

The Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust Newsletter

No. 16 June 2019



*An ecumenical trust seeking to promote contacts between Christian communities in Britain
and those in the Holy Land and neighbouring countries.*

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THY KINGDOM COME

I write this with Ascension past and Pentecost anticipated. You may be involved with one of the many Thy Kingdom Come initiatives, but you are likely also to be praying every day for our Christian sisters and brothers across the Middle East. Our charity continues to seek a solution to the issues which we have been outlining to you over many months, and at our Annual Meeting last November. We have to find the best way to allow us to continue our support of these our fellow disciples of Jesus.

At our AGM in November we passed a motion agreeing that we would continue to seek a way to align with another charity. At that time we thought The Friends of the Holy Land Trust might provide a suitable 'home' for the Michael Prior Fund, but this has not proved to be the case. We followed this up with an alternative approach to Embrace the Middle East who have been very positive and their Chief Executive has offered a number of possible ways to 'adopt' Living Stones with its assets while honouring the memory of Michael Prior and maintaining some of the ethos of Living Stones. These would include Encounter visits for young people and for Ordinands, and the continuance of our grants to students for further studies. However there is not yet consensus among trustees for this solution.

Theology has stood at the heart of the work of Living Stones, and in recent years Anthony O'Mahony, director of the centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, has supported the functioning of our Theology Group. As you know sadly Heythrop was closed down last year, and Anthony has been at Blackfriars, University of Oxford. A suggested alternative option involves management of the Michael Prior Fund through that route, ensuring the continuance of contextual Middle East Theology studies and research, with a Michael Prior Lecture and conferences, and publishing of a Yearbook

Once there is more clarity of detail the trustees will offer alternatives to members. Though it has not received the support of the Executive, a third option might be raised at an Annual or Extraordinary Meeting, namely that the charity could reduce the number of trustees, the frequency of meetings, the administrative burdens and the range of work it undertakes, a solution which has been described as 'Living Stones Lite'.

Let us ALL prayerfully consider how we think this work we have been involved with can best be continued. Apart from the constant deterioration of justice in Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza, the turmoil, terror and troubles across the entire Middle East, particularly since 2003, have devastated the Christian communities more than any others. The UK government actions for over a century give us all a responsibility for concern.

May the Wind and Fire of Pentecost clear our minds to see the way forward for The Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust.

THEOLOGY GROUP

The next meeting of the Theology group will take place on Monday 1st July in Oxford, starting at 12.30 and ending at 3pm. The topic will be on the Eastern Churches and the Environmental Crisis, and will be led by Revd Robin Gibbons. If you would like to attend please let Len Harrow and the group know, using the Living Stones email address editor@livingstonesonline.org.uk so as to help plan numbers.

MICHAEL PRIOR LECTURE 2019

We are pleased to announce that Chris Doyle, of the Council for the Advancement of Arab British Understanding, has agreed to give the Michael Prior Lecture entitled "An Unholy Mess" on **Saturday 16th November 2019**, at Our Lady of Victories Church, Kensington, a venue we have used on previous occasions. The AGM will also take place then, perhaps being an EGM!. **Please put that date in your diary now.**

Michael Prior Scholarship Recipients 2019

Prior to our most recent Trustees Meeting in May, the Scholarship Subcommittee met to debate applications from a number of students, for assistance with their further studies. They recommended acceptance of all the requests and the other trustees then endorsed the decision.



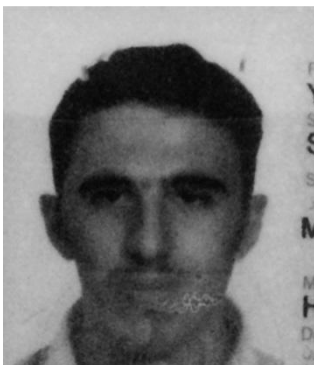
Emil Halloun is from Ibillin in the Galilee, completing his **PhD in English** at Bar Ilan University, Tel Aviv. Thesis topic is "From figures of strength to figures of weakness; Enmity and amity in the theory of Harold Bloom (who is a Jewish writer) and Gianni Vattimo (who is a Christian writer)". He has been granted a further £1000 to study in the library at Tantur Ecumenical Centre in Jerusalem. (Emil spoke eloquently at our Seminar in Jerusalem in January 2018, as reported in the Newsletter a year ago.)



Rawan Munayeh (pictured here with husband Jack and baby Salim) lives in Jerusalem and is mid-way through her **PhD in Education** at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Her thesis proposal has been accepted and is entitled "Approaches and coping strategies of Arab and Jewish teachers with diversity in school: personal, professional and organizational factors". She has been granted £2000 for this year of study.



Grace Zoughbi (seen here with her husband Revd Michael Arteen) is a Palestinian from Bethlehem, doing a **PhD** at the London School of Theology, UK. Her aim is to reflect on the issues that limit Palestinian Christian women doing Biblical Studies and explore ways in which these can be removed to enable these women to serve the global body of Christ. She has been granted £2000 for this year.



Yahya Sarsam is from Mosul in Iraq and is currently doing an **MA in English and American Studies** at the University of Salzburg in Austria. He has been granted £2000 to complete the final year of his MA so he can progress to a **PhD in Theology** at the same university with a view to returning to Iraq to serve his church there. His intention is to study manuscripts dealing with Syriac theology, comparing them with the modern genre of theology in anticipation of developing a contextual theology that relates to the current situation facing Middle Eastern Christians.

Four other students were granted assistance towards their potential study at Masters and PhD level. They are awaiting acceptance at the appropriate university or awaiting visas to study in the UK.

Dr Lesley Dawson, Michael Prior Scholarship Secretary

Lesley is also on the executive of the British Palestine Friendship & Twinning Network

Report of British Palestine Friendship and Twinning Network Annual Conference February 2019, Odd Fellows Hall, Stafford

Welcome by the Chair of the Network, followed by welcome to Stafford by the Chair of Stafford-Beit Likour group.

Opening Remarks by British Patron, Sir Vincent Fean

The Network is involved for the long haul to strengthen ties between Britain and Palestine and has been active in many ways this year. Particular congratulations to Oxford-Ramallah group who are approaching formal city twinning.

The issue of visas for Palestinians visiting the UK is still a problem. BPFTN committee is seeking a meeting with the Home Office in this respect. We are encouraging our Palestinian friends to attend the April conference in Nablus. Some of the activities that have worked well in the Network are education and school links. In January, Sir Vincent met the Palestinian Education Minister, who is interested in what we are doing and wants to connect to the Nablus conference.

Presentations from BPFTN groups; Camden/Abu Dis; Oxford/Ramallah Friendship Assn; Northampton/ al-Bireh, Liverpool Friends of Bil'in; Stourbridge/Seir; Walsall/Kobar

Issues raised included advantages and disadvantages of charity status, twinning or friendship status and funding issues. Groups varied in their activities which include selling craft goods, funding and staffing teaching English in Palestine, demonstrations in support of specific Palestinian issues, barriers to communication and the value of reciprocal visits.

Group discussion "What makes a successful twinning and what causes problems?"

SUCCESSFUL TWINNINGS included;

Bringing people over from Palestine, being able to keep going, cultural events, fundraising, key people on both sides, a clear focus – Palestine as a whole or one place in Palestine and a core of 2 or 3 very committed people willing/able to do 90% of the work!

PROBLEMS FOR TWINNING included;

There are so many other ways of supporting Palestine, we need more young people as most group members tend to be older, unofficial twinings may carry less importance, issues with getting visas for Palestinian visitors and financial needs.

Address by Palestine Ambassador Dr Hussam Zomlot (via Skype)

He applauded The Network for being more about action than rhetoric. Congratulations to the Oxford-Ramallah group. The Mayor of Ramallah would visit the UK soon to complete the Twinning process.

Our relationship is not about charity but dignity and partnerships. It is friendship based on human equality, not a donor/recipient relationship. Dr Zomlot referred to several partnerships including Hanwell/Sabastiya (HAFSA) whose AGM he had attended. He underlined the importance of dignity, action and values.

Dr Zomlot spoke of Gaza, where he was born, and proposed a Twinning between Gaza City and a community in the UK and also spoke of the need for a Twinning/Friendship relationship between East Jerusalem and London. He feels it is essential that the British Government recognises the state of Palestine. He promised to work to achieve this historic relationship between the British and the Palestinian peoples.

He referred to the issue of visas for Palestinians as 'mind boggling'. Palestinian students get scholarships to UK universities, but are not allowed into the UK. He spoke of the illegality of the occupation. It is crucial that International and British Law be fully applied.

He congratulated us on a job well done and on the hope that we generate by our actions to build and sustain bridges and friendship.

Address by Palestinian Patron Hanan Al H'roub (via Skype)

I am happy to be with you today and send greetings to you all from Jerusalem, the heart of Palestine. We Palestinians are a people of moderation and welcome our cooperation with you on this basis. We seek the opportunity to share our work together. Our students express their readiness to work together for the common good.

We need to protect the environment for our children's future without violence and suffering. The effects of the violence of the occupation on small children are experienced every day. They grow up with checkpoints, soldiers, shooting etc. The difficulty of bringing up children in this situation is eased only by the availability of education.

We are succeeding in educating our children despite the violence, using the new Palestinian curriculum and training and equipping good teachers. We are thankful for those around the world who support education and build schools in Palestine.

I am a refugee and grew up in a refugee camp. Without UNRWA schools, I would not have a dream, an education, be nominated the best teacher in the world, be speaking to you today.

Report on the BPFTN Conference in Nablus/Sebastye April 2019

Introduction

The conference was organized by Palestinian colleagues in Nablus and Sebastye with telephone/Skype input from two committee members from the UK.

The first day the venue was the Chamber of Commerce building in Nablus and the second day the venue was in Sebastye Municipality. Simultaneous translation between English and Arabic was available on the first day in Nablus by an extremely competent young lady who was a graduate of An Najah University. Translation was provided by Sebastye Municipality at the general meetings and informal translation was provided by group members in the group sessions.

Day One – Nablus

Participants arrived, registered and settled into their seats between 10am and 11am. When all invited guests were present the British and Palestinian national anthems were played.

The programme began with a welcome from **Naseer Arafat**, the Chair of the morning session, who officially declared the conference open.



Munib Masri, the Chair of the Civil Society of the Nablus Governate invited British participants to see Nablus as their home. He said “we cherish and appreciate that you came all the way from the UK and feel that because of your visit there is still hope”.

Adli Yaish, the Mayor of Nablus welcomed the conference to Nablus and mentioned the hunger strike of Palestinian prisoners, and not being able to visit Jerusalem. He said “we are human beings not animals, we want dignity”. He quoted from the Holy Quran that God created humans to meet together.

Zahi Anabtawi on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce welcomed everybody. He showed a PowerPoint presentation on the economic situation in Nablus and its various commercial & industrial activities and mentioned that present trade with the UK is small but developing.

Philip Hall, UK Consul General thanked the Mayor of Nablus and Chamber of Commerce for hosting the conference. He welcomed those from the UK, present at a time of great uncertainty. He reiterated the UK position of support for the Palestinian Authority, the two-state solution, Jerusalem as a shared capital, refusal to recognize annexation of the OPT, and a desire for the occupation to end. Networks such as BPFTN show that people matter and learn about resilience, real values and uncomfortable compromises. The fact that such networks are independent of government control shows that those involved are committed.

Jean Fitzpatrick on behalf of BPFTN planning committee commented she was very moved by the speeches and assured the Palestinians present that we will speak out. “The BPFTN is 15 years old and we are here to witness” she commented. “Thousands of Brits carry out

good actions on behalf of Palestine. 14 British groups & 4 committee members are present” She concluded by saying “we relish the prospect of eating, walking and talking with you”

Mary McGregor, expressed her pleasure at representing the Lord Provost of Dundee and bringing his greetings. The Dundee/Nablus city twinning now existing for 39 years is one of the first civil authority partnerships between the UK to and Palestine. She said "In Nablus where there are restrictions, subjugation and imprisonment we find a cultured people when we visit". She appreciated the honour of being present and the expressions of emotion. "Tears show we care but tears are not enough. To exist is to resist". Mary presented a shield from Dundee to the Mayor.

Tony Pearce, chair of BPFTN gave thanks to all those involved in organizing the conference. He commented “this is my third visit to Palestine, but my first visit to Nablus” He expected to leave from previous visits impressed, he left inspired by Palestinian “summud”. Twinning brings friendship, solidarity, deepens UK understanding and informs them of the situation here.

Sir Vincent Fean, Patron of BPFTN talked about the need for both politics and practice. He paid respect to the dignity of the Palestinian people and suggested that BPFTN should draft a statement to the British government from the conference. He touched upon various issues relating to British/Palestinian cooperation in trade and investment such as the Palestine/British Business Council (encouraging travel writers to visit Palestine), the British Council which currently supports 60 Palestinian academics studying at Masters level in the UK, and MAP cooperating in health visits in both directions.

Tony Richardson, from the Oxford/Ramallah group, **Ursula Walker**, from the Walsall/Kobar group and **Nehad Khanfar**, FONSA (Friends of Nablus and Surrounding Areas) described the activities of their groups.



Dr Lesley Dawson with Living Stones scholarship recipient Jack Nasser

Day Two Sebastye

Delegates were welcomed to the Municipality Building by Abu Yasser, the representative of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Mayor. **Sir Vincent Fean** thanked the Mayor for his greeting and paid tribute to HANSA and their commitment to Sebastye.

Discussion groups on education, health, tourism and land/identity/livelihood took place. Each group had both visitors and local members and informal translation was done by Palestinians fluent in both Arabic and English. Discussion focused on how twinning agreements could help in the area of theses.

The final plenary raised a number of issues

1. There was a need to refresh the links between some of the British and Palestinian groups already set up.
2. There was a need for a similar network to BPFTN to be set up in the West Bank. Discussions need to take place after the Eid to take this forward.
3. Such a network should be democratic and invite all with an interest to attend.
4. A Palestinian network needs transparency of information sharing based in Palestinian culture.
5. There was an acknowledgement that discussion was the most important part of the conference.
6. More information is needed about the British and Palestinian participants attending, with city/town profiles of the British groups present.
7. Milestones need to be laid down so it is possible to measure where the friendships are going.
8. Sir Vincent concluded by saying BPFTN want to come back, and agreed to draft a statement that the BPFTN could send to the British Government on behalf of all present.

And now for something completely different

The Palestine History Tapestry was proposed in 2012 and the first phase completed and launched on the 70th anniversary of The Nakba in 2018. To find out more go to www.palestinianhistorytapestry.org. You can order the book on ISBN 978-1-911072-34-8

and

Mark Calder, a Regional Manager at Embrace the Middle East, is running 14 ultramarathons to raise funds to support the work in Iraq which Embrace is planning to undertake, enabling Iraqi Christian partners to help those returning to their homes after displacement. From building and running schools and healthcare facilities, to rebuilding homes and starting new businesses, Christian communities are aiming to rebuild their communities and economies and create opportunities for the next generation. You can find out more and follow Mark's blog at www.runninghome2019.co.uk

INVITATION TO JOIN

**Jo Simister (Leader) and Revd Adam Dickens (Chaplain)
and Derby City Deanery for the
Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Jerusalem 2020
Thursday 23rd January - Tuesday 4th February 2020**



Join us to:

- ☆ *worship with many denominations (e.g. Greek Orthodox, Armenians, Syrian & Ethiopian Orthodox – as well as Lutherans, Anglicans and Roman Catholics)*
- ☆ *encounter Christians living in Galilee, Jerusalem and the West Bank*
- ☆ *visit community projects, institutions and enterprises in Palestine and Israel*
- ☆ *show support and solidarity with all the people of the Middle East*
- ☆ *engage in dialogue on the theological implications of justice and peace*

12 nights based in Galilee, Taybeh, Jerusalem and Bethlehem: £1700 pp in twin room (£450 single supplement);

8 nights based in Taybeh and Jerusalem: £1250 pp in twin room (£300 single suppl.)

This includes: transport and a driver and interpreter and also a light lunch most days, and all tips. It does not include donations for any speakers or projects visited, or flights.

Flights: I recommend the EasyJet flight from Luton, which costs around £200 return. It is also possible to book an extra bag if you would like to bring clothes, books or other materials for projects and link organisations. *[If you have links with particular projects or personnel, please let me know so that we can include a visit if feasible, or invite representatives to talk to us one evening.]*

Would you like to join us? If you would like to know more, and for booking instructions, please contact Jo Simister: jo.simister@derby.anglican.org.

Jo Simister, previously Vice-Chair of Living Stones writes:

I am very pleased to have been able to arrange a group visit to join in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Jerusalem 2020. This will be the seventh such group I have taken, and I know what a life-changing experience it can be! As a resident of Jerusalem for 10 years, working with Quakers, Save the Children, and various Palestinian universities, I look forward to sharing my knowledge of this special place and its wonderful people. Despite the ongoing difficulties which the Christian and other communities are experiencing in Jerusalem and throughout the area, our presence during this Week of Prayer is greatly appreciated and eagerly welcomed.

Itinerary overview: The 12 days will begin in the Galilee at the Convent of the Beatitudes near Tiberias, from where we shall visit Nazareth and sites around the Sea of Galilee and other places associated with Jesus' ministry.

We shall then move south to Taybeh (biblical Ephraim) in the West Bank, where any 8-day pilgrims will join us.

We shall join the various different denominational churches around Jerusalem for special services for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity each evening and visit communities and projects around the West Bank during the day. The theme for 2020 is "They Showed Us Unusual Kindness" (cf. Acts 28:2) with resources prepared by the Christians of Malta.

Our day-time visits will include Sebastiya, Birkin, Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jericho, Bethany and Nablus in the West Bank.

There will also be free days on Thursday and Friday so that individuals may join local activities such as the 3pm Friday Way of the Cross walk along the Via Dolorosa – and we have suggestions too for various museums, etc.

On the final Sunday we shall attend the liturgy at the Crusader church in Abu Ghosh before dropping the 8-day pilgrims at the airport.

The 12-day group will return to Jerusalem for the closing service of the Week of Prayer and then move to Bethlehem from where we shall explore the southern West Bank, including Battir, Hebron and the Tent of Nations. On the final morning we shall visit Jaffa before going to the airport.

The Week of Prayer programme of services will not be confirmed until December but a typical pattern would be

Saturday 5.30pm Greek Orthodox Chapel at Holy Sepulchre, Compline,
Sunday 5pm St George's Anglican Cathedral , **Monday** 5pm St James Armenian Cathedral **Tuesday** 5pm Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, **Wednesday** 5pm Latin Patriarchate, **Thursday** 4pm Cenacle (Upper Room), **Friday** 5pm St Mark's Syrian Orthodox Church. This last seems to alternate with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Prophet Street, or the Coptic Church.

National emergency

Living Stones fully endorses this statement by members of the Palestine Forum (originally published on 20th May 2019)

Today, the Palestinian people are facing a national emergency and urgently need our support. Since the election of President Trump, the US administration has trailed a proposed settlement to the unresolved core issues between Israel and the Palestinians. The public announcement of the plan, described by President Trump as the 'Deal of the Century', is expected imminently. Indeed, since the plan was first proposed, the US has already acted to support and embed a vision of annexation of Palestinian land and perpetual Israeli occupation, heralding the negation of the Palestinian people's fundamental and inalienable rights to self-determination and return under international law.

Over the past two years, the US has begun attempts to erase the status of some five million Palestinian refugees from what is known by Palestinians as the Nakba of 1948, and undermine their basic rights. This includes the sudden withdrawal of its major annual funding of UNRWA, the agency established by the UN General Assembly on 8 December 1949 to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees who lost their homes and livelihoods during the Nakba. In addition, the Trump administration has unilaterally recognised Israel's illegal annexation of East Jerusalem by recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital, moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, closed the US consulate in occupied East Jerusalem and the PLO office in Washington, recognised Israel's illegal annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights, and emboldened Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to call for the annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank. Through these measures, the US has sought to institute a radical departure from the international consensus and requirements for any just peace in the region, disenfranchising the Palestinian people of their land and rights, in clear disregard for the international rule of law.

As a coalition of UK-based humanitarian, development, human rights and faith organisations working to support the rights and welfare of the Palestinian people, we are deeply concerned that the basic human rights and civilian protections guaranteed to the Palestinians under international law are now under serious attack, and in grave danger. We call on the UK government, parliamentarians and civil society organisations to reaffirm their commitment to the principles of international law and justice at this critical time and uphold their respective legal and moral duties to defend the individual and collective rights of the Palestinian people, and to raise awareness of this escalating emergency.

Statement endorsed by the following 14 agencies:

- ABCD Bethlehem
- Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)
- Christian Aid
- Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu)
- Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel – UK and Ireland
- Embrace the Middle East
- Friends of Birzeit University (Fobzu)
- Friends of Nablus and the Surrounding Areas (FONSA)
- Interpal
- Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights (LPHR)
- Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP)
- Quakers in Britain
- War on Want
- Welfare Association

Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust

Official Notification

OPEN DAY WITH MICHAEL PRIOR LECTURE AND 2019 AGM

10.30am to 4.00 pm on Saturday 16th November, 2019

Our Lady of Victories, 235a Kensington High Street, LONDON, W8 6SA

Proposed Programme:

- 10.30 **Arrivals and Registration:** Refreshments and sales/book table
- 11.00 **Welcome, Introduction and Opening Devotions**
- 11.30 **Michael Prior Memorial Lecture: “An Unholy Mess”.** Chris Doyle offers an analysis of current conflicts in the Middle East and their impact on the Christian communities in the region. *Chris is a Director of the Council for Arab-British Understanding. As the lead spokesperson for CAABU and an acknowledged expert on the region, Chris is a frequent commentator on TV & Radio and gives numerous talks around the country on issues such as the Arab Spring, Libya, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Islamophobia and the Arabs in Britain. He has had copious articles published in the British and international media. He has organized and accompanied numerous British Parliamentary delegations to Arab countries.*
- 12.30 **Question and Answer Session**
- 1.00 **Lunch Break ****
- 2.00 **Annual General Meeting** including reports on all sections of our work and most importantly voting on proposals concerning the future of Living Stones
- 3.30 **Closing worship**

** Please bring a packed lunch. Beverages will be provided.