates at the House Hotel have dropped dramatically, and we have had almost no tourists for 15 months, putting us in an incredibly difficult financial situation.

Locals were also reluctant to visit Jerusalem, and many were hesitant to stay in non-Israeli hotels, further affecting our business. The situation took a toll on our staff, with West Bank workers being prevented from entering Jerusalem to work. Meanwhile, our Jerusalem-based employees had to stop working due to the lack of business and financial strain. We still do not have enough business to employ all our staff full-time, and this is a source of concern for us. People are struggling.

In an attempt to generate income, we explored alternative revenue streams, such as hosting a Christmas market and organising private events. While these efforts provided some relief, they were not enough to make a significant impact on our financial situation.

Despite the challenges we have faced, this situation has made us stronger, allowing us to navigate through financial difficulties without the need for loans or similar assistance.

At the moment, we are receiving some local reservations, and we are hopeful that after the ceasefire, more tourists will return. However, we anticipate that large groups may be limited, and we expect most guests to be individuals until the end of September. If the situation remains calm, we believe this could set the stage for a stronger year in 2026. We remain optimistic, as we believe that this Holy Land holds a unique resilience. After every challenge—whether it's war or the pandemic—tourism has emerged stronger, and we trust that this pattern will continue. **Lilian Lepejian, Manager**

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/TheFriendsStAndrewsJerusalemandTiberias).

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