

## PARTNERPLAN

# John McCulloch – Israel and Palestine April 2018

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Dear Friends,

Greetings from Jerusalem during Eastertide, when so many pilgrims and people from different walks of life converge on the narrow streets of the Old City, reflecting on and re-imagining Christ's entry into Jerusalem, his journey to the cross and his glorious resurrection.

We have been here for just over a month now and so much has happened since we arrived, but I want to start by thanking each and every one of you for your prayerful support for us.



The children have settled well into school and have begun to make friends, and Annette has already put her medical skills to good use, helping out in the local school with both students and staff who have needed medical care. She is also heading to Ramallah next week to meet with [Medical Aid for Palestinians \(MAP\)](#), who are delivering Primary Care services across the West Bank and Gaza. Given Annette's experience, she hopes to be able to use her expertise in support of the work which MAP is doing in training doctors and providing primary and emergency care across the occupied Palestinian Territories.



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Jerusalem and the surrounding landscape is beautiful at this time of year. The trees and flowers are in full bloom, a timely reminder of new life and hope, which is so central to the season.



The scent of the acacia and mimosa trees drift in the warm breeze, and the walls of the old city of Jerusalem turn different shades of pink, as the sun sinks behind the horizon.

Being ordained in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was deeply moving and significant for me on so many different levels. It was both humbling and inspiring to be ordained in the land where Jesus walked, and in Jerusalem during Holy Week.

A group from the World Mission Council and Council of Assembly was here carrying out a review of our work and mission here in the Holy Land, so it was a great joy to have Rt Rev John Chalmers, Moderator Designate Susan Brown (WMC Vice Convener), Rev Iain Cunningham (Convener of World Mission Council), Rev Ian Alexander (World Mission Council Secretary) and Rev Paraic Reamon (Minister of St Andrews Jerusalem and Moderator of Jerusalem Presbytery), Rev Kate Reynolds (Minister & Mission Partner in Tiberias), Joanna Oakley-Levstein (Prebytery Clerk of Jerusalem) all taking part in my ordination.

I was also deeply grateful for the presence of Rev Alistair McGregor, President of the Friends of St Andrews, who travelled out especially to be at my ordination.

Holy Week in Jerusalem is a procession of colour, spectacle and deep significance. We joined with many of our ecumenical partners and friends for different services throughout the week, be it Maundy Thursday in the garden of Gethsemane, or walking up the Via Dolorosa early on Good Friday with Christian leaders and pilgrims from all denominations.

But whilst I journeyed through Holy Week here in Jerusalem, the tragic events along the Gaza border were on my mind. What started out as peaceful demonstrations along the border turned to violence, with 24 Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers in the course of two separate marches, with over 1000 Palestinians injured.

The Church of Scotland has partners within Gaza who work with education, primary care and other programmes. I will be writing more specifically about each of our partners there after my next visit, but please pray for the people of Gaza at this time. Gaza is roughly the same size as the island of Jura. Whilst Jura has around 200 inhabitants, Gaza has close to 2 million. A large proportion of the population are children and young people, living in conditions that the UN has described as 'unsustainable' for human life. Any escalation of violence in such a densely populated area will cause untold suffering on a population that has already been subjected to so much. How the

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Church of Scotland can best support our brothers and sisters in Gaza is something that will be at the top of my list of priorities. They need more than our prayers and financial support, they need real solidarity and advocacy.

But this letter is primarily to give you a brief conspectus of our first month here, and I will write more detailed letters about each of our partners separately, with specific ways in which we can all support and encourage them in their work.

There are many strands to our work out here: building the churches, supporting the work of Tabeetha School in Jaffa, looking after our staff and institutions (The Guest House in Jerusalem and Scots Hotel in Tiberias), accompanying the pilgrims who visit the Holy Land, and engaging with advocacy for the circa 30 partners the Church of Scotland works with here, across Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories.

Our work and mission is to be alongside Palestinians and Israelis, Jews, Arabs, Druze and many others who live in this beautiful and yet conflicted land. And I will say one thing at the very start of my ministry here. What I am about to write are not my words but have been expressed by many others before, but they do sum up for me how we should move through this land:

'Any solution to Palestinian and Israeli situation has to do four things. It has to be pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, pro-justice and pro-peace. There are ways of being pro-Palestinian that make you anti-Israeli, and ways of being pro-Israeli that make you anti Palestinian. These have to be avoided'.

One of the challenges here is to see everyone through the eyes of compassion, and to not dehumanise the other, even those who are part of the structures of violence and injustice. It is not just the occupied who need liberating, but the occupiers.

Desmond Tutu once said:

'When we see others as the enemy, we risk becoming what we hate. When we oppress others, we end up oppressing ourselves. All of our humanity is dependent upon recognising the humanity in others'.

Seeing the humanity of those across the social-religious and political divides, and standing with those who are wanting to bring about a more just, compassionate and caring world is central to our mission here.

We greatly appreciate your continued prayers and support.

John, Annette and family.