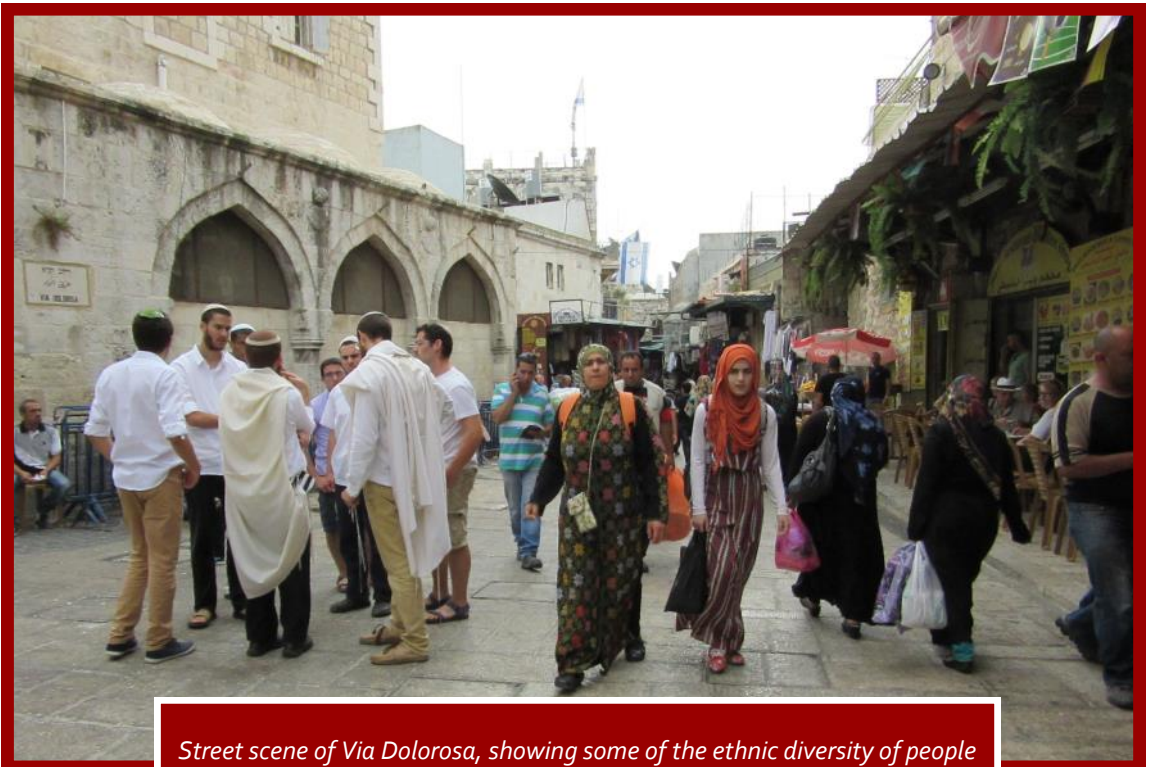




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Postcard from Jerusalem

By Jenny Campbell



Street scene of Via Dolorosa, showing some of the ethnic diversity of people that call Jerusalem home.

A friend surprised me by asking me to go as her room companion on a trip to Jerusalem led by Reverends John and Dawn Stringer from Christchurch with the emphasis on pilgrimage, over a period of three weeks. As a group of nine we benefited by becoming close-knit, being adaptable, flexible and adventurous. After arriving in Tel Aviv and staying overnight, we stayed on the edge of the Sea of Galilee for four nights, so enabling us to swim there, followed by the rest of our time in a hotel near the Jaffa gate in the old city of Jerusalem. The Pope had been at the church up that street the day before we got there so security was still very tight.

A comfortable van with an obliging Jewish driver, with comprehensive knowledge and a relaxed manner, made visiting historic places and points

of interest for the first two weeks an easy exercise because of his knowledge and relaxed manner. He obviously told the history from a Jewish perspective but did venture into the political arena, stopping by intimating that we needed to find out more – looking through different eyes.

A month after returning home I am still trying to make sense of all I saw, smelled, heard, and touched. While I was there I felt safe, whether in the hotel, on a bus or walking during the day and evening. However, now I am home and the political situation there seems to have changed dramatically, I am very thankful that I don't have to live in a place of potential conflict and constant anxiety. I marvel at the calmness of people there, who go about their daily lives in the face of trauma and risk, but no doubt this is the only



A view of lush crops, olives and trees in rift valley beside the Sea of Galilee. The bus is stopped at sea level and the valley floor is 200m below.

way they know how to cope and their resilience and faith sustains them.

I was struck by the variety of faiths, clothes and languages which were particularly evident in the Old City of Jerusalem as local residents and tourists mixed and mingled. I realised my severe limitations and even embarrassment with regard to communication and only speaking English, when most there are multi-lingual.

Bible stories have come to life now as geography makes sense, having travelled the roads such as from Jericho to Jerusalem, where the Good Samaritan made a difference for a traveller, sailed on the Sea of Galilee and stood where Jesus fed the 5000. Towns and villages are quite close together with large blocks of multi storey apartments obviously built after the war when Jews returned to Israel. Many of them need some renovation and this is happening.

The landscapes are often barren deserts interspersed with lush valleys where intensive agriculture and a great variety of crops provide a food bowl for the people, often irrigated by desalinated water. Cows are in barns and very few sheep were seen apart from Bedouins tending their flocks on barren slopes as I imagine they did in biblical times. Solar panels are atop many rooftops. They are reducing the use of coal because of the pollution. I noted their recycling

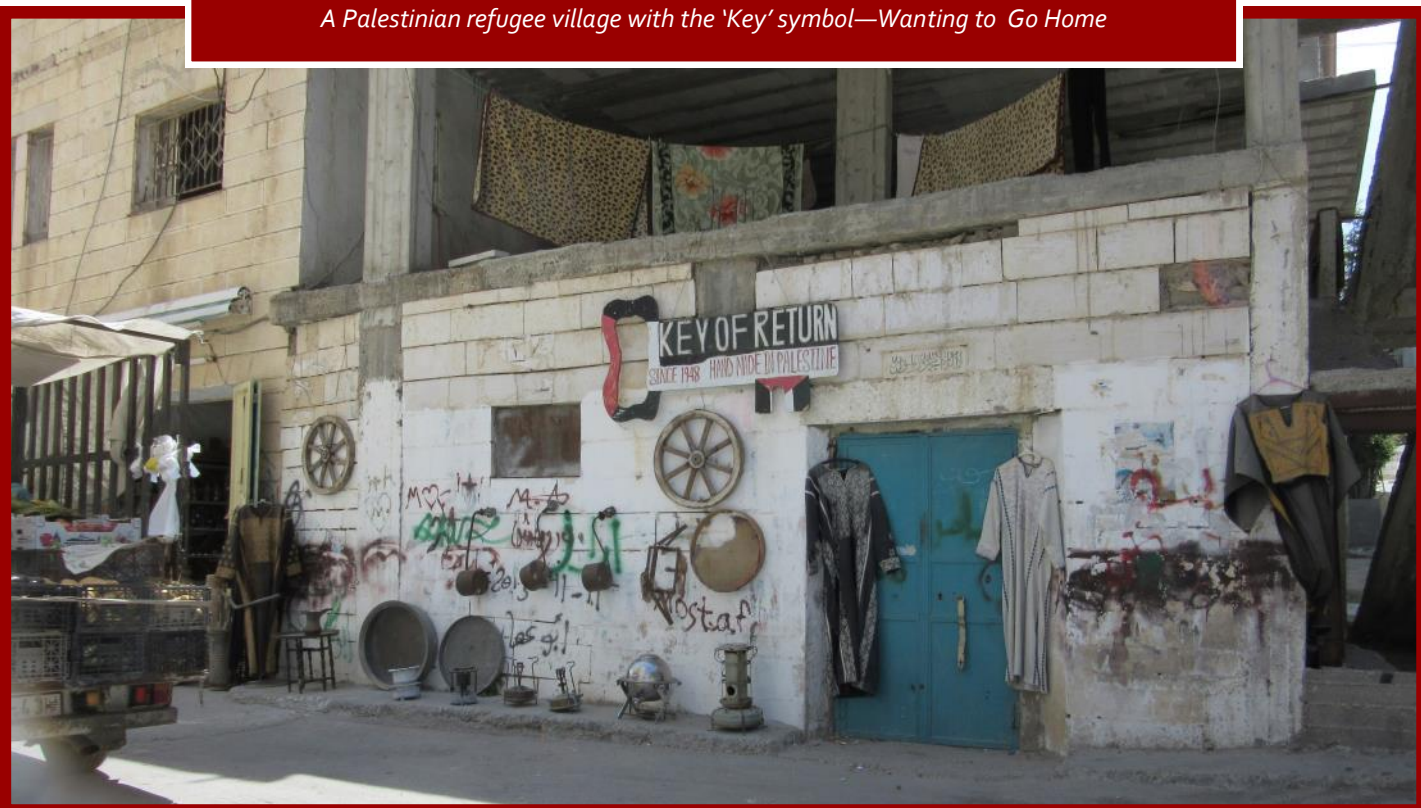
efforts with glass, plastic aluminium cans able to be returned for a refundable deposit. Water conservation was not mentioned in spite of the scarcity of water.

We saw many ruins of former cities and places with centuries of history but the ones which struck me were at Megiddo (referred to as Armageddon in the biblical book of Revelation) with its 25 layers of civilisations which they are only just beginning to explore archaeologically, and Masada with its mountain top fortress city built by Herod the Great.

We met and interacted with many ethnic and faith groups, always listening respectfully and trying to make sense of this complex society- Moslems, Orthodox Jews, Palestinians, Israelis, Armenians..... We went to different religious services with Syrian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Messianic Jews, attended a synagogue as observers upstairs (the place for women) as well as St George's Cathedral in Jerusalem for a service of Peace

and Reconcilia-

A Palestinian refugee village with the 'Key' symbol—Wanting to Go Home



tion on the Eve of Pentecost. Bishops and leaders from all the Christian churches were there and it was televised to be shown around the world as the start of a wave of prayer for peace going out from Jerusalem. So many different languages were used as tourists had gathered as well from around the world so singing and the Lord's Prayer truly sounded like I had imagined the account in the Bible to be. I said the Lord's Prayer in Maori - not sure how often that might have happened there. Over 300 people seemed to lift the roof with their singing. The sermon was given in both English and Arabic by the Dean- who was also

a proficient band leader and played the piano accordion with a group at the Sunday lunch.

On Pentecost Sunday all the Anglicans from far and wide gathered there from around the Diocese with about 600 attending. After the service we were escorted by Scouts playing bagpipes, across the road to St George's School for a sumptuous lunch for about 400. Present day version of loaves and fishes?

The Holocaust Memorial, Yad Vashem, made a huge impact on us all. 'Lest we forget', with the reading of the names of the

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1.5 million children killed in Auschwitz in 1944 being read out as we walked in the darkness with the ceiling lit by tiny lights to represent all those children. That was the most moving part for me.

For the first few days in Jerusalem I found it difficult to cope with seeing so many young people in military uniforms, each with a large gun slung over their shoulder – and the young women (with their 'pink' handbag as well) - all part of their compulsory military training from 18- 20 years (3 years for men and 2 years for women). Jewish young people come from all around the world to participate and learn about their roots. Recently a law has been passed which means young Ultra-Orthodox Jews will have to undertake this training as well as up until now they have been exempt.

With a Palestinian guide we went to a Palestinian refugee camp where the people have been living since 1948, moved there from their homes when Jews began to return.

They are now, three generations on, 'non- people' with no passports, no freedom to travel and little chance for meaningful jobs or a future for their children. Their symbol is a key, representing how they were forced to leave their homes with very little, and they just want to go 'home'. Power and water can be cut off by the authorities at any time as a form of intimidation and harassment.

As tourist I swam in the Dead Sea – quite unnerving as it is quite toxic. I marvelled at the markets and techniques of getting us to buy items – most of the shop keepers in the old city were men. We jostled with thousands of other tourists in the old narrow cobbled streets, marvelled at the Wailing Wall and its significance to the Jewish people (although apparently Jews prefer the Western Wall) - yes we put our prayers in a crack in the wall on the women's side, and managed to watch a whole Bar Mitzvah ceremony one

afternoon.

We walked and prayed along the Via Dolorosa with many other tourist groups from around the world doing it their way - maybe

carrying a cross, chanting, singing, reading from the Bible, praying and discussing what this final symbolic walk with Christ to his death means for us now. With all that sacrifice, prayer and a heart for seeing peace in Jerusalem it is hard to comprehend how and why things are not different now. As a city and country of Faiths it seems there is a church, holy site, place to

pray ... for every saint or person mentioned in the Bible, which we could visit.

A special treat was visiting the St John's Ophthalmology Hospital in Jerusalem because my friend is a St John chaplain. We had a wonderful talk and tour and marvelled at the commitment of

all the staff to make huge differences to the people's ability to see- mostly Palestinians, all at little cost, funded by people and groups around the world.

The present hospital was built in 1960 but the St John Ophthalmic Hospital started in 1882. It treats people from all faiths, any ethnicity and regardless of the persons ability to pay. Because of the huge

demand for their services, the cost of coming to the hospital and restrictions placed on Palestinians in particular regarding the need to negotiate checkpoints and requiring special permits, they have set up satellite hospitals and mobile units. There is a Clinic in Gaza which opened in 1992, a hospital in Hebron opened in 2005 and the Anabta Clinic opened in 2007, as well as the mobile clinics established in 2011. Cataract operations, de-



Above: Jenny relaxing in the Dead Sea—a startling sensation.

Left: Revd Barbara Harford & Dr Jeanne Garth, Palestinian Medical Director of St John's Ophthalmic Hospital, with some of the high tech equipment for retinal photography donated by the Japanese.

Below: Our hotel was on this street by Jaffa Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem which still displays the banner of Pope Francis who had walked this street on his way to church on the Sunday before we arrived. Armed police and military are a common sight.



tached retina, corneal transplants and education, especially about diabetes, can all be done at some of these places which takes the pressure off the main hospital and is less costly and disruptive on peoples lives.

I was struck by the many groups of people, women in particular, who are taking the initiative to work with people across many faiths and nationalities to promote communities with an understanding of each other, to tell their stories and support each other. A group of about 40 artists in a suburb, Masara, close to the walled city of Jerusalem is working hard on this. The area used to be divided by barbed wire with snipers and drug addicts – creating a divided community- before the 'wall' was taken down in 1967 after the War of Independence. The artists are doing their work on the streets of Masara, helping start conversations about what they are creating and why, brightening up the streets, helping with a community garden, bringing back the endangered red falcon by providing nesting boxes, setting up soccer games for all to join in and having drama and music festivals. Every Saturday they take anyone who wants to join them, on a tour of the suburb to explain their philosophy and how it is making a difference. I learned so much about community and giving freely that morning.

Some of us found a Women's Craft Cooperative – not far from our hotel- run by Armenian Christian women where they sold beautiful needlework done by Palestinian women. This helps to provide them with an income stream to put towards the education of their daughters in particular. One good news story, as



An Armenian Christian woman staffs the Craft Cooperative which supports Palestinian women who wish to sell their needlework and handcrafts through the Cooperative.

re-

result, was of a woman who has been able to put her two daughters through university, with one about to graduate with a PhD very soon.

The women we spoke to all believed that education is the key, especially for women; with abuse one of the big issues and women's refuges needed. Some countries are providing aid to take say 5 young people from each of Jewish, Christian and Palestinian backgrounds to their country for a summer camp - so they get to understand and hopefully appreciate their commonality and differences and to build up tolerance.

Lotem, the young Israeli woman on the left with her friend Amos, led the group on an Artists Tour. After the tour, the group enjoyed lunch at Hummus Café with an Israeli couple from Tel Aviv.



We sang 'Te Aroha, te Whakapono, te Rangimarie, tatou, tatou e' as a gift to the women who came to share their stories with us. A hongi brought tears as I explained its significance.

When we asked what we could do about the situations as we had seen them, when we got home we were told that the priorities are in this order:

1. pray,
2. tell their stories,
3. come back,
4. bring others,
5. make donations.

In three weeks I found it hard to grasp the enormity of the situation, with so many telling me their perspective, all with sincerity and conviction. I am not a political person but it seems to me that there are some serious outside influences



Above: View of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives with Jewish cemetery in the foreground, walled Old City and the gold Dome of the Rock in the center with El-Aqsa Mosque.

Right: Festival Day at the Western Wall—note men and women are segregated during the celebration.

Below: The Group's first day in Jopaa (Jaffa). Standing: Cushla Jordan, Revd Dawn Stringer. Seated: Lois Dobson, Gayle Lord, Revd John Stringer, Revd Barbara Harford, Grant Froggatt & Elizabeth Cummings.



which are hindering the peace process.

My gut feeling is that it will be the women in particular who in many ways have the most to lose - their children- who are already making a difference, supporting each other, listening with their hearts, feeling the pain and working daily to ensure reconciliation and peace processes prevail.

I feel incredibly blessed to have had these experiences and to have had my awareness raised on not only the plight of the Jewish people and their story but also the heart-breaking world of the Palestinians. When we enquired about what to do with our new found perceptions of the current situation when we got home, we were told—



Pray,
Tell the Stories,
Come Back,
Bring Others,
Provide Funds as Each is Able.

I am endeavouring to do this and this article is one such action. He iti, he pounamu. It may be small but it is precious.



Jenny Campbell is a lay enabler at Te Anau and a member of Waimea Plains Parish, WSC Link Rep for Diocese of Dunedin, member of Social Justice Commission and passionate advocate for justice and ecological issues.

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The Centre for Anglican Women's Studies, commonly known as the **Women's Studies Centre** was set up to serve and to advance the interests and needs of the women of this Church particularly those undertaking Theological training.

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The Link Representatives from each Diocese and Hui Amorangi have been chosen for their leadership ability to identify, gather, facilitate, resource and encourage women in their educational preparation for ministry whether lay or ordained. It is hoped that the Women's Studies Centre can continue to enjoy the support of each Diocese and Hui Amorangi in this endeavour.

The issue of increasing numbers of women in representative positions across the councils and committees of the Church is seen as a high priority and the practice of intentional mentoring by those already in national and international representative roles is seen as a good way to expose women of this church to fulfill their potential as leaders.

Ensuring that women's voices and stories are heard now and in the future is also one of our continued aims whether it be by traditional methods of publication or using more contemporary technologies like website publication. We remain optimistic that through continued support, the needs of women throughout this Province will be valued and recognized.



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EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER: The Women's Studies Centre is committed to encouraging and enabling women's voices and perspectives from across the diversity of the Church to be shared more widely. We acknowledge that women's experiences of church differ considerably and that resultant theological perspectives also differ considerably. In general the WSC does not exercise editorial control, rather we welcome as many voices as are willing to contribute.