



# The Society of Friends of St Andrew's, Jerusalem

November 2018

## Newsletter No 8

### News from the Minister St Andrew's, Jerusalem *Rev John McCulloch*



*In a world of noise, confusion and conflict it is necessary that there be places of silence, inner discipline and peace. In such places love can blossom.*  
(Thomas Merton)

I have been reading Thomas Merton over the last few months, and in a context where there are so many competing demands and voices, he reminds me of the importance of taking time to sit in silence, to be renewed by the God of peace. The church should also offer a space which contrasts with the confusion and conflict all around us, opening-up the possibilities so that love and compassion can blossom.

The context of the Church and Christianity across Israel/ Palestine is very challenging. Without going over well-worn territory, large numbers of Christians have left Palestine (and the Middle East as a whole), and the Christian population of Israel/Palestine is estimated at

around 1.9% of the total population (many of these are Palestinian West Bank Christians who are not allowed to travel to Jerusalem). Those who speak English (and would want to attend an English-speaking congregation) are a tiny minority of the ones who actually could attend. When you add in the location of St Andrews Jerusalem, it becomes even more challenging, given that we are in West Jerusalem where most inhabitants would attend the synagogue.

There is a real challenge in how do you build a church congregation in this context. Despite this, there is room for some encouragement. Our numbers have been holding-up over the summer months, when Jerusalem is quiet. And some of those attending have been coming regularly, week by week (although most of these are here in Jerusalem only part of the year).



Also, the Ecumenical Women's Bible study that meets monthly at the guesthouse has been flourishing, with many Messianic Jewish women coming, as well as Palestinian Christians to share and study together.

I am keen to develop a space at the back of the church, with some wicker furniture, art installations and contemplative space for

reflection and prayer, that would also serve as an area for the children during the service. It would also enable the Ecumenical Bible study to meet in a more conducive space where they can sing and worship and share more freely without disturbing the guesthouse customers.

The other encouraging aspect of church life is that we now have a fledgling children's work within Sunday worship. This has meant that families feel more welcome at St Andrews, as there is always something for them.



Now that Jerusalem & Tiberias are one congregation, this has enabled myself and Rev Kate McDonald to share vision and ideas about how we move forward. I don't want our congregations just to serve the visiting pilgrim groups (although this is an important aspect of ministry here), but we need the congregations to become more viable in their own right.

In my mind it is imperative that the congregation is outward looking, missionally focussed and generous (even with the little it has). I was reading Rabbi Sack's *To Heal a Fractured World*, and he has an analogy which I think is very relevant for the church here:



*There are two seas in Israel: the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. The latter (the Sea of Galilee) is full of life: fish, birds, vegetation. The former (the*

*Dead Sea), as its name suggests, contains no life at all. Yet they are both fed by the same river, the Jordan. The difference is that the Sea of Galilee*

*receives water at one end and gives out water at the other. The Dead Sea receives but does not give. The Jordan ends there. To receive without reciprocating is a kind of death. To live is to give.*

As a family we have also visited and befriended the community of Um Al Khair, and our children have enjoyed playing and getting to know the Bedouin children. My friend Aziz said to me 'we are used to receiving international delegations, but your children are the only foreign children who have ever been here and played with our children. This is very special'.

In June 2018 I visited Gaza for the second time this year.



Despite the hardship

and political impasse, there are many who are working on the ground to try and bring about hope in a situation of real despair. The Church of Scotland supports primary care units and a hospital, women's cooperative groups and many other community initiatives which trying to improve the daily lives of the most vulnerable in society. I also was privileged to visit the small community of Christians, and to hear first-hand of their witness of hope in such a challenging context.



Please keep the people of Gaza in your prayers.

I also interact and am trying to make more inroads into the Jewish community here beyond our partners, which takes some time. Whilst I have had plenty of contact with Rabbis for Human Rights and B'TSELEM, I feel it is also important to engage with as wide a range of Reform and progressive Rabbis, to see how we can accompany them in their attempts to critique and question the profound injustices deeply embedded in this intractable situation of military occupation and an ever-more nationalistic and exclusivist brand of ultra-Zionism.

It is important that we don't treat the Israeli or Palestinian sides as monoliths, but find a way of supporting and walking alongside both Jews and Palestinians who are locked in this tragic conflict. The Church of Scotland is well-placed to continue to do so, given that our institutions are all within the State of Israel and most of our partners are across the West Bank & Gaza (we do of course have quite a few within Israel too).

*Rev John McCulloch*



## ... and St Andrew's, Tiberias as reported by Rev Kate McDonald, the Minister

It's been a busy summer, not least because between June and September, I baptised



seven people and led six others in the reaffirmation of their baptismal vows. Tiberias is fifteen minutes away from one of the Jordan River baptismal sites, and in the past I have occasionally been contacted by individual pilgrims wishing to be baptised. We often have an email exchange — or sometimes Skype conversation — about their journey of faith, and it's a privilege to then meet them in person for the baptism. But this year — with the exception of a family from Australia reaffirming their vows — all those baptised live locally, including 3 children from Nazareth who were baptised in the church, and whose families then hosted meals afterwards at the Scots Hotel. It looks likely that we will have more families from the Arab Christian community coming to the church for a baptism and the hotel for the reception after.

It's wonderful to see both used in this way, but I'm also having to be sensitive to the different traditions' views on baptism (and women's ordination!) and encourage those who are active members in another congregation to invite their own priest/pastor to perform the baptism at St Andrew's. It is such a joy to see people responding in faith to God's love in their lives!

In less good news, sadly the church experienced several incidents of minor vandalism over the summer. We had one break-in, which fortunately did not result in major damage or theft thanks to the swift action of the Scots Hotel security team, a separate instance when the sign and intercom buttons were damaged, and several occasions in which tyres were set on fire next to the church wall. On the advice of local police, we have now installed CCTV cameras covering the external areas of the church, linked directly to the Scots Hotel security system. It is impossible to know whether any of the attacks were targeted because we are a church, or simply random acts of violence to which we are more susceptible because we are in the town centre. In the summer months when there are more visitors in Tiberias, vandalism seems to increase.

In July, the church and Scots Hotel made a delivery of furniture, bedding and sun shades to the Bedouin village of Umm al-Khair in the



South Hebron Hills. The village is in Area C of the West Bank and therefore

under the control of Israel's Civil Administration. Building permits are rarely given to communities like it, so their structures are considered illegal and under constant threat of demolition. When I had visited in October 2017, even one of the goat pens had a demolition order on it. The children play on a playground which has no shade to shelter them from the searing summer sun, and the villagers would like to develop their community centre but had few supplies. The Scots Hotel had a

storage room filled with unused furniture and fittings which would be perfect. We asked the united congregation to get involved by covering the cost of the delivery, which they agreed to do. Rev

John McCulloch and I, along with Peter Hehle, General Manager of



the Scots Hotel, travelled with the lorry and spent the afternoon with the villagers learning more about their life under military occupation and their vision for the future.

For those interested in reading more about that visit, I wrote a longer post about it on my blog, *Imagination of Peace*:

<https://imaginationofpeace.com/2018/07/26/hope-is-resistance/>.

In August, I met with Hadas Lahav, Director of Sindyanna in Kana of Galilee. Sindyanna— one of the Church of Scotland partners also supported by Friends of St Andrew's — currently exports its olive oil across much of Europe, the US, and even to Japan. Its close link with the Church of Scotland gives it a unique connection.

After the Friends' generous donation of hymnals earlier this year we are finally in receipt of all of them. Thank you again for this wonderful gift.

As always, I am grateful for the support — both practical and prayerful — given to us by the Friends of St Andrew's as we endeavour to serve in this beautiful and conflicted land.

*Rev Kate McDonald*

## Tabeetha School



I have been down to Tabeetha on several occasions, for the summer Graduation of 2018, for a school Board, to give assemblies to both primary and secondary pupils, to meet with staff and

teachers. There are inevitably huge challenges in running a school from Scotland, and it is good that more consideration is going to be given about how we move forward. The school does offer something unique in terms of its welcoming Christian ethos and its attempt to bring Jewish, Arab and International children together.

*Rev John McCulloch*

## St Andrew's Guest House, Jerusalem



The World Mission Council is in the throes of combining the work of the Guesthouse with that of the Church to enable a more joined-up approach to events in both locations.

Occupancy in the Guesthouse during 2018 has risen to 80-90% which is hugely encouraging – a large increase being noted from Arab tourists as well as Christians.

It is anticipated that essential maintenance work, including critical repairs to the roof and stained glass windows in the St Andrew's will now be undertaken in 2019.

## ... and the Scots Hotel, Tiberias



Reflecting the trend at the Guesthouse, occupancy at the Scots Hotel continues to provide encouraging statistics.

## Scholarly News ....

### 2019 Scholarship - £2,000

The Society offers a wonderful opportunity for a divinity student to apply for a scholarship for up to £2,000. Level of qualification and age holds no barrier. The expectation in gaining a scholarship is that it will be used by students to undertake a course of study, formal or informal, within the Holy Land, which will directly enhance their studies here in Scotland. The subject of the study is for the student to determine and the application will be judged on its relevance to their university course.

Historically, most students have spent around four weeks in the region during their summer vacation, but over the years a great variety of topics have been researched each requiring different timescales.

Do you, or anyone you know, want to be considered?

Further information and application forms are available from [Dorothy McMonagle](#) and should be returned by Friday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

## 2018 Scholar – Craig Dobney



This year we awarded one scholarship. Craig Dobney, who was in the RAF for 21 years, is currently in his final year of training for the Ministry. He has already spent time in the Holy Land

and, through the award, capitalised on St Andrews' contacts amongst the Palestinian Christians, particularly those who are involved with [Sunbula](#) and [Hadeel](#). To identify and better understand the challenges that they face was of benefit not only to Craig as he moves towards the Ministry, but offered awareness for the projects that they support.

### Craig gives us a general overview...

The main purpose of my 3-week visit was to meet with some of the partners of Sunbula and Hadeel in the Jerusalem and West Bank areas. Some of these partners manufacture a number of different crafts, the income of which helps them to support their families and each other in often difficult circumstances. Others use craft making as a social activity bringing together people with and without learning difficulties. The people involved come from a range of cultural, social and religious backgrounds. Shirabe Yamada Executive Director of Sunbula was instrumental in allowing me access to the groups involved and did a wonderful job as an enabler, guide, interpreter, explainer and indeed friend.



On other days I visited a number of religious and tourist sites

including Mount of Olives, the Garden Tomb, Gethsemane, the Biblical Zoo and the Museum of Israel which houses the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Reverend John McCulloch took me to a Bedouin village, to Hebron and allowed me to take part in worship at St Andrews Church. He also showed me the new Israeli development around the Tent of Nations, the Walled Off Hotel near Checkpoint 300. I also accompanied him to Tabeetha School for assembly and graduation. I was particularly impressed by the outreach work being undertaken by St Andrews at this time.

I returned to the UK with a much clearer picture of the current political situation in the Holy Land (although the clarification of some aspects left me with greater difficulty in understanding others). The people I met and the places I visited had a transformational effect on me and I certainly see a much greater emphasis needs to be placed upon the social responsibilities of the church, not only in the Holy Land but throughout the world, and here in Scotland.

Once again I must thank the Friends for giving me this wonderful opportunity through this important scholarship.

*Craig Dobney*





## How we support St Andrews



As part of the enhancement of the back of the Church for Bible studies, prayer meetings and events for smaller groups, the Friends are pleased to support the purchase of a Bedouin rug. Along with providing welcome, peace, warmth and comfort (especially in the winter) it will offer an opportunity to showcase the work of the communities supported by Sunbula.

As mentioned in his report, the Minister is also sourcing some wicker seating for the area which the Society is happy to support.



The Society is delighted to continue to donate towards the Reception following the St Andrew's Day Service. This annual event is much appreciated not only by the local Christian family but the wider religious community.



## St Andrew's Day Service 2018 Commemorating the end of WW1



Friday 30th November 2018      2.00pm  
St Cuthbert's Parish Church  
Lothian Road, Edinburgh

Choir of  
George Watson's College,  
Edinburgh

Please join us  
for tea and coffee  
after the Service

A retiring collection will be taken in aid of Sindyanna

## Supporting St Andrew's in Jerusalem



Along with The Scots Hotel, the Guesthouse and Tabeetha, in addition to the collection at this year's Service, The Friends have pledged to support [Sindyanna](#) of Galilee in their Olive Grove project at Rocha for the next four years. This year our contribution amounts to £5,000.

**Sindyanna** is run entirely by women, and markets Palestinian olive products on the principles of Fair Trade. Established in 1996 it aims to advance the Arab economy in Israel to help preserve the land and support the mainstay of the farmers. Any oil which cannot be used for food is made into soap, using traditional methods, **Sindyanna** being responsible for cleaning, packing and exporting the products.



## Annual General Meeting 2019

Friday 17th May 2019

11.00 for 11.30

**St Cuthbert's Church,  
Lothian Road  
Edinburgh**

**Lunch will follow the meeting – an  
opportunity to hear firsthand  
the impressions and reflections of  
Rev John McCulloch**

**Can we help you? – just click on the link.**

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[The Society's Hon. Secretary \(Walter Dunlop\)](#)

[The Society's Membership Secretary \(Walter Dunlop\)](#)

[Church of Scotland World Mission Council](#)

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*With thanks to WMC of the Church of Scotland for the photograph of Rev  
John McCulloch on page 1*