

The Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust Newsletter



No 6: September 2013.

An ecumenical trust seeking to promote contacts between Christian communities in Britain and those in the Holy Land and neighbouring countries. UK registered charity No. 1081204

From the Chair:

We have our AGM coming up shortly (16th November – please see back page for a poster) and I do not want to spoil your delight in receiving the Chair's report!

However, I will just draw your attention to:

Pilgrimage:

Jerusalem January 2014: Plans are progressing for the January 2014 pilgrimage to Israel/Palestine which includes the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Promotional material is available on the website and on page 5. Our deadline for deposits is 23rd November 2013.

Jordan 2015: We also plan a pilgrimage to Jordan to support the small Christian community there (while of course not missing the opportunity to visit historic sites such as Petra!), probably at Easter to enable pilgrims to celebrate with the Orthodox and Latin communities together (as the dates of Easter will coincide that year).

The Michael Prior Memorial Fund:

Scholarships: This year there have been four applications for scholarships, and two awards have been made for PhD programmes, in support of Christian Communities in the Middle East. We hope to benefit from that research and hear more about the studies at future conferences and in articles for the Yearbook.

Memorial Lecture: Professor James Conroy of Glasgow University agreed to lecture on "Toledo Guidelines and the Myth of the Andalusian Caliphates" for the Michael Prior Memorial Lecture at Bethlehem University this year, as part of a conference on 'Religion and State: from Theocracy to Secularism and in between', in October 2013.

Contents:

- Page 2: Leah Levane: *Life under Occupation*. Extracts from the 2012 AGM presentation
- Page 4: Interesting – a note about BAX (Britain-Arab Exchanges)
- Page 5: Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and *Reflections on the situation in the Middle East* from Salim J. Munayer, Director of Musalaha – one of the organisations the pilgrimage group meets
- Page 7: Membership information and forms
- Page 8: AGM notification poster



Leah Levane: LIFE UNDER OCCUPATION

Leah was an EA in the South Hebron Hills from June to September 2012. She shared some of her experiences with us at the 2012 AGM, focusing on a day of destruction for Nabil Samamri and his family. These are some of her slides, with extracts from the text of her talk.

NB: the situation Leah described is ongoing – see for example 29th August 2013:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/palestinianauthority/10271598/British-writers-back-Palestinian-villagers-against-Israeli-army.html>

The EAPPI programme:

- has been going for 10 yrs;
- is based in 7 localities in Jerusalem and the West Bank;
- was started at the request of the Jerusalem churches of all denominations when, at the height of the 2nd intifada (uprising) many countries withdrew their observers;
- operates from a perspective of principled impartiality – not taking sides in the conflict but not being neutral on human rights;
- works through protection by presence, monitoring abuses of human rights, supporting Palestinian and Israeli peace activists and organisations and advocacy, by witnessing and standing in solidarity.

What to do?

- Write expressing your concerns to your MP, your MEP, your local and national press;
- Invite speakers to other forums with which you are involved;
- Tell other people you know;
- Read about the conflict and the history;
- Visit Palestine and Israel and see for yourself;
- Consider becoming an Ecumenical Accompanier yourself;
- Make a donation, e.g. to EAPPI or to an Israeli or joint Palestinian – Israeli peace group such as Rabbis for Human Rights, B'Tselem;
- Establish or become active in twinning networks.





“26 of the 34 villages we were trying to support have full or partial demolition orders... we even witnessed a demolition of a road returning it to dirt track....

“At 7 a.m. on Tuesday, 28th August, Nabil Khalid had to watch his home and his animal shelters being demolished.

“He is a sheep herder, which provides for him and his family. As you can see, the land is very dry – there is no rainfall at all for at least 8 months.

“At 7 a.m. on Tuesday August 28th 2012, Nabil was eating breakfast with his wife Sawsa and their children when the army arrived and told them to leave and to stand some distance away....

“Nabil, his three brothers and their families had to watch the destruction of their homes, animal shelters and wells and try to make sense of this and to protect their children and their animals (Ghani and Khalil, for example had 140 goats.)”

On that day, in three different hamlets, the Army destroyed 6 residential structures, 9 animal shelters, 4 wells/cisterns and one fodder storage tent, displacing four brothers and their wives and children, and seriously disrupting their life and livelihood, from elderly parents down to the schooling of the young children.

The traditional word *Summoud* expresses the traditional response of Palestinian communities: usually translated as *steadfastness*.

< *These young girls were herding the sheep again less than one hour after their homes had been demolished, and even 3 year old Mohamed, was helping his parents get the sheep into their hastily recreated (but shadeless) pens.*

“Not all Israelis agree with the actions of the Israeli government or the harassment by the settlers.

“In the South Hebron area many organisations are working with the villagers in a number of ways: Rabbis for Human Rights, ACRI, B’Tselem, (e.g. providing cameras to record attacks, demolitions, etc), Ta’yush, the Villages Group and Comet ME.”

< *Israelis and Palestinians rebuilding together after a demolition in Um El Kher, April 2012.*

(Continues overleaf...)



Leah Levane *(continued)*

So why is this happening? Demolitions and living with the threat of demolitions is a feature of life for people in 26 villages and hamlets in the South Hebron Hills as well as in many other parts of the West Bank. They are part of 'Area C', over which Israel maintains control – agreed as a temporary arrangement that should have ended in 1999 at which time there should have been a Palestinian state – however talks did not lead to agreement and the temporary arrangement has now pertained for 19 years instead of five.

In Area C – which is more than 60% of the West Bank – Israel retains full control for all civil as well as security matters. This control is exercised by the Israeli army and martial (military) law applies to Palestinians living in Area C and for security matters, Area B as well.

Israel's actions in the West Bank are subject to the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), which states that 'any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property ...is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations' (Article 53). In fact Israel, as the occupying power in the West Bank, has the obligation to protect Palestinian civilians and to administer the territory for their benefit.

Although international law specifically prohibits the deliberate displacement of civilian populations in whole or in part, unless absolutely necessary for the security of civilians or for imperative military reasons, Israeli Settlements are being built throughout the area and are deemed to need significant additional land for security. This is illegal under International Law.

Note that the Israeli Settlements do have permission to build under Israeli law, although they are illegal under International Law, which prohibits an occupying country from moving its own population into occupied territories... There are also settlements that are illegal even under Israeli law – you may have heard the term 'outposts' which refers to such places – but even these usually very quickly get paved roads, electricity and often piped water as well as other services such as access to schools, health care, etc.

By contrast, Palestinians are restricted to just one percent of the land in Area C. 70% is off limits to Palestinians, mainly because of Settlements and the Security buffer zones around them but also Firing Zones and Nature Reserves, a further 29% is heavily restricted, leaving 1% available for new development – and it is almost impossible for Palestinians to get permits, so they live with the constant threat that their homes and/or other structures could be demolished..

William Hague had stated (8th June 2012): We condemn the Israeli Settlement Plan as being 'provocative, [it] undermines the prospects of peace between Israel and the Palestinians and makes the 2-state solution ever harder to realise. It makes it increasingly difficult for Israel's international friends to defend the Israeli government's actions'.

INTERESTING.....

Contributions are welcome!

To catch the next edition, please send them to josimister@yahoo.co.uk by the end of February 2014.



BRITAIN-ARAB EXCHANGES

Building bridges is the central mission of BAX, and the name of a recent programme which offered nine young professionals and postgraduates from Britain and Ireland an exceptional insight into the life and the people of the West Bank. The nine participants wrote about their experiences and their vivid impressions are available via the website <http://bax.org.uk> – follow the links to the Building Bridges programme.



There's still time to join the Living Stones

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

PILGRIMAGE to JERUSALEM 2014

Saturday 18th – Wednesday 29th January 2014

with optional 3-night Galilee extension to Saturday 1st February

******DEADLINE for deposits (£200): 23rd November 2013******



ENQUIRIES AND BOOKINGS:

Enquiries to Jo Simister: josimister@yahoo.co.uk (81 Corbet Close, Wallington, Surrey SM6 7AR).

Reservations & payments: Living Stones Administrator, 48 Strickland Way, ORPINGTON, Kent, BR6 9UE.

Reflections on the situation in the Middle East

From Salim J. Munayer, Director of Musalaha*

[Pilgrims on the Week of Prayer pilgrimage will be able to meet with Salim and members of Musalaha]

It is impossible to avoid the shocking, blatant and daily murder and massacre of men, women and children in Syria as it flashes on our television and computer screens. I see these images and ask myself, how can these things happen in 2013 after what occurred during World War II, and more recently the genocide in Rwanda?

Why aren't world powers taking necessary steps to stop this injustice?

A few months ago I was preaching in our congregation about why we are so surprised and overwhelmed when we see gross displays of evil in our world today. I reflected on our astonishment when we see atrocities against other humans, extensive theft by greedy heads of banks, or the widening gap between rich

and poor. I think one of the main reasons for our disbelief is that we have not fully comprehended human nature – that all people are inherently evil and capable of doing horrible things to each other.

This reminds me of what the Apostle Paul wrote to us in the book of Romans 3:9-18, *“There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

First of all, despite Paul’s words teaching us that none is righteous, we have embraced a worldview that all of us are good, and that this world is getting better and better. We have witnessed many technological advances and the growth of human rights’ activism. And still, in spite of all this good and the progress we have made, we are paralysed by the continual bloodshed in Syria and other places in the world.

Second, we not only act surprised by this kind of evil, but we also fall into the trap of thinking this evil is “over there,” far removed from us. We can find ourselves thinking, “They’re primitive in their thinking and actions, and we’re enlightened so as not to engage in this type of violence,” and it becomes an “us versus them” pattern of thinking. We easily forget our recent history, of what happened in places like Bosnia and Serbia, because it happened to “them.” That is, until the next school massacre or other evil act is perpetrated in our community.

Third, we can react in a way that makes it worse rather than better. Sometimes we use our power in a way that escalates suffering rather than solves it. We need to ask ourselves, “Are we looking at other ways of dealing with inter-generational ethnic, tribal, and religious rivalries and offences? Or are we feeding and fuelling the vicious cycle of revenge and retaliation? Are we so paralysed by hatred we cannot break this cycle?” Look at what began as fighting against soldiers, and it has spun out of control, resulting in the murder of thousands of women and children. This cycle of hatred moved from one people group to another.

This leads me to say that each one of us as individuals, organisations, and congregations should not be passive, looking only for military intervention to solve atrocities like those in Syria. Instead, each society needs to actively live out Jesus’s teaching from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”* Resisting the urge to repay vengeance with vengeance, we break the cycle of revenge and retaliation.

Therefore, the Sermon on the Mount is something that we need to practice in our daily lives in order to avoid the poisonous and deadly fruit that we are seeing right now. This is not idealism; it is something we need to take an active role in, especially on a grassroots level. My hope and desire is for more grassroots organisations to take an active role in peace-building and reconciliation. Professor Glen Stassen eloquently states in his book, *Just Peacemaking*, *“We can change a little bit of the tide of evil.”* This echoes Paul in Romans 12:21, *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

Realising that we can take part in changing the tide little by little, we are also aware of our human limitations. Without the help of God as demonstrated on the cross and his intervention in history, there is no hope for us. Ultimately, God will deal with the great evil.

Musalaha is a grassroots organization working with women, youth and children. Please join us in prayer for our neighbouring countries. We pray for the end of the violence and conflict, and also that these difficult times would result in more people and organisations practicing Jesus’s teachings from the Sermon on the Mount. Living out Jesus’s mandate to us is hard, but transforming, with the power to break boundaries, shatter cycles of violence, and give birth to a new way of doing things, both here in the Middle East, and throughout our world.

** Musalaha is a non-profit organization that seeks to promote reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians as demonstrated in the life and teaching of Jesus, seeking to be an encouragement and facilitator of reconciliation, first among Palestinian Christians and Messianic Israelis, and then beyond to their respective communities. You can find out more at <http://www.musalaha.org> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musalaha>.*



The Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust

UK registered charity No. 1081204

MEMBERSHIP entitles you to our regular newsletters, a copy of the Living Stones Yearbook to be published annually, free attendance at conferences and other major events, news of our Scholarship programme, notification of pilgrimages and much more. For current news and other items see our website at www.livingstonesonline.org.uk.

Please send your form to 48 Strickland Way, ORPINGTON, BR6 9UE together with EITHER a cheque for £20 payable to Living Stones OR the Standing Order Mandate. If you are a UK tax payer please ALSO complete the Gift Aid form. **Personal Details:**

Name:

Address:

Post Code:

E-mail address:

I am also interested in: (please tick as appropriate)

- serving on the Living Stones Committee as Trustee
- contributing articles or news items about the churches in the Middle East
- participating in a Theology Group
- attending conferences in London; Oxford; Birmingham; Durham; Edinburgh; Cardiff
- receiving the Journal
- receiving newsletters, etc, by e-mail attachment

STANDING ORDER MANDATE

To the Manager of
(name of your Bank/Building Society)

Address:

Postcode:

Please pay the sum of twenty pounds/ £20 annually on:
..... (insert date) **until further notice in writing**

From:

Your account name:

Your account number:

Your Bank Sort Code:

To:

LIVING STONES Account No: 8913 7808; Code: 09-01-55

Your signature:

Date:

Your Address:

Postcode:

DONATIONS & LEGACIES

Living Stones is very happy to accept donations and to help with legacies. Both can be Gift Aided.

GIFT AID DECLARATION

As a registered charity, Living Stones can recover basic rate tax on your membership and other donations provided you pay UK income tax or capital gains tax equal to or more than the amount of relief LIVING STONES is claiming in the tax year that the donation was made.

I wish LIVING STONES to reclaim tax on all donations I have made for the six years prior to this year and on all future donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise.

Title: Forename(s)

Surname:

Address:

Postcode:

Signature:

Date:

Please send all forms and enquiries to Living Stones at 48 Strickland Way, ORPINGTON, Kent, BR6 9UE.

- NOTES:
1. Please notify LIVING STONES of any change in your above details or in your tax circumstances
 2. You can cancel this declaration at any time by notifying LIVING STONES.
 3. If you pay tax at the higher rate, you can claim further relief in your Self-Assessment tax return.



Notice of the 2013 Annual General Meeting of the Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust

10.30am, Saturday 16th November 2013 at St. James's Church, Sussex Gardens W2 3UD
(nearest tube Lancaster Gate; see www.stjamespaddington.org for more details).

Programme for the day:

- 10.00 - 10.30 Arrival, refreshments, registration for lunch (by 11.30)
- 10.30 - 11.15 AGM
- 11.30 - 12.30 Sister Bernadette "Living Galilean Icons" (see below)
- 12.30 - 1.15 Lunch at the church (from Maroush - £10 per person)
- 1.30 - 2.15 Service of reflection and celebration

Palestinian crafts will be on sale in aid of the Michael Prior Memorial Fund; also Living Stones publications.

"Living Galilean Icons"

Sr. Bernadette Crook will speak about the design and construction of the Iconostasis, the surrounding balcony "Beatitude" paintings, and the apse and dome icons for Archbishop Elias Chacour's Church of the Sermon on the Mount in Ibillin, Galilee.

(NB: we expect to visit the church during the 2014 Pilgrimage.)



This first Christian Church to be built in the Holy Land in the past fifty years was designed to make a statement and to bring hope to beleaguered Palestinian Christians as well as to accommodate teachers, pupils and the families of the three schools and a college known as the Mar Elias Institutions.

Archbishop Chacour is one of the original Spiritual Patrons of the "Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust". It was he who insisted that visitors to Holy Sites should meet Palestinian Christians, the contemporary "Living Stones" whose circumstances call upon them daily to live out the Beatitudes.

We will be delighted to welcome Sr. Bernadette who, as coordinator of the project, will be able to share its challenges with us.

Over the years of the project support was given by other members of the British Association of Iconographers who donated boards, painted and donated icons, took photographs or offered other services - added to which the assistance of enthusiastic local Arab workers and in particular the carpenter Walid, was indispensable.

You can find out more about the British Association of iconographers at www.bai.org.uk and at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/British-Association-of-Iconographers/155162701205911>