

Friends of St Andrew's Jerusalem & Tiberias

Newsletter

August 2022



Dear Friends

The demands and roles played by the new Ministry in Jerusalem and Tiberias are changing. In response, the Friends are excited to be changing alongside them.

Read through our newsletter to see what's new and how you too can continue to support us all.

Important Dates

AGM 2022

Friday 9th September at 11.30am

St Cuthbert's Church, Lothian Road, Edinburgh
Welcome coffee at 11.00.

Please let us know if you plan to join us for a sandwich lunch so that we have catered for you.

The link will be sent out by email in good time should you wish to join remotely. Just let us know on friends@standrewsjerusalem.org.

St Andrew's Day 2022

30th November at 2pm

St Cuthbert's Church, Edinburgh.

Live streaming will also be available. Details to follow nearer the time.

Are you interested in travelling to join the congregation at **St Andrew's in Jerusalem?**

If so, contact us on

friends@standrewsjerusalem.org.

Notes from the Ministers

Rev Stewart Gillan

As Stewart prepares to arrive, with his family, in Jerusalem and contemplates life and work in the shared ministry with Muriel, he reflects on an incident that occurred during his visit in May.

I had arrived on 5 May, Independence Day for Israel, a day of dancing and singing for many; a day of harrowing memories for many others. I felt anew the challenge of our calling to care for all, to seek the peace and healing of all, in the knowledge that there can be no peace with justice for all, asking how can we with integrity rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep: a question that will be with us always in our ministry. Yet we do pray for the peace of Jerusalem and Ramallah, seeking the blessing of Shalom and Salaam.

The **killing of Shireen Abu Akleh** happened on the morning Rev Angleena Keizer (of the Methodist Church) took me to Wi'am, Hebron and the Tent of Nations. Everywhere we encountered shattered, gutted people. Nor did Shireen's funeral on the 13th go off peacefully. When news broke of her killing, it was my privilege to be with Daoud (Nassar of Tent of Nations) whose conviction is, 'We refuse to be enemies.' He left a post on Facebook, saying: "On a day heavy with grief, sudden and aggravated, our prayers are with the family and friends of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, and all of Palestine, Israel and the Middle East. Amidst many conflicts it is a costly, and inspiring, discipleship of our Lord. Shireen's funeral is at 3.00pm in the Greek Catholic Church near Jaffa Gate. May she enter fully into the peace and joy of the Lord."



Within hours scores of women were testifying to the importance of Shireen, her life and work, in their own lives. Her legacy was already a living force.

As all-pervading as Shireen's story was, it was a decision by the Supreme Court against the interests of Bedouin at Masafa Yatta that occasioned a series of considerations regarding how Muriel and I go about making statements in response to incidents and developments that exercise us greatly. Discussion between the two of us, and an understanding with Bishop Azar that we may if we wish feed our statements through him to the Heads of Churches, when they are planning to make a joint response, are early attempts to answer the question.

Rev Muriel Pearson

Muriel shares an excerpt from her blog following her visit to House of Grace, one of the Partners.



Hospitality and **House of Grace** are synonymous. Not only are there coffee

and water and sweet treats as a visitor, but hospitality is at the heart of the vision of the House of Grace itself, opened to receive former prisoners transitioning to life 'on the outside' by Kamil and Agnes Shehade in 1982.

Kamil and Agnes had a vision for the abandoned shell of The Church of our Lady in downtown Haifa. They rebuilt it, and opened it as a half-way house for men leaving prison as some of the most marginalized people in Israeli society.

People seek it out and find refuge here.

11% of the population of Haifa is Arab and 20% across Israel; they make up 40% of the prison population in Israel. Some of these men have been imprisoned for a long time for minor crimes, most have faced enormous struggles in life, including a lack of stability in family life, poor education and lack of opportunity. It is difficult to find well paid work, build a home, raise a family; in short, to flourish.

Some have been so long in a harsh prison environment that kindness and good relationships with partners and children are harder to sustain.

Through its programmes, House of Grace helps men find some inner peace, some self-esteem, learn some skills and build better relationships.

Over time, obvious needs for family support in the community and young people who have far less spent on them in terms of education and after school activities led to new programmes. The infrastructure of this became really important in the pandemic.



This is what grassroots activism is. Small acts of grace on limited budgets, bearing fruit over time in unforeseen ways. And still faithful to Kamil and Agnes's Matthew 25 faith.

Ecumenical Partners of St Andrew's

There are three ecumenical partners associated with the life of St Andrew's Jerusalem and Tiberias. Working closely with volunteer partners in ministry, they lead worship and contribute through friendship and association with the congregation.

In this edition we meet **Anita Ventner**

Anita was born in Germany but grew up in South Africa. In 2011 she came to Bethlehem Bible College as a volunteer. At first she was involved in setting up data bases for the college but when the manager of the tiny shop retired she saw an opportunity to use her gifts there.



Anita explains, 'I saw the potential to develop the Gift Shop generating much more income in order to support the scholarship fund and help with the cost of general upkeep.'

The shop, which is committed to fair trade principles, deals directly with 60 vendors and indirectly with 60 more. Many of the vendors are marginalized in some way. Most trade is now on-line and Anita believes both artisan makers and buyers are given a fair price.

Anita continues, 'We also support three centers for mentally and physically disabled people. I help develop new products, educate vendors with proper cost estimation, quality control of products and give them the platform through The Star Bazaar (Bethlehem Bible College Gift Shop) as well as our online shop to sell their products.'

Anita has supported children's work and a women's group at St Andrew's Jerusalem, and takes part in our online 'Sacred Space' as well as leading worship on an occasional basis. She has worshipped with St Andrew's Jerusalem since 2015.

Keeping in touch with the Ministers

To sign up for **partnership letters** from Stewart and Muriel, contact nskinner@churchofscotland.org.uk or friends@standrewsjerusalem.org

Follow **Stewart** on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/stewart.gillan.7>

and **Muriel** on Twitter @murielpearson60 or through her **blog**: <https://wordpress.com/view/murielpearson.com>.



Middle East Update

Here we share with you an abridged version of the news that is contained in the Annual Report, written by Kenny Roger, Middle East Secretary.

St Andrew's Jerusalem

During the uncertainty within the Covid period, and indeed into 2022, we were indebted to a group of people who kept the church running when it was allowed to be open, and who dealt with pastoral issues and concerns. Anita Ventner, Angleena Keizer, Doug Dicks, and Marc Falconer did an excellent job in supporting, alongside the elders of the Church.

Renovations were also completed on the Church, meaning that the building is now water-tight, and the roof is not leaking. The painting will be completed in due course, now that the damp has dried out.

Stewart Gillan will start a new chapter in the life of the Church in September, and we are looking forward to seeing the fruits of his ministry in the coming months and years.

St Andrew's Tiberias

I know that the two churches are one officially, but of course there are so many differences! Tiberias is indebted Joanna Oakley Levstein who kept St Andrew's running, along with support from the Jerusalem team, whilst there was an absence of a minister between Kate's departure in October 2020, and Muriel's arrival.

Muriel Pearson arrived, eventually, in early 2022 following many visa delays. You will see from her report that it has been a busy time. She has made a very positive impression on many people, and has been busy meeting our partners, and we are very much looking forward to seeing Muriel's ministry flourishing over the coming years.

St Andrew's Guesthouse, Jerusalem

Having been closed for about 18 months, the Guesthouse re-opened in May 2021, and after an up-and-down few months, came back to normal around March 2022. It has been flourishing ever since.

The renovations have been very well received and the group business has started returning. Thankfully we were able to support many of our staff during the period of Covid-19, which meant that they came back to work for us when we re-opened. Finding staff in the industry has been very difficult, so we are grateful that our staff also stood by the Guesthouse.

Occupancy and income are back to pre-pandemic levels in many months, although sadly the new venture with the Restaurant on the terrace has not worked as well as we would have hoped.

Scots Hotel

The Hotel has operated really well since it managed to re-open. It has had spells of being open, and spells of being closed, but the Israel market was keen to travel and so many made the trip to Tiberias to take time away, as they were unable to go abroad. They continue now to operate in a good way, with standards increasing all the time and guest satisfaction at an all-time high. Staff are happy and Shaul is doing an excellent job as Manager.

Tabeetha School

Mona Ashkar was appointed just before covid-19, and so was thrown completely in at the deep end, but has managed superbly. Many changes have happened, but the standards set have never dropped. Staff contracts are being re-done to iron out anomalies, and the next stage is a large renovation project, as the school has suffered from lack of attention to the fabric over the years. The Board of Governors are leading on this and hope to gain approval by the end of this year for the work to continue.



Our Partners



Through the past two years, our partners have been steadfast in fighting for justice, and highlighting the ways in which the occupation is harming the whole of Palestine, and Israel itself.

Sadly, our funding possibilities have been severely reduced, in line with the financial situation of the church. This has meant that we have often been unable to help financially at the times of greatest need, but there has been a huge amount of generosity from some parishes in Scotland which has helped, and now that we will have two Ministers on the ground, our 'attentive accompaniment' will be able to resume in full.

Special offer from Sindyanna

Take advantage of the offer from The Oil Merchant
£8.95 per 500ml bottle of the award-winning

Olive Oil from Sindyanna
free delivery for 6 bottles or more.

The Extra Unified Olive Oil is from

The Scottish Grove – a project funded by **The Friends**.

Email on om@oilmerchant.co.uk, or call 020 8740 1335,

quoting *Friends of St Andrew's*



Changes from The Friends

Walter Dunlop

Walter originally joined The Friends in his capacity as Middle East Secretary.



He took over as Secretary / Membership Secretary in 2012 from which role he has guided the Administrative Committee with unstinting devotion, energy and attention.

Having spent years with his family in Tiberias, Walter was the ideal person to fill the posts. Not only does he know the country well but his unique liaison with those in 121 stood him in good stead when he eventually arrived there on the World Mission Council.

He has steered The Friends through constitutional updates, he has taken care of the Scholars and he has shared his vision for the future.

Outwith the committee, knowledge and love of St Andrew's Jerusalem provide Walter with the impetus to write *Faith Rewarded*, the history of the church that emphasises "a depth of faith that leaves you questioning your own".

Thank you, Walter. Your wisdom and guidance have set us up to manage the changing face of today's challenges.

Changes you can be part of

We want **your friends** to:

- **know** what The Friends are doing
- **become** a Friend
- **enable** The Friends to support the work of St Andrew's in the Holy Land
- **consider** our Scholarship programme

Ask them to look at our website or contact us on friends@standrewsjerusalem.org

Scholarship Changes



Prior to the students of New College, Edinburgh and Trinity College, Glasgow, heading out to the Holy Land in June, Craig Dobney (a past scholar and member of our Administrative Committee) was able to share the experiences and benefits gained from his award. Already this has borne fruit in terms of interest and we are now hoping that the word will spread and more potential scholars will come forward.

An online meeting with some of those who travelled to Jerusalem has been arranged so that, based on feedback, we can adjust our award to respond to the needs of the students more appropriately.

Possibilities will include supporting one of the courses offered by St George's College, Jerusalem or working alongside one of the Partners in a more deliberate way; the goal being to deepen their understanding of the contemporary problems of the Holy Land.

Meantime... **applications for future scholarship awards** are still being considered. Please pass the word around and encourage interested parties to email us on friends@standrewsjerusalem.org.

News to Know

Our **new brochure** detailing membership opportunities, our history, the scholarship programme and more will be available from mid-September. Collect them at the AGM or St Andrew's Day Service, or we can send them.

The November issue of **Life and Work** will highlight St Andrew's and the importance of The Friends to the Ministers.

Do you have Netflix?

Award winning Palestinian film **The Present** is a drama about a Palestinian man and his daughter in search of a gift for his wife. Twice in the day they have to pass through Israeli checkpoints. Challenging, tender, moving. Worth watching.

