

PARTNERPLAN

Stewart Gillan – Israel October 2023

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Dear Friends

Listening to Faure's *Requiem* will not bring you closer to Gaza, but it might bring you closer to yourself. Hearing it as a lament not for one person but for hundreds, running to thousands since 7 October. Kyrie eleison, the voices sing. Lord have mercy. Yes, upon us all.

Many of you, in your encouraging messages of support as we made our way, Muriel and I, overland from Jerusalem to Amman, and then by air to Abu Dhabi and London, before reaching Glasgow at midnight on Friday 13th, gave thanks for our safe return and then added words that told us you knew it had not been easy for us to leave. Leave parishioners, partners, friends and colleagues behind – some of whom had chosen to stay, many more of whom had no choice.

We came out with volunteers from the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, and three Methodist colleagues, Dave, Bea and Lynne. Praying prayers of gratitude and grief, and for a ceasefire, refusing to be told it was too early for such a prayer. A significant moment along the way was the short trip from the Israeli side of Sheikh Hussein bridge to the Jordanian side. For five shekels, and an exit doc, you bus it across the River Jordan. 'It is the wise decision,' said my friend Jim, drawing on years of experience as a chaplain to the forces. 'Often they are the ones that hurt most.'



The five travellers at Sheikh Hussein: Dave, Muriel, myself, Lynne and Bea.

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I have arrived not all at once. Happy to see Sarah and the kids at the airport, but not happy to be home like this. I am forgetting where I left the keys. Letting cups of coffee go cold. Trying to find my way around our new flat – we had only just moved.

Watching the news out of Gaza and Israel, the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka came to mind. He spoke of those who are shaken by their experience in this world, and called for a new political community to be formed: the solidarity of the shaken. I used to think it a good idea, but for others, the shaken ones, to build. I no longer place myself outside it.

So, we are here. But how might we be usefully here? Muriel and I are keeping up with the St Andrew's community on our WhatsApp group and on zoom, checking in, telling stories, joining in prayer, comparing notes. Daily prayers at 7 in the morning in the immediate aftermath of the Hamas attacks on Israeli civilians have given way to Sunday Worship online at 10.00am Jerusalem time, and prayers at 7.00pm on Wednesdays. The blast at Al Ahli Episcopal Hospital shook us all up, sending us to prayer in extremis from different sides of the wall. We are a diverse congregation, which presents challenges and opportunities for understanding what we are going through respectively before the Lord. In its Statement, the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, quoted the Apostle Paul to the Church in Corinth, 'We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed ... struck down, but not destroyed.'

Working with Kenny Roger and Rebecca McGonigle at Faith Action, and Carol Finlay and team, we wish to connect with you in the days and weeks to come. It is not possible to know how long the war will run, but at the moment it looks possible to plan visits and events in Presbyteries and congregations. We would love to meet you, check in, join in prayer, and see what we might be able to do together, including communicating with partners and colleagues in Israel, Gaza and Palestine, and advocacy with our governments here concerning their policy on the war and the protection of Christian communities.

Muriel has listed the following prayer points in her letter, which I share with you:

- Pray for leadership to move beyond the current crisis
- Pray for all who have lost loved ones or have been injured
- Pray for a cease fire and humanitarian aid
- Pray for all those Israelis and Palestinians, displaced from their homes or who have lost their jobs overnight
- Pray for all those seeking to find ways to be 'human' in face of great inhumanity
- Pray for staff at the Scots Hotel, the St Andrew's House Hotel and Tabeetha School
- Continue to pray for peace with justice
- Continue to pray to hold both Palestinian and Israeli together in our hearts

Through these days, may we be to each other in the power of the Holy Spirit, strength in need, comfort in sorrow, and companions on this journey of spiritual communion and mission partnership with our friends and colleagues in Israel and Palestine.

Grace and peace to you,
Stewart