

PARTNERPLAN

Joint Partner Plan Letter from **Stewart Gillan & Muriel Pearson** **Israel** **September 2024**

'How long, O Lord?' Habakkuk, 1.1

Dear all,

Your thoughts and your prayers are so appreciated. Thanks to everyone who has taken the time to message, and for everyone concerned and wondering how to pray.

Here is a short catch up from each of us, with some specific prayer points at the end of letter.

Stewart

The current war, as it grinds on towards the one-year mark on 7 October, challenges us in spirit and body to continue to serve the peace of Christ in meaningful ways. Thinking of my experience since General Assembly, I wish to tell of a recent visit to a partner that surfaced the importance of tending to our spiritual journeys through these days.

Last week I visited Anton Goodman at the Jerusalem office of Rabbis for Human Rights, to catch up, and to hand over our donation to this year's Interfaith March for Human Rights and Peace. Anton serves as Director of Partnerships and is as apt to be in a field pulling potatoes with Palestinians as he is in a meeting planning interfaith prayers with representatives of the three Abrahamic faiths. They have much to do with each other, he might note.

During our conversation we spoke of dark nights of the soul and of the toll the war is taking on the mental health of those who continue to pray and work for peace, seeking to build bridges in the face of the suspicion and opposition of their people. 'Many are losing their grip on themselves,' he said. 'It's hard not to.' We took a moment with that, relating moments in our own journeys, before speaking of current work concerning which we might find a way to partner: protective presence in, and advocacy for, Bedouin communities subject to repeated settler incursions in the South Hebron Hills, the recruitment of volunteers to accompany the olive harvest in Palestinian groves, and the organisation of interfaith prayers near Bethlehem. I just about remembered to hand him our donation.

Our conversation reminded me of something the redoubtable anti-apartheid theologian Wolfram Kistner said. He had recently retired as the Justice Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, and was wont with his wife to welcome visitors to his home for coffee and check-ins. 'Those who fight for human rights,' he said, 'must themselves remain human.'

Thinking back on it, I look for encouragement and guidance from our faith traditions here in Jerusalem and home in Scotland. May I offer one of each:

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'The Lord will turn his face toward you, and give you peace.'

This inscription was found on a silver amulet in a tomb at the base of the ridge on which St Andrew's Jerusalem is built, dated to 600 BCE, and is the earliest extant text from the Hebrew bible, part of the Aaronic Blessing (Numbers 6:24–26). We know it as, 'The Lord bless you and keep you' (CH4 796). It gives point to our practice in worship of singing a prayer for peace to the Lord in Arabic, English and Hebrew at three points during the Intercessory Prayers each Sunday Morning in Jerusalem and Tiberias. Known as the 'Ya rabba,' it translates as:

'God of peace in your wisdom, give us the will to seek peace;
God of peace and of healing, fill with your peace every heart.'

Our cry for peace joins those of people of faith down the centuries. In Scotland, Celtic Christian tradition offers prayers and blessings that tell us our forebears were no strangers to the pain and joy of serving the peace of Christ in the world. The following blessing, which will be known to many of you, captures it well as we carry on:

May the Christ who walks on wounded feet
walk with you on the road.
May the Christ who serves with wounded hands
stretch out your hands to serve.
May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart
open your hearts to love.
May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet,
and may everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you.

Muriel

It is hard to believe it is almost a year since I was heading to Jerusalem along the Jordan Valley Road with Joanna, our Presbytery Clerk on 7th October. Following advice from the assistant in a petrol station we turned and came home. The horror of what happened that day and the multiple horrors to follow were unimaginable.

Not long after Israel's retaliatory strike on Gaza, we came back to Scotland, along with our Methodist Ecumenical Associate. Because of my Dad's illness and death, it was April 2024 before I was properly back.

Since then, I've been here in Tiberias. The hotel has been home to 100 'guests from the north': evacuees who left the northern border region because of Hezbollah rocket attacks. Numbers have fallen to about 30. It is hard to live in a hotel room. Church operated by Zoom for a while between Jerusalem and Tiberias and it has been impossible to connect in person with partners as we can't travel to the West Bank.

The toll of death and injury in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territory and the constant anxiety in Israel for and memory of those held hostage is overwhelming. Immediately following 7th October many groups who had been patiently working for years to bring Palestinians and Israelis together fell apart. Others, with great bravery, have tried to 'hold on to humanity'. Rabbis for Human Rights a prime example.

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I have been part of an online community, Heart to Heart, which uses Non-Violent Communication (NVC) to allow Palestinians, Israelis and people from around the world to connect with empathy, even to people they profoundly disagree with. Speaking Arabic, Hebrew and English, in large and small groups, we try to really hear what is being said and show empathy for it. This is not easy when someone says something you think is wrong, or is racist or apparently judgmental. 'Connect before you correct' is one of the mantras.

But such human connections seem overwhelmed by the relentless shelling, the humanitarian crisis and the emboldened rightwing Zionists who are pushing Palestinians from their land and homes, even setting fire to them, while soldiers stand by and arrest any Palestinian who resists.

For the past week the roar of planes overhead and the occasional bangs from the Iron Dome intercepting a missile from Hezbollah have kept me awake, and with millions I wonder what next? A just peace where everyone can live in peace with equal rights seems so far away.

My friend Nadia recently said, 'Hope is an action; something you do.' Let us build hope by staying informed, pressing for cease fire, demanding peace with justice for all living in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, and by holding on to the humanity of all.

Grace and Peace to you all,

Stewart, Mission Partner Jerusalem

Muriel, Mission Partner Tiberias

Prayer points

- As the anniversary of 7th October approaches, hold before God all who suffer from Hamas' attacks on 7th October, and for all who suffer as a result of Israel's war on Gaza. Hold before God all who suffer as a result of Israel's occupation of the West Bank.
- Pray for those in the North of Israel subjected to rocket attack from Hezbollah, displaced from their homes; and for those in Lebanon killed, injured and displaced by Israeli attacks.
- Pray for all bereaved, all wounded, all suffering trauma and distress, all held hostage or imprisoned, whether Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or Druze.
- Pray for those charged with care of the vulnerable on all sides, and raise up leaders with a vision of peace with justice for all.
- Pray for bold support for peace from the international community, and for international law to be upheld and strengthened.
- Pray for aid workers, UNRWA staff, medics and journalists who are struggling to bring humanitarian aid with limited resources.
- Pray for those struggling to hold onto their humanity, who come under suspicion for reaching out to neighbours who are different from them.
- Pray for us and our ecumenical associates at St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias, that we may know God's peace in seeking to carry out the ministry of Christ.

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