

The Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust Pilgrimage Supplement

to accompany Newsletter No 3: April 2012:



GROUND-BREAKING PILGRIMAGE

Universal appreciation for Living Stones support

In late January, 21 pilgrims gathered at Mar Maroun, the Maronite convent near Jaffa Gate, which is a traditional Jerusalem building with a domed roof, built around a courtyard and incorporating a chapel and meeting rooms, and simple accommodation on three levels.

Our itinerary was based around the official local programme of worship with a number of different denominations which had reasonably large churches, as the event draws in all the local Christians plus a number of visitors to Jerusalem (though this is not a peak tourist month).

During the day, we went out into the West Bank to encounter the Christian experience of life and worship in the current political realities, and the people we met were delighted to talk to us and show us around.

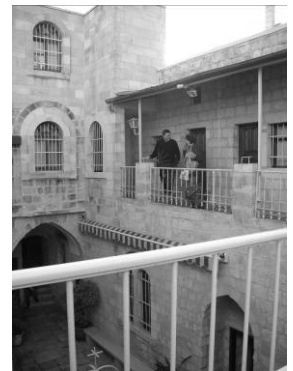


We hope you will enjoy this poster and a little information about our trip, and consider coming with us next time. (Please display the poster in your local church to raise awareness of the diverse Christian congregations in the Holy Land, and remember them in your prayers.)

← *The Wall separating Israeli and Palestinian communities.*

→ *Fr Graham, who helped us through the Week of Prayer with carefully chosen prayers and songs from the different spiritual traditions we encountered, on the balcony with Coco.*

↓ *The wonderful view eastwards over the Christian Quarter, from the roof of Mar Maroun.*



OUR PROGRAMME AND KEY TO POSTER PHOTOS (in bold):

Day 1: Sunday 22nd January: Taybeh

We **set off via Jaffa Gate** to meet our coach, in drizzle.

Taybeh, 14 kilometres north east of Ramallah, is one of the few predominantly Christian villages in Palestine. Like villages all over the West Bank, it is suffering as many of its people decide to emigrate, seeing no other choice given the economic and physical hardship they suffer under Israeli occupation. In the 1960s the town had a population of 3,400. The population today is 1,300. Unemployment stands at around 50 per cent.

There are three congregations in the village – Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic. The congregations worship together at Easter and Christmas, and are all actively involved in local projects.

Our coach had some difficulty negotiating the narrow lanes to our first destination: the **Greek Orthodox liturgy in St George's Church**. We talked with Fr Daowd Khoury and parishioners afterwards – Fr Daowd showed us the excavated foundations of an earlier church on the site.

We then met Fr Raed Abusahlia at the Latin (i.e. Roman Catholic) Church for animated discussion, followed by a look at the fascinating 1st Century House Museum en route to hot tea in the meeting room; The Latin parish runs a school, a medical centre, a hostel for pilgrims, and numerous church services and youth activities. Around 50 young people aged between five and 15 sing in the parish youth choir. The choir has produced a CD called *With One Voice*, and in 2006, eight children from the choir participated in a musical tour of France, performing 14 concerts throughout the country. Fr Raed arranged a delicious lunch for us.

In the afternoon we visited the family-run Taybeh Brewery. David Khoury and his brother Nadim – both born in Taybeh – had been living in Boston for 20 years when they decided to return to Palestine to set up the brewery. Palestine's only brewery, it was established in 1995 and now runs under license in Belgium, exporting from there to other European markets. In 2007, a non-alcoholic beer was launched. Each year the brewery runs an Oktoberfest celebration featuring local musical and dance acts. We sampled the wares, learning about the difficulties of exporting produce from Palestine, before returning to Jerusalem through the rain for a warming beverage in the American Colony and the Inaugural Service of the Week of Prayer, in St George's Anglican Cathedral.

Day 2: Monday 23rd January: Bethlehem

Via Wadi Nar (the tortuous and dangerous route which Palestinians have to take to access Bethlehem from the north) to Beit Sahour (=house of the shepherds) to visit the **craft workshops and aquaponics tent at Al-Basma centre** for people with learning difficulties, before going on to Bethlehem, where different groups visited a variety of organisations: the Sheepfold, **Bethlehem University** where we enjoyed the chapel frescoes for which local children, Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation, **Deheisheh refugee camp** and Bethlehem Bible College – plus time in the **Church of the Nativity** where we found a quiet spot for reflection in **St Jerome's Chapel**.

Our peregrinations concluded at the **Armenian Cathedral of St James**, and after supper we benefited from an excellent discussion with Janet Lahr Lewis (United Methodist Liaison in Palestine and Israel) who accompanied the group in Nazareth.

Day 3: Tuesday 24th January: Mount of Olives

Sunshine! so morning prayer on the roof overlooking the Old City.

No coach today: we took the bus from Damascus Gate bus station up to **Augusta Victoria Hospital** on the Mount of Olives, where we met Revd Mark Brown, Regional Representative of the **Lutheran World Federation**, and learned about the difficulties of residents and organisations in Jerusalem, access for staff and patients from the West Bank, and encroachments of Israeli settlers onto their land.

We walked along to **Princess Basma Centre** for handicapped children for a tour and lunch, seeing the school which includes children with and without disability, the **prosthetics workshop** and the clinic; we noticed the many **traditional hand-painted tiles** commemorating donors and supporters.

In the afternoon we were free to walk down into Jerusalem, visiting different churches on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, before the service in the **Lutheran Church of the Redeemer**. After supper we needed quiet reflection time at our blanket meeting, as many of us were feeling the pace of learning so much in such a short time!

Day 4: Wednesday 25th January: Ramallah

Off in the rain again, for quiet prayer at the historic **Friends Meeting House**, and time to listen to Jean Zaru on being a female in the theological and peacemaking arenas. We also met Kathy Bergen, Program Coordinator at the Peace Centre, enjoyed traditional West Bank food lunch at Al-Zawadeh Women's Cooperative Restaurant, and learned about business and communications restrictions from Sam Bahour; our final visit was to the **Friends Schools** and head teacher Joyce Ajlouni, before an adventure at Qalandia Checkpoint delayed our attendance at the **Latin Patriarchate Church**.

Our evening was enlivened by a visit from Jihad Alawni and Adel Al-Sous, graduates of the Bethlehem University Physiotherapy Degree Programme to talk about life and health and the difficult marathon to get to work each day via checkpoints – and bring the traditional warm cheese dessert called Konafeh.

Day 5: Thursday 26th January: Hebron / Jerusalem and Ein Kerem

A minibus took half the group south to a clinic near Dura, then into *the horror of Hebron and the roof settlements: Christine*. Others joined the Sabeel liberation theology group, founded by Anglican Canon Naim Ateek, for their weekly lunchtime Eucharist. *Jo & Colin: talked to a young man on the bus – house demolished, many problems – Colin's traditional parting blessing of 'may you have many children' was met with 'I would not be so selfish as to bring children into the world' which was deeply shocking – especially in this culture.*

The evening event was slightly earlier – at 4pm at the **Cenacle** (Coenaculum) on Mt Zion aka the Upper Room, for worship organised by the monks of the Dormition Abbey; lots of Taizé chants and a wonderful recitation of the Lords Prayer in many languages, which seemed to whisper round the domed space. (The building is now in the Jewish Quarter, and was at one time a mosque; now Christians are only allowed access on this one day.)

The earlier timing gave opportunity to take a fleet of taxis to Ein Kerem (on the Israeli side of Jerusalem) to the Trezoro Restaurant to meet members young Jewish believers. *Mary: It was a weird experience to talk with the young woman soldier- who, when we described our Qalandia event, said "O that's my checkpoint!"*

Day 6: Friday 27th January: free day

An opportunity for experiencing the Friday bustle of the Old City, and joining the Stations of the Cross walk with the Franciscans, before setting off in torrential rain for the **Ethiopian Orthodox Church**, which is situated well to the West Jerusalem end of Prophet's Street (leading from Damascus gate) – quite a trek. The Ethiopian Orthodox are renowned for their **dancing and drumming** – we were not disappointed!

We were joined at supper by Salim and Kay Munayer who talked about their work at Musalaha (reconciliation ministry) and Sunbula (income generation projects) on the Israeli side.

Day 7: Saturday 28th January: Jericho

Into the Judean wilderness to view **St George's Monastery at Wadi Qelt** – a rare and precious absolute silence as we looked over the gorge where this desert retreat is situated. We could hear the stream at the bottom, and the birds....

Then on to the Baptism site in a closed military area alongside the Jordan – we could almost have stepped over to the church on the Jordanian side! The river was much higher than usual; we renewed our baptismal vows and sprinkled the river water – and our guide took a **group photo**.

Lunch at one of the traditional Jericho restaurants, famed for kebabs and grilled meats, then on to the ancient spring where some of the party enjoyed the local orange juice in the café, others caught the **cable car** for Monastery of Temptation (though some were tempted up just for orange juice and the fantastic view).

On our way back to Jerusalem we called at St Lazarus' Franciscan church, in El-Azariya (Bethany), a community caught in the inconvenience of the route of the Wall, necessitating detours to enter Jerusalem through tunnels under the 'Arab' areas.

The day's service was at **St Anthony's Coptic Orthodox Church**, accessed via the roof of the Holy Sepulchre.

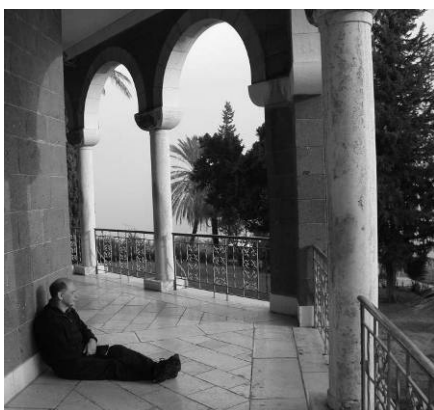
Day 8: Sunday 29th January: Abu Ghosh

Mass at the **Crusader Church in Abu Ghosh** preceded by visit to crypt. The service was beautifully sung by the monks and nuns and spread a real sense of tranquillity: just as well, as after traditional lentil soup and salads at Abu Shukri's restaurant, three of the group were dropped at the airport to face security (with variable amounts of delay). The closing service of the Week of Prayer was in the **Greek Catholic Church of the Annunciation** near Jaffa Gate.

Galilee Extension: Monday 30th and Tuesday 31st January.

The group fragmented further on Monday 30th January, and most took advantage of the opportunity to visit Nazareth for two nights, calling at Capurneum, Tabgha, Cana, and visiting Ibellin to meet Archbishop Elias Chacour and visit the Mar Elias schools.

Christine: I found the pilgrimage overwhelming in every way and a life-changing experience, in that I was wrenched away from my previous goals and foci in life, into a passionate focus on Palestine and what to do about what I had seen and heard.

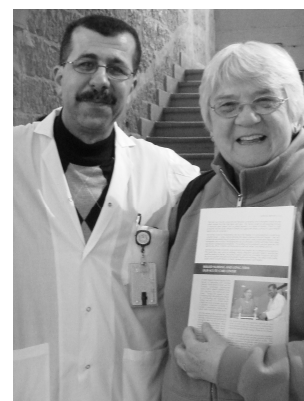


← Andrew in reflective mood by the Sea of Galilee.

→ Lesley encounters one of her graduates at Augusta Victoria Hospital.

↓ Felicity and Jo enjoy a mezze.

↘ 'Blanket meetings' – Rene and Alison demonstrate how to keep cosy in the bitter cold!



REGISTRATION OF INTEREST:

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Jerusalem, January 2014
Proposed 9-day pilgrimage with optional extension to Nazareth

If you like the aims listed here, and you would like to register your interest (with no obligation), please notify Jo Simister, (josimister@yahoo.co.uk, 81 Corbet Close, Wallington, Surrey SM6 7AR)

- ❖ *participate in the Jerusalem Week of Prayer for Christian Unity programme*
- ❖ *worship with a wide range of local Christian denominations (Greek Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Armenian and many more, plus the more familiar Anglican, Lutheran, Quaker and Roman Catholic churches)*
- ❖ *find out why and how the churches differ, by looking at the causes and results of their history*
- ❖ *find out about the challenges Christians face and how we might support them from outside*
- ❖ *encounter the wider work of the various Christian communities, visiting educational, health and social care centres, for example – several of the trustees have links with these*
- ❖ *support Christian-run enterprises, by staying in local religious communities and visiting Christian businesses*
- ❖ *meet with Christian clergy and community leaders in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Taybeh*
- ❖ *take time to explore, or join with other local activities, on the free days.*

Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust is an ecumenical trust seeking to promote contacts between Christian communities in Britain and those in the Holy Land and neighbouring countries. www.livingstonesonline.org.uk UK registered charity No. 1081204. 48 Strickland Way, ORPINGTON, Kent, BR6 9UE.