

PARTNER PLAN

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Dear Friends,

Greetings from a hot and humid Cairo. I returned on 1st August for a final 3 months, and it is so good to be back and to see everyone again. As the plane touched down, I found a sense of homecoming and as the college vehicle joined the dual carriageway into town, I found that I had even missed the chaotic Cairo traffic!

It was good to be back in Scotland, however, and I enjoyed being able to connect with the congregations in Sutherland Presbytery. My thanks to all those who offered hospitality, drove me places and showed an interest in my work: it was much appreciated. It was too bad that I was not able to visit Shetland, but hope that the radical changes happening there work out well. I had hoped this summer to start the process of looking for a charge, but I discovered that there was new legislation and that I needed to be registered with the Church in a certain category. This has now been done, though it did take all summer to accomplish it! I have been given the go-ahead to look for a charge, though it was strongly recommended that I act as a locum for some months beforehand. I have therefore arranged to be locum in a church in Linlithgow when I come back to Scotland in November. Once there I will start to look at the various vacancies!



Montazah Palace in Alexandria

Within a week of my arrival I travelled to Alexandria for an overnight to attend the final church service of Medhat Fayeze as associate pastor in Ibrihamiya church. Medhat had taught me Egyptian Arabic, though I found his comments on the political situation and his insights into the Egyptian church equally helpful. He has just been appointed to teach Church History at the Seminary, but first of all must take a Master's degree (followed hopefully by a Doctorate). He applied to New College in Edinburgh and has been accepted, so will start in September this year. He will come to Scotland with his wife, Marian, and thankfully both have just received their visas. I am looking forward to seeing them and showing them something of

Scotland when I return. Whilst I was in Alexandria, I took the opportunity to meet up with one of the students, Peter Marko, who is doing his summer placement in a church there. It was good to see how well he related to the members of the congregation. We managed to visit one of the former royal palaces in Alexandria, before he went off for a 3 day camp with the Youths (in Egyptian terms, youths tend to be in their 20s and early 30s). He bemoaned the lack of young people in the

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congregation compared to his home area in Upper Egypt, but from a Scottish perspective, I was amazed at the number of youths both at the service and registering to attend camp!

Like most neighbourhoods in the city, my area of Abbassiya has been more like a farmyard in August, with stalls for sheep and cows at almost every street corner. This has to do with the Eid Al Adha feast, which remembers the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son, though



ETSC wishing our Muslim neighbours a Happy Eid

for Muslims that means Ishmael and not Isaac! Families buy a sheep (or cow or camel) and slaughter it. They often do outside on the street, and on the first day of the feast the roads are full of pools of blood. It can be pretty gruesome to see the animals being killed and also to have to find a way round the blood. This year it was not too bad, however, as the government has been discouraging the slaughter of animals on the street with big fines. The Egyptian media has also been highlighting animal cruelty issues and even how vegetarians can appreciate the feast! Behind all the blood and gore there is a strong message of personal sacrifice and also a thankfulness of what God has given us, and anyone killing an animal must give part of it away to the poor. But then in Islam there is a strong emphasis on almsgiving and helping the less fortunate, and I am very conscious how fewer homeless people and beggars I see on the streets of Cairo compared to Edinburgh. That doesn't mean to say that they are not

there, and certainly there are many who live in poverty, but there is also a great deal of social concern, and both the Church and the Mosque are in the forefront of providing much-needed care. As with Ramadan, the Seminary always puts out a banner wishing our Muslim neighbours well as they celebrate their feast.

The Muslim feast coincided with one of the big Christian fast period, during which the Coptic Orthodox Christians give up animal produce (meat, milk and eggs). During this time they come together for an evening service every night followed by a bible study. These services were absolutely packed (and with lots of young people) and there was a very nice atmosphere at them. It was good, because the Coptic Orthodox Church went through a difficult time at the beginning of August with the death of the abbot of one of the big monasteries. He was found murdered in his cell by, it transpired, a fellow monk. The abbot was well known for his ecumenical approach and he was a regular speaker at the Centre for Arab Christianity at the Seminary. His murder emphasised divisions within the Coptic Orthodox Church.



Salim

It has been good to catch up with a number of the students, and it was especially good to see Salim, who graduated in June and who returned to Syria just a few days after my arrival. It was the first time he would travel back to Syria in four years, and during that time his father died, so it would be an emotional homecoming. Someone else is now pastoring the congregation which he had been looking after before coming to the Seminary, so he will be appointed to another church. He is very much hoping to be part of the enormous healing process of that fractured nation.

It is also good being back at St Andrew's, and I found myself preaching the first two Fridays back (We have our services on Fridays, as most people are off work then). Being an international congregation, there is always some movement with people moving away, but fortunately over

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the summer we seem to have had one or two new people moving in, which is encouraging. Over the next couple of months I will spend two days a week working at StARS, the St Andrew's refugee project, helping with English, especially for those tasked with writing reports.

The new academic year at ETSC starts with a retreat in the middle of September. However, it has been busy at the seminary over the summer with various conferences and courses; a week long national elders' conference has just finished. The summer has also been a time for building work, as we try to improve the infrastructure and create more space.

Over the next few weeks I hope to visit some more of the students in their congregations. I hope that you enjoy the rest of the summer, wherever you are.

Peace & Blessings

Colin