

PARTNERPLAN

Muriel Pearson - Israel September 2022

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Dear Friends

My last letter was sent from the Gorbals. I'm pleased to report that I have been in Israel/Palestine since the beginning of April! This letter gives me an opportunity to tell you what I've been up to and ask for specific prayer points.

My time in Israel/Palestine began with a very enjoyable and immersive week with the board of Tabeetha School. <https://tabeethaschool.org/> I and my fellow board members, who are all very experienced in the world of education, had tasked ourselves with developing a strategic plan for the school.



Tabeeetha has been providing education in Jaffa since the school was founded by Jane Walker Arnott in 1863. She saw the need to educate girls and began with a small number teaching reading, writing, arithmetic and sewing. The well-known travel entrepreneur Thomas Cook was so impressed by her work he provided the means to purchase land and build a school. This building is still the main building of the school today. The visit was thoroughly enjoyable, but challenging. We saw the uniqueness and the value of a Christian English medium school bringing together Jews, Christians and Muslims, articulated by senior students who described to us how their encounters with diversity and the Christian values of love and acceptance taught them to celebrate difference and equipped them for life in a multicultural land. Many former pupils have gone on to work in key roles both in Israel and abroad. We met a committed staff, under the leadership of new head Ms Mona Ashkar, who had helped them navigate the troubled waters of the Covid pandemic and was now helping them to look ahead. We also saw that if the school is to continue as a centre of excellence major capital investment is needed to bring the building up to 21st century standards. IT provision also requires serious investment. The board is committed to working strategically on this over the next five years, and I am excited to be involved both at board level and as one of the school chaplains.

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After this energetic beginning the pace slowed a bit as I began to settle into life in Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee. I've used the phrase 'settle in' but I want to continue to feel 'unsettled' because I don't want to normalise all the issues around Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the blockage of Gaza and the fact that since 2018 the new Nation State or Nationality laws have privileged Jewish citizens and the Hebrew language over other citizens and languages. The Supreme Court in 2021 rejected claims that this law was unconstitutional, nevertheless many Palestinian (Arab) Israelis see it as a severe impediment to equal rights for all citizens.



Yakvei, newly painted

The Scots Hotel in Galilee and the Guest House in Jerusalem continue to provide employment to people from all communities and work hard to be harmonious and fair places of work. The success of this is seen in the outstanding feedback from guests who often comment on the attentiveness of staff. I have benefitted from this too as staff from the hotel have welcomed me warmly, answered my questions, helped me organise myself and looked after me (at a distance) when I had Covid.

I was really disappointed that my first encounter with Covid 19 coincided with a visit by a group of probationers and newly qualified ministers from Trinity College in Glasgow and New College in Edinburgh and so I didn't get to meet them. I have heard some of their impressions, though, and I am confident that many will have a new relationship with and continuing interest in Israel/Palestine.

'Relationship' is the key word when thinking about my role here. I am developing relationships with members of the congregation and ecumenical partners and particularly with partner organisations committed to peace and justice in grassroots ways. Building trust and exploring opportunities is not quick work, but I am encouraged by the number of invitations received and by the potential to support projects like Sindyanna of the Galilee <https://www.sindyanna.com/> and House of Grace <https://house-grace.org/> At present I am working with Jamal Shehade on a plan to bring him to Scotland in early 2023 both to meet folk involved in similar work supporting ex-prisoners and their families and to share the story of the extraordinary hospitable project he and his family run in Haifa. Get in touch with me or with Kenny Roger (kroger@churchofscotland.org.uk) if you'd like to be part of Jamal's programme.

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Jamal and Muriel

An enjoyable experience in July was to join one of St George's Jerusalem's study pilgrimages, *In the Footsteps of Jesus*. <https://www.saintgeorgescollegejerusalem.com/> Not only did I gain a healthy respect for all pilgrims who survive a punishing programme of early starts and hot days I was able to visit some fascinating places with expert guides, and it really brought Jesus' journeys through Galilee, Judea and Samaria alive. I also met some great folk!



I have been very grateful for the interest and support of the Friends of St Andrews Jerusalem and Tiberias, who in preparation for the arrival of Rev Dr Stewart Gillan and his family and in support of my work have been redesigning and updating their publicity and will be relaunching at their September AGM. Becoming a Friend is a very practical way to support our work and the work of our partners both financially and through advocacy and sharing. <https://www.standrewsjerusalem.org/friends/>

There are so many places I have not yet been and people with whom we have historic links I have not yet met, including the Bedoiun of Um Al Khair, the Nasser family at Tent of Nations and friends in Gaza. But I will get there.

Looking back over the past five months I am aware that whether for short or for long spells there have always been companions on the road. There was Julia and Ellis Conway who served for three months as hosts for Educational Opportunities groups coming from the US to Galilee, or

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Ecumenical Accompaniers who stay two or three nights in the flat above the manse. I was particularly glad of Cheryl who washed dishes as I singlehandedly catered for a choir who had performed in St Andrew's Tiberias and for Andrea who was my Covid buddy, as she was also positive at the same time I was. Andrea and I were sick as workmen renovated the outside of Yakvei and when we were better though still positive we escaped the banging and construction by visiting some remote national parks where we didn't meet a soul but could enjoy the fresh air.



Julie and Ellis Conway

I have been blogging about some of the people I've met and current affairs, and you can subscribe to that at <https://wordpress.com/view/murielpearson.com> I also post on Facebook and I have promised to make some wee films, though not done that yet.

Thank you for your interest and support. I hope this newsletter has been informative. If there are particular questions you have, or if you are planning a visit, please be in touch. It would be a pleasure to help you meet some of the 'living stones' of this land as well as recommend interesting visits.

Prayer points

- That the congregations would deepen in faith and fellowship and grow in numbers
- For the work of partners seeking justice and working for peace
- For opportunities to deepen relationships and build connections between the Church of Scotland at home and partners here.
- For all who work in the hotel and guest house and school and those who support them through their work as members of the boards of governors.
- For those involved through the UN and diplomatic routes in bringing people together to build a just peace
- For those who are at the sharp end and face an uncertain future
- For our ecumenical partners, seeking deeper relationships and wisdom in facing challenges

Muriel