

# A Lenten guide with reflections on Palestine/Israel

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Step into  
the footsteps  
of an Ecumenical  
Accompanier (EA)!

EA Andrew Telfer, recently served with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel ([EAPPI](#)), a program of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

EAPPI deploys volunteers for three-month placements, living alongside vulnerable Palestinian communities. Volunteers bear witness to the communities' suffering and work alongside an international Christian network standing in solidarity with people of all faiths, building the foundations for justice and peace in Palestine and Israel.

*This is not an official EAPPI document. Opinions expressed herein represent the opinions of the EA involved and do not necessarily represent the views of the EAPPI program or World Council of Churches.*

This resource is produced by the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network ([PIEN](#)). PIEN is a network of Australian Christians and supporters who are seeking a lasting peace in Palestine and Israel.



Each week in Lent you will hear firsthand accounts of what Andrew experienced during his placement in East Jerusalem, along with suggested further learning, actions to undertake and prayers to offer, sourced or adapted from, [Sabeel Palestine](#).

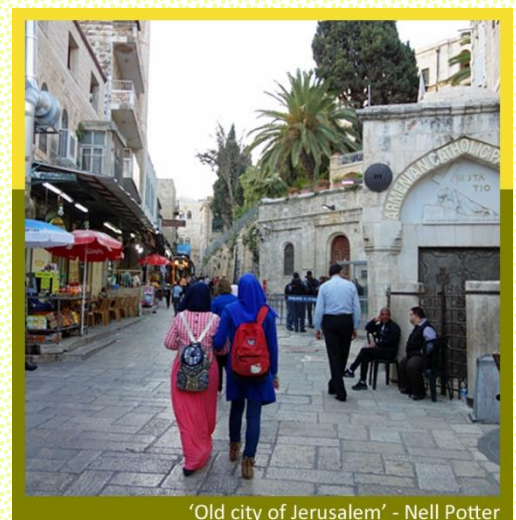
Together, as we head toward Passion Week and all that it encompasses and challenges us to consider, let us journey alongside people in the Holy Land who are suffering today in the land which embeds the footsteps of Jesus.

## Week 1: Feb 26 – Mar 4

**Orientation Nov 2022** - Two teams of EA's are based in East Jerusalem, with one having major responsibility for the Old City and some of the Palestinian communities close to it while the other is more actively supporting Bedouin and other communities on the edge of East Jerusalem.

A priority for all teams is providing a protective presence for communities. For us, this mostly involves walking through the Old City, and other communities, while wearing recognisable vests in the hope that this will reduce the likelihood of human rights violations occurring.

Other regular activities are self-initiated visits to communities and organisations. The former provides us with the opportunity to learn about difficulties and positive aspects of their lives and for us to show that we are genuinely concerned and wanting to inform people in our home countries about their situation. Visits to organisations are primarily for us to broaden our understanding of their roles and, in some cases, enhance relationships to enable better two-way communication.



The third major role is to monitor access to work, education and worship and to document any human rights violations. One of the Jerusalem teams monitors and accompanies children attending one of the schools in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. Students are regularly stopped by soldiers for identification checks and searching of their bags and EA's can provide a 'protective presence' in these situations. Both teams are also required to monitor either Checkpoint 300 at Bethlehem (shared with the Bethlehem EA team) or Qalandiya Checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Incident reports are lodged if there are unusually long delays or other significant issues occurring. An illustration of this role is discussed in next week's reflection.

There are many communities in East Jerusalem which experience a great deal of hardship because of the construction of the Separation Wall and/or settlements by Israel, and the two examples below illustrate this.

### **Kafr Aqab**

This 'suburb' started as a village on the edge of Jerusalem but is now on the outside of the Separation Wall. While it is still part of Jerusalem it is physically in the West Bank. It has grown enormously over the last 20 years with large numbers of high-rise apartment blocks jammed into a small area.

East Jerusalem was occupied by Israel in 1967 after the six-day war, later formally annexed. As a result, Palestinians living within East Jerusalem have a 'resident of Israel' ID card, different to Palestinians living within the West Bank. Many of the Kafr Aqab residents have retained their 'blue card', the Jerusalem identification card which allows them to pass through the nearby Qalandiya checkpoint to enter Jerusalem. One of the appeals of living in Kafr Aqab for these Palestinians is that apartments are much cheaper to buy there than in Jerusalem. Many others have married residents of the West Bank who are not allowed to enter Jerusalem. It can take years for the latter to be able to obtain a permit to enter but, in the meantime, the 'blue card' holder can do so.

The biggest problem with living in this suburb is that, even though it is part of Jerusalem, the city municipality does not provide any services such as rubbish collection and road maintenance because it is in the West Bank. This is despite the fact that residents who retain their Jerusalem identification card continue to pay taxes to the municipality. On the other hand, because it is part of Jerusalem, the Palestinian Authority also refuses to provide any services. As a consequence, there is no planning control for buildings or maintenance of standards and there is a risk that it will turn into a ghetto of poorly constructed apartments. There is also no policing or security presence (except when incidents occur) and there is a significant violence issue. For much of the day, there is major traffic congestion which adds to the time for people from the West Bank wanting to drive through the checkpoint into Jerusalem.

### Seam Zone

Biddu is one of 16 villages, about 10 km northwest of Jerusalem, which have been separated from their nearby farming land by the separation wall. The wall, as in a great many other locations, has been located on Palestinian land rather than along the internationally agreed 'Green Line' dividing Israel and the West Bank. The wall also separates the Palestinian villages from nearby settlements.

Residents now require separate permits to access their farming land and to be able to enter Jerusalem. Permits granted to farmers do not allow sufficient access to tend their olive trees and other crops and provide only a limited time for the landowner and his immediate family to harvest.

What used to be a 10-minute drive to Jerusalem to sell produce from their farms now takes about 2 hours and the same applies to anyone who works in Jerusalem. An unlit tunnel of about 1.7km has been constructed by Israel to give road access to the Biddu enclave. It passes under a road constructed for settlers only and its poor design has resulted in a number of serious vehicle collisions.

### Learn / Act

[Kumi Now](#) (meaning Rise Up) is an initiative of [Sabeel Palestine](#). It seeks to engage folk through webinars, stories, data and suggested actions you can take, around numerous occupation related themes. They have a wealth of information to share, so go deeper through clicking these links:

Learn about [Jerusalem](#)

Learn about [home demolitions](#)

Learn about [family unification](#)

Learn about [Palestinian Citizens of Israel](#)

### Pray

**"Lord, we pray** for the Palestinians living In East Jerusalem as they face an uncertain future with so many home demolitions and discrimination against them in employment and services, as well as the threat of forcible transfer to the occupied West Bank.

**Lord, we pray** for courage for Palestinians to continue to seek markets for their products despite the discrimination they face living under the Israeli occupation. We pray that other countries around the world will support them in their efforts to continue their trade.

**Lord, we pray** for an end to the harassment of Palestinian school children by Israeli soldiers. We continue to pray for these children growing up under the occupation, who have to cope with obstruction, checkpoints, hostile attacks from settlers and tear gas, as part of their daily routine.

**Lord, in your mercy.."**

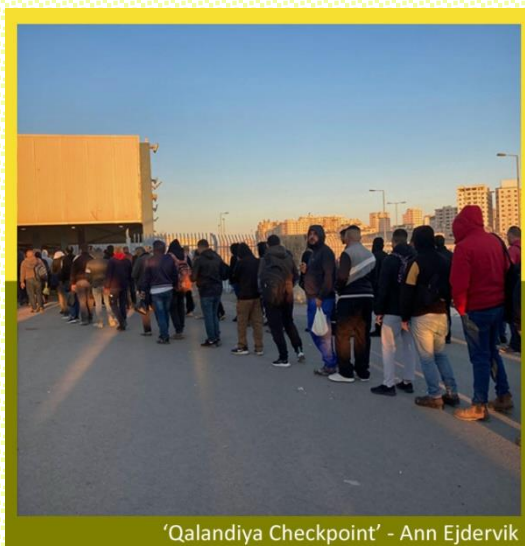


## Week 2: Mar 5 – Mar 11

**Mid Nov 2022** - During our refresher and orientation training in Jerusalem, the programme coordinator spoke to us about the current situation with the number of reported violations of human rights against Palestinians having jumped significantly during the COVID period when there were no international teams present. EAPPI is the first organisation to return and teams have received a strong welcome from the communities where they are placed. Conversely, some Israeli settlers have expressed their opposition to the return by putting up banners.

One of the most powerful presentations we received was from a lady who is a senior figure in Addameer, a Palestinian Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, which is one of six organisations declared to be a terrorist group by the Israeli government a few months ago.

Their work with prisoners is very difficult given that there are 17 prisons to which Palestinians can be sent with only one of these being in the West Bank. Not only is this a breach of international law, which bars the detention of prisoners outside of their own territory, but it is also punitive for the families of the prisoner who have to get a permit to travel from the West Bank and these are frequently not granted. This leaves prisoners isolated and often unable to access legal advice. Palestinians charged with an offence in the West Bank are dealt with in a Military Court where the prosecutor and judge are serving military officers. Israelis who are charged with an offence (much smaller numbers are actually charged) are dealt with in a civil court. This is one of the clear aspects of the 'apartheid' which exists.



'Qalandiya Checkpoint' - Ann Ejdervik

The first day at our placement was a long one with a visit to Qalandia checkpoint, which is north of Jerusalem on the road to Ramallah. It was a Friday and we monitored Palestinians wanting to pass through the checkpoint from the West Bank so that they could attend the Al Aqsa Mosque for Friday prayers. This mosque is the third most holy place for Islamic people. We were there for 2 hours and there was a steady flow of people entering the checkpoint. However, about 100 of these had their entry refused for a variety of reasons such as: their magnetic identification card didn't work, they didn't have the birth certificates for children under 15 (once they are 15 they are required to get an ID card), children taken through the checkpoint by grandparents (only parents can escort their own children) and permits had expired (many seemed aware that this was the case but tried to cross regardless). Some family groups who were rejected by the Border Police came out with young kids crying. The two from our team who were at the checkpoint today reported that only one entry lane was operating at any one time (there were two operating continuously last week) and that for quite a long time the lane would open for 20-30 seconds and then close and another lane would open. So people would run to a lane only to have it close before they gained access and then try for the newly opened lane. A great deal of frustration resulted from this arbitrary behaviour of the Border Police. It is these sorts of unpredictable actions that are a great source of anger - understandably.



'Sheikh Jarrah' - Claudia Giner

In the afternoon, we went firstly to a demonstration in Paris Square in West Jerusalem by an Israeli organisation, 'Women in Black', who have been conducting a 1-hour silent vigil since 1988 opposing the Occupation. They cop a lot of abuse from drivers passing by and a small amount of support.

After this vigil they then proceeded to Sheik Jarrah (as did we) to participate in a weekly demonstration protesting over evictions and land grabs by Israelis. This has about 50 people attending with a lot of shouting, beating of drums etc. So far we have not witnessed any violence but there is clearly a high potential for this. Our role is to monitor the demonstration without actually demonstrating in any way. As with other roles, it is hoped that by our presence, and that of other internationals, the chance of human rights violations occurring is reduced. The demonstrators comprised mainly Palestinians but also quite a number of Israelis and a number of internationals.

On Saturday morning we went to the Bedouin village, Kahn al Ahmar, with the driver who is available to take us to locations further out and also to act as interpreter for us. He has been doing this work with EAPPI for 15 years and is a wonderful source of information and contacts. This village of 35 families, all related, were forced from their home of generations in the Negev Desert in 1951 and after wandering for many months settled in hills just east of Jerusalem. Their small hamlet is now surrounded by settlements and in 2018 the Israeli Government issued eviction orders, mainly on the basis that their very humble homes etc were built without permits, which are almost impossible to obtain. After court action opposing the eviction orders, the Israeli High Court, in 2018, dismissed the claims of the Bedouins and ordered the evictions proceed. International pressure has slowed this process but they are living under threat of eviction at any time. The Government plan is to move them to an area in East Jerusalem close to a rubbish dump and give them land of about 300 square meters.

On Monday we walked in the Christian Quarter of the Old City to provide 'protective presence'. There are now a number of Israeli settlements in buildings in this Quarter, with clashes occurring from time to time.

I hope this gives you some feel for the work the Jerusalem team will be doing.

## Learn / Act

Continue to engage through Kumi Now: Click these links to go deeper:

Learn about [administrative detention](#)

Learn about [Palestinian refugees](#)

Learn about [restrictions on movement](#)

## Pray

**"Lord, we pray** for the Palestinian prisoners currently enduring harsh conditions in Israeli jails. We remember especially the 29 Palestinian women and 160 Palestinian children in prison and pray for the 915 Palestinians living under administrative detention.

**Lord, we pray** that Palestinian prisoners will be able to see their relatives again and pray especially for those imprisoned for years without charge and for those kept in solitary confinement.

**Lord, we pray** that international governments and organisations will challenge the Israeli government over its plans to break international law by forcibly transferring the villagers of Khan al Ahmar.

**Lord, in your mercy..."**

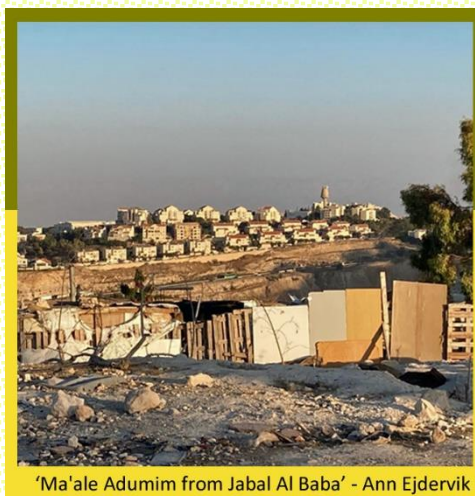


## Week 3: Mar 12 – Mar 18

**Late Nov 2022** - Since my first update, some of the team visited the town of Al Eizariya which is only about 3.3 km from Jerusalem as the crow flies. However, given that it is now enclosed by Israel's security fence on the east, north and west you need to travel twice that distance by road and it takes a lot longer than it used to. In Biblical times it was known as Bethany which is the location where Jesus is believed to have raised Lazarus from the dead. The latter's tomb is in the town and is a draw card for thousands of Christian tourists.

We met with the Mayor and another Municipal Officer and they discussed with us some of the issues which have impacted on the town and others which are in the pipeline. Since the Occupation the town has lost about 3/4 of its land area due to confiscations but the population has increased significantly. The town is still officially part of Jerusalem, despite being separated by the wall, but receives very few services. One of the municipality's concerns is that tourists only stay for 20-30 minutes and don't spend any money in the town and they are trying to develop initiatives which would entice them to stay longer.

The second largest Israeli settlement in the West Bank, Ma'ale Adumim, has been developed about 1km from Al Eizariya and because of its proximity, with other settlements, to Jerusalem, there have been plans for a number of years to develop a road system which connects settlements with each other and to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and to construct a separate road for Palestinians (part of the E1 Project). This would enable the building of about 3,500 more settlement homes to link up with Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and would effectively cut the West Bank in half making any chance of a 2-state solution impossible (not that it seems likely now). It was stated in 2020 by the then Israeli Defence Minister, Naftali Bennett, that the plan would "improve the quality of life for [Israeli] residents in the area, avoid unnecessary friction with the Palestinian population and most importantly - allow for continued [settlement] constructions. We're applying sovereignty [to the West Bank] in deeds, not in words." This project, apart from creating additional separation of Israelis and Palestinians, expansion of settlements and the closure of some roads currently used by Palestinians in particular, would result in the confiscation of more land from Al Eizariya.



'Ma'ale Adumim from Jabal Al Baba' - Ann Ejdervik

Later in the week I visited the Bedouin village of Jabal al Baba for the first time. It is close to Al Eizariya and will also be greatly affected if the E1 road and settlement project goes ahead. The people here would almost certainly be evicted and forced to the edge of Al Eizariya. The spokesman for the village, Attallah, talked at length about their situation and it is similar to that of Kahn al Ahmar which I mentioned in my earlier update. They were forced out of the Negev in 1948 when given an ultimatum to either agree to join the Israeli Army or leave their tents and way of life. They opted for the latter and settled in their current location where they live in housing which we would regard as terrible conditions. Attallah spoke of how much they just wanted to live their simple lives with nature and in the fresh air and with their herds of goats. He talked a bit about their former nomadic lifestyle when they lived in tents in the desert and moved locations depending on the season. He emphasised that they were happy where they are but was very concerned that eviction could come soon. All the Bedouin villages and towns we have visited so far have expressed frustration at the lack of support internationally, particularly since the Ukraine situation.

The tragic bombing at a West Jerusalem bus station led to tighter security across the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. There were immediate calls from senior right wing Israeli politicians for targeted assassinations of Palestinian terrorists and a senior Army reservist officer suggested that planes, missiles and tanks should be sent in to deal with Palestinians. World leaders expressed their outrage. But as an article in Haaretz reminded readers, about 30 Israeli and over 120 Palestinians have been killed by terrorists or in violent incidents this year. Our Palestinian driver commented when we were talking about the situation a couple of days ago that "they are killing our young people every day". The generally one-sided response to such incidents as the bombing is frustrating for us and especially for Palestinians, the vast majority of whom just want to live peaceful lives.

## Learn / Act

Continue to engage through Kumi Now: Click these links to go deeper:

Learn about [settlements and settler violence](#)

Learn about [collective punishment](#)

## Pray

**“Lord, we pray** that international governments and organisations will challenge Israel for violating international law by allowing settlers to seize more and more Palestinian land.

**Lord, we pray** for the relatives of the Israelis injured and killed in the West Jerusalem bombing and other recent acts of violence. We pray for wisdom and restraint for all those in positions of authority in Palestine/Israel that they will act to calm the tensions between the communities and guide them in the way of peace.

**Lord, we pray** that the human rights of all will be respected in the Holy Land. We pray for an end to the apartheid regime of separation and discrimination between Israelis and Palestinians.

**Lord, in your mercy..”**

## Week 4: Mar 19 – Mar 25

**Dec 2022** - I will focus in this update on a briefing we received this week from members of a Palestinian organisation, Military Court Watch (MCW). It was a very enlightening and sobering session. The presenters were a Palestinian woman who is one of the co-founders and an English lawyer, Gerard, who has been working with MCW for 10 years. It was formed in 2013 and is guided by two basic principles:

*“all children detained by the Israeli military authorities are entitled to all the rights and protections guaranteed under international law”; and*

*“there can be no legal justification for treating Palestinian and Israeli children differently under Israel’s military and civilian legal systems”. ([Quotes](#) from their website)*

Three days into the Six-day war in 1967, military courts were established by Israel and military laws imposed. Israel was entitled to do this under the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention which it is a signatory to. However, this is required to be a temporary measure and it’s now been 55 years! Israel’s Military Order #3 expressly referenced the 4th Convention but within 3 months of Israel’s victory, the first settlement was established in the Occupied Palestine Territories. This is contrary to the Convention. Israel later removed the reference to the 4th Geneva Convention from their Military Order. There are now about 700,000 Israeli settlers in the occupied territories - 250,000 in East Jerusalem (which was formally annexed into Israel in 1980) and about 450,000 in the West Bank.

The Israel Defence Force (IDF) has the task of protecting Israeli settlers which it does very effectively. Approximately 95% of Palestinians arrested or detained live within 1km of a settlement.

We were told about the process of identifying Palestinian suspects for such an offence as throwing stones at vehicles on a road, which is a pretty common occurrence. The IDF assumes that this will have been caused by males aged from 10-30 years and who are from the nearest village. Information is passed to the Intelligence



Unit covering that area and they identify suspects with strong political loyalties to Palestine and with a history of previous stone throwing. They will also check with collaborators who live in that village. Apparently Palestinian society is thoroughly infiltrated by collaborators with the IDF. They are coerced into this role through such activities as the offering of inducements during an interrogation and the threat of not renewing work permits if they don't collaborate. Their presence (generally unknown) in villages leads to suspicions amongst the residents and tends to unravel the social fabric of communities.

## Salwa Duaibis

Co-founder of 'Military Court Watch', an organization that monitors the treatment of children in Israeli military detention.

'The mechanics of occupation: Children in Israeli military detention'

Watch this brilliant talk by Salwa, looking at the long-term impact of child detention.



The above talk was given during a Lenten series PIEN co-hosted in 2022, called 'Hear our Voices', reflections from Palestinian Christians.

Click [here](#) to view the talk.

About 50% of arrests are made at night, typically 2.00am to 4.00am, because the suspects are likely to be home but also because there is less likelihood of riots resulting and because people are terrified and less likely to resist. MCW has collated information about these raids over some time. Entry is gained by either aggressive banging on the door, by blowing off the door with explosives or the use of hydraulic jacks to quietly open doors. The raids have a huge impact on families. Typically, about 10 soldiers in full camouflage gear will enter, sometimes with dogs, and gather the family in the lounge room. Their intent is to get the suspect out as quickly as possible to avoid any chaos, and, having identified their suspect, will tell the parents that they are taking him (usually a male) for 2 hours to interview him. No other information will usually be given. Most of the arrested kids have zip ties put around their wrists and are blindfolded which is a tactic for reducing their resistance during subsequent interrogation. There is rarely any support from family or legal advice available and about 20% of 16–17-year-olds are put into solitary confinement following charging for an average of about 11 days. Interrogations are conducted in Arabic but the transcripts are done in Hebrew so that the detained person can't verify their accuracy. Subsequent court proceedings in a Military Court are also in Hebrew.

After being charged, 97% are not given bail. If they plead guilty their imprisonment is likely to be about 4 months but if not guilty they will be in custody for at least 6 months. Extensive plea bargaining occurs with many pleading guilty just to get out of custody. 80% of those imprisoned are transferred to prisons in Israel (there is only 1 in the West Bank) which is another breach of the Geneva Convention.

We heard about the huge impact on Palestinians caused by night raids with an average of 8 per night currently occurring across the West Bank. A couple of examples:

- in a village near Ramallah, there is a house which is only a few metres from a settlement house. The Palestinian home was raided 16 times in May while kids in the family were trying to prepare for exams. Only 1 person was arrested as a result.
- after a boy was released from prison, his mother was interviewed by MCW. They live in a refugee camp and she questioned why the IDF come into the camp while nothing is happening. They often fire tear gas, smoke grenades or live bullets for no reason and this only causes violence and more arrests and fear.
- another woman described to MCW how she woke up one night to find soldiers in her bedroom. Her screams caused her baby to wake up screaming. After half an hour they left without making any arrests. She assumed that they were doing training and I have heard previously that often the IDF will enter homes at night for training purposes. This mother is now scared of being home in darkness and worries for her baby son.

The changes in behaviour of children after they have been released from prison was also described with a high percentage becoming more rebellious and socially isolated. Many sleep during the day and stay awake at night and they often drop out of school early.

The MCW presenters emphasised that these situations don't affect all Palestinians but it helps the Israeli authorities maintain control. Of course, the other breach of international law which exists is the fact that Israeli and Palestinian citizens living in the West Bank are dealt with under different legal systems - Palestinians under Military Law and Israelis by Civil Law, with vastly different conviction rates, detention periods and penalties.



## Learn / Act

Continue to engage through Kumi Now: Click these links to go deeper:

Learn about [children's rights](#)

Learn about [minors in Military Courts](#)

## Pray

**Lord, we hold** all Palestinian children in Israeli military custody before you in our prayers. We pray too for their families, suffering due to their absence from home and concerned for their well-being. Lord, we ask you to comfort and strengthen them so that their light and hope is not quenched.

**Lord, we pray** that international organisations will challenge the Israeli government for the mistreatment of Palestinian children. We pray for an end to the harassment of Palestinian children by the Israeli military during night raids and arrests. We pray for an end to the home and school demolitions and lack of employment opportunities for young Palestinians.

**Lord, in your mercy..**

## Week 5: Mar 26 – Apr 1

**Jan 2023** - Since Christmas the team has continued to be busy with visits to a number of communities, regular checkpoint monitoring and a meeting with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). I will provide some snapshots from a number of these activities.

### Meeting with UNRWA

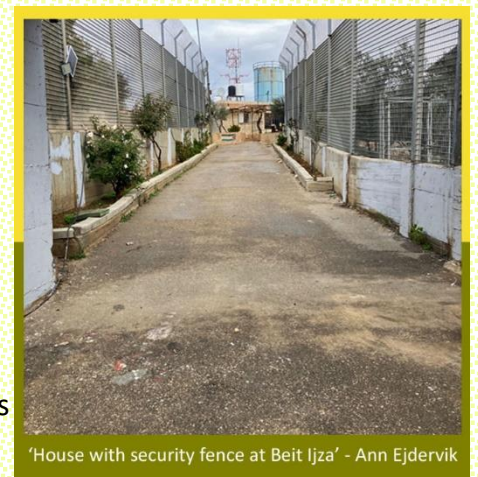
This UN agency is the only one which delivers direct services in its role of providing a range of services to approximately 900,000 registered Palestinian refugees who fled their homes at the time of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war (called the Nakba or Catastrophe by Palestinians). Refugee camps are located in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza.

It provides 96 schools servicing over 500,000 students, hospitals and clinics, rubbish collection, microfinance advice and other practical support. It is a quasi-governmental agency and, when peace is realised between Israel and Palestine (what a great day that will be!) all its resources would be transferred to the Palestinian Government.

### Biddu

This was our second visit to this town and to other small villages nearby. We spoke with a man who lived for 40 years in the USA where he lectured in American History (ironic!) but, after 10 years of trying to get a permit to return, came back to "my land". He said it would have been much easier to have stayed but he felt a very strong urge to return and to be with his people. He commented that it should be everyone's right to return to their own country but Palestinians regard it as a victory to be able to get back. This is so starkly different to the situation for Jews anywhere who have automatic right of residency and citizenship in Israel. A Jew is defined as any person born of a Jewish mother (and having one Jewish grandparent is sufficient) or who has converted to Judaism. International Humanitarian Law, and various UN resolutions, are very clear in upholding the right of Palestinians to return to their country but the hundreds of thousands who were forced out in 1948 and 1967 have not been allowed to return.

We visited a home in Beit Ijza which was part of an area of 10 hectares of Palestinian land but is now surrounded on three sides by Israeli settler housing. According to the local men, the surrounding land used to be planted with wheat. Israelis took photos of the land after harvest and argued that the photos showed that the land was not being used - and it was subsequently confiscated. The only access to this house is up a long driveway which, for a few years, had a secure gate at the entrance controlled by the military and the family had to ring them to open the gate so that they could enter or exit. The separation wall that now runs on three sides of their house was extended upwards to prevent settlers from throwing rocks and other items. The latter have been offered a 'blank cheque' to leave but they refuse.



'House with security fence at Beit Ijza' - Ann Ejdervik

### South Hebron Hills

Last week I spent 2 days visiting the EA team located at Yatta. A couple of my experiences with them:

The team was requested to attend a village about 15 minutes drive away where shepherds, trying to take their sheep to an area to graze, were stopped by two settlers, one of whom had a dog and the other a firearm. The EA team has been to this community a number of times to support them with various issues with settlers. The family moving their sheep have been harassed so many times that they are not prepared to resist the actions of the settlers and on this occasion we observed the situation, with two Israeli activists, until the police and military attended. A great deal of talking and showing of documents followed and eventually a compromise was made as to where settlers and Palestinians could respectively graze their flocks. However, there was no legal solution offered and so it will undoubtedly happen again before long.

The next morning we were asked to attend another village where a man had come to check his 2 and a half year old olive trees which had been planted fairly recently. Of the 170 trees only 3 had not been pulled from the ground and most of them had had their trunks snapped. An illegal Israeli outpost (a precursor to a settlement) is located about 400 metres from the orchard and there seemed to be no question about who the culprit was. This sort of destruction and harassment is very common from settlers and persons in outposts as they try and force Palestinians from their land so that the former can then take it over. It was heartbreaking to think of all the work required to plant 170 trees (no mechanisation involved) and the need now to replant, which they intend doing. The statement was made that they would have more security, but it's hard to imagine how they can prevent this happening again.

### Learn / Act

Continue to engage through Kumi Now: Click these links to go deeper:

Learn about [Palestinian Right of Return](#)

### Pray

**"Lord, we pray** for an end to the Israeli occupation. We pray for a shared future for the fulfilment of the Palestinian right of return and a just and peaceful co-existence with all the people living in the Holy Land.

**We pray** that the Israeli authorities will stop turning a blind eye to the frequent outbreaks of settler violence and vandalism directed against Palestinian communities.

**Merciful Lord,** we pray for the Palestinian people caged in their own land by military checkpoints, separation walls, travel permits. We pray for a dismantling of this inhumane system of oppression and degradation.

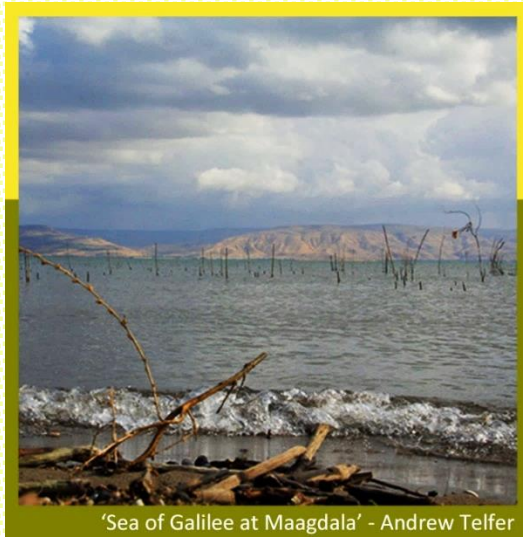
**Lord, we pray** for protection for Palestinian farmers during the olive harvest when so many face attacks from Israeli settlers. We thank you that there are some Israeli activists prepared to go and join farmers to provide protection from settler attacks and to document settler abuses.

**Lord, in your mercy.."**



## Week 6: Apr 2 – Apr 8

**Late Jan 2023** - As a Christian, visiting the Holy Land is an enormous privilege. During my deployments with EAPPI I have been able to walk the streets of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, wander through Nazareth and Jericho and walk along the edge of the Sea of Galilee and in the hills outside Jericho. As we approach Easter, my thoughts go to the Garden of Gethsemane and the ancient olive trees which are still present and to the pilgrim groups we regularly encountered in Jerusalem who faithfully walked the Via Dolorosa and acknowledged the Stations of the Cross.



'Sea of Galilee at Maagdala' - Andrew Telfer



'Garden of Gethsemane' - Nell Potter

In this birthplace of Christianity, however, the number of Palestinian Christians living in the West Bank and Gaza has fallen from 7-8% of the population in 1947 to 1-2% now. While thousands have left their homeland as a result of the Nakba and Occupation, and often, now, for economic reasons, those who remain joyfully worship in their churches and are committed to maintaining a Christian presence. Unfortunately, there have been numerous attacks against Christians and their property in recent years and, in January, two young extremist Jews were filmed desecrating graves in a Protestant cemetery on Mount Zion.

The opportunity to regularly worship with Christians in Jerusalem, and in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve, was a highlight of my recent time as an EA in Palestine. On our first Sunday in placement, some of our team attended St Saviour's Catholic Church in the Old City and, although the service was in Arabic, I felt a togetherness with the congregation of at least 100 who clearly enjoyed the service and which included the involvement of children. Over the following weeks I attended services in Orthodox, Anglican and Lutheran churches.

The work of EAPPI would not exist if the leaders of the Christian Churches in Jerusalem hadn't cried out to the World Council of Churches for help during the Second Intifada (in 2002). Their active demonstration of Jesus' call for peace and justice for all has flowed on to hundreds of Christians, and other like-minded people, from all over the world who have stood with Palestinians since then, as EA's, and now advocate for a just peace in Palestine and Israel.

My involvement stemmed, initially, from a long-held thought of contributing in some way to people who were much less fortunate than me. I saw an advertisement for EAPPI distributed by [Act for Peace](#), the international aid agency for the National Council of Churches in Australia, which coordinates the EAPPI program in Australia. This included a summary of the key roles of EA's and these resonated with my background in policing in which I had worked for 40 years. At the time, I knew very little about the realities of the Occupation and its impact on Palestinians but this has changed dramatically since.

Now, like many other Christians in Australia including those involved in the [Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network](#) and other advocacy groups, I want to inform as many people as possible of these realities.

Jesus, who, with his disciples, also walked the streets of Jerusalem and around the Sea of Galilee, took up the cause of so many people who were disadvantaged and oppressed, including the leper, tax collector, prostitute, sinner, blind, lame and deaf.

The Palestinian residents of the West Bank and East Jerusalem have been living in a situation where they have very few rights, are subject to violence and control by an occupying force and are treated differently to their Israeli neighbours in relation to justice and service provision.

I have not mentioned the situation facing Palestinians in Gaza as the EAPPI program does not operate in this territory, but much of the above applies to the dire situation they also find themselves in, albeit in slightly different circumstances. Very few people, Palestinians and foreigners alike, are permitted to enter or exit Gaza, whose land, sea and air borders are under strict Israeli control. The UN predicted that Gaza would be uninhabitable by the year 2020. Three years on and their prediction continues to worsen.

As we enter Holy Week, when we commemorate the journey Jesus took to the cross, I carry a heavy heart for the injustice that is bestowed upon the people of the occupied Palestinian territories and the discrimination that is extended toward Palestinian residents of Israel. We applaud the work and courage of Israelis who tirelessly speak up for a just peace, often labelled as traitors for doing so.

I feel extraordinarily privileged to have spent 3 months here amongst a people who have so few rights and so many impediments in their lives but are so resilient, welcoming and generous. We all hope that by advocating for peace and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians we can add our voices to those already calling for this and that, eventually, this will happen. Inshallah - if God wills!

People of peace, these reflections are a call to learn, engage and to challenge narratives that seek to hide the reality facing *all* the inhabitants of the Holy Land.

Followers of Jesus, may we strive to do all we can to reflect his calls for love, truth and peace.

In the words of Jesus...

*"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls".*

Matthew 11: 28 - 29

## Learn / Act

Continue to engage through Kumi Now: Click these links to go deeper:

Learn about [Christians in the Holy Land](#)

Learn about the [Kairos Palestine Document](#) and [here](#)

## Pray

**"Merciful Lord**, we pray for our brothers and sisters and their important witness in Palestine. We pray that you will continue to reveal the light of your presence to Christians and guide their feet into the way of peace in the Holy Land.

**Lord, we pray** for an end to the frequent attacks against the Arab Christian community and their property by extremist groups.

**Lord, we pray** that the authorities responsible for administering law and order in Jerusalem will prosecute any settlers who deliberately vandalise the city. We pray that believers of all faiths will continue to have access to their holy sites and can visit their places of worship without fear of assault from radical groups.

**Merciful Lord**, we pray for those suffering serious illnesses in Gaza, especially those who are denied travel permits. We pray for an end to the sixteen-year-old blockade of Gaza.

**Lord Jesus, Immanuel**, when we are fearful of the darkness all around us, help us to turn towards your light. Our Redeemer, we ask for your help in troubled times and trust ourselves to your care.

**Lord, in your mercy.."**



## Notes

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