

# *The Diocese of Swansea and Brecon*



**No. 92**

**Summer2021**



**From the Editor: Chancellor Brian H. Jones**

## ***My Dear Friends***

On January 5<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Epiphany, 1954 Glyn Simon was consecrated Bishop of Swansea and Brecon in Brecon Cathedral, presumably at the time there was no Metropolitan cathedral. The Preacher was Bishop Kenneth Kirk, Bishop of Oxford who took as his text "***I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock***" ((Zechariah 11v7))

The essence of the Bishop's life is to feed the flock committed to his charge. The Eastern shepherd had two staves the cudgel to ward off danger to the flock, the crook to stop the flock wandering. These are the two things which the bishop takes up at his consecration. The prophet called the One Beauty and the other Bands, Kirk suggests that the new Bishop takes up the same two.

**BEAUTY** the beauty of holiness to be shown to his people, the Church goes forward proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom. **BANDS** representing the virtue the Church needs to fulfil his ministry - unity, quietness, love and peace among all Christian people.

The two elements of the Bishop's ministry. **Beauty**

his relationship with his people, his pastoral ministry. His Preaching, Confirmations, Ordinations, Visitations. The Beauty of the shepherd guiding and feeding his flock.

**BANDS** Kirk says "the shackles and limitations laid upon him by administration, cares and responsibilities. He is the fixed point around which the Diocese revolves." The contemporary situation, the ease of contacting the bishop, using all the means of social media, the prospect of starting the day with a full Inbox.



**Beauty and Bands** the pastoral duty of feeding the flock and the responsibility of keeping Church administration efficient - the two elements of the Bishop's life.

In September the Electoral College will be asked to appoint a bishop to this Diocese, laying before him, or her, **Beauty and Bands** pastoral care and administration to keep the Unity. A huge task, so we ask for the prayers of God's people, not only for the Electors, but also for the person who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they will elect.

We look forward to welcoming the Bishop elect in the next issue of ***The Newsletter***

***With best wishes and prayers.***

***Brian***

## *Family News*

***We send our congratulations and best wishes to:***

- Bishop John and Jo on their retirement

**To those celebrating anniversaries of Ordination  
( years and Deacon(D) Priest(P))**

75 Douglas Davies (D)

60 Brian Jones, Michael Short (D) Peter Dixon (P)

55 Peter Jackson, Clive Jones (D), Bishop Anthony (P)

45 George Bennett, Nigel Hall, Robert Williams.  
David Lloyd (D) Andrew Knight (P)

40 Andrew Tweed, Pdraig Gallagher (D) Peter  
Williams (P)

35 Glyn James (P) 30 David Payne, Eldon Phillips (P)

25 Lyndon Taylor (P)

***Your prayers are asked/or those to be Ordained  
at this time.***

***Priests (June 26th)***

Lisa Morgan

Jim Page

Sue Northcott

Jon Howard

Sue Waite

Annabelle Elletson

Biddy Wigley

Lucy McKeown

***Deacons (June 2'J'h)***

Anna Bessant (Brecon)

Sarah Harris (Central Swansea)

Carol Jones (Llanwrtyd)

***We send our good wishes and prayers to those who  
have not been well Please continue to hold in your  
prayers all those who are lonely and separated from  
their families because of current restrictions.***

### ***In Memoriam.***

Three priests who died recently gave long and faithful service to the Diocese.

***Terry Evans*** was brought up in St. Thomas and was educated in the Swansea Grammar School (now Bishop Gore) After some years working in the city he followed his vocation and went to St. Michael's College, Llandaff for a period of three years before being ordained Deacon

in 1969 and Priest the following year. Over a period of eight years he served two curacies in Loughor and Gowerton before being inducted as Rector of Llanbister in 1977. He returned to the Gower Archdeaconry in 1981 as Rector of Llanyrnewydd (Penclawdd) where he remained until his retirement in 2009. As a parish priest he was diligent and caring for his people. A quiet and retiring soul he and Gaynor retired to Central Swansea. Gaynor sadly predeceased him and he lived quietly in his retirement. He and I were in school together and I remember him as a quiet, unassuming person with very strong opinions on the Church and human society.

***Lionel Ward*** After his initial degree in Cardiff University, Lionel researched his Ph.D in London University before taking up a lectureship in the Department of Education in Swansea University where he spent all of his academic career. He was ordained Deacon in 1985 and Priest the following year and served as NSM in the Parish of Swansea. From 1989 he was priest in charge of St. Matthew and Diocesan Director of Education from 1997 - 2001. In 1991 his wife Pat had been ordained Deacon and subsequently Priest and also served as NSM in St. Mary's. She sadly died at a very young age. On retirement Lionel moved to London to be near his family. He was a faithful Priest in the Diocese and many young teachers were grateful for his guidance and support in their P.G.C.E. year.

***Eric Wastell*** Eric was brought up in the Sandfields area of Swansea and in Christ Church one of the churches of the Catholic tradition in the town. After training as a teacher in Trinity CoJlege Carmarthen he taught for some years in Swansea before studying for the priesthood in St. Michael's College Llandaff. He was ordained Deacon in 1962 and Priest the following year and served as a curate in the parish of Oystermouth for three years. In 1965 he began a fruitful ministry in Antigua which lasted for seven years and during which he held a number of extra parochial posts including Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Antigua. He returned to the Diocese as Vicar of St. Gabriel's in Swansea beginning a long and faithful ministry. As a Canon of Brecon Cathedral he brought to the Chapter meetings a clear Catholic view of liturgy and the pastoral ministry. On retirement he was received in to the Roman Catholic Church and subsequently ordained Deacon and Priest and had a ministry centred on the St. Joseph cathedral in the city. In retirement Eric suffered some ill health and lived for some years in the Stella Maris Nursing home.

It was a privilege to be alongside these priests in ministry as friends and colleagues. Their contribution to the life of the Church in the Diocese in a variety of aspects of ministry and tradition would be difficult to comprehend. We thank God for their ministry, for their friendship commending them to the care and mercy of God. To their families, and all who mourn their loss, we send our sympathy and prayers. ***Ed.***

# Ordination



In a recent article in the Church Times, Angela Tilby quoted the American writer Frederick Buechner " The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet"

As we look back over the decades to our ordination, many of us might feel that the gift of Holy Orders is so central to our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world that we might almost say without exaggeration that without ordination we cannot be saved. Our calling to be followers of Christ and our calling to ministerial priesthood are woven together inextricably.

This has its dangers. Canon Tony Prescott of the Additional Curates Society once addressed the student body at St Stephens House in forceful terms. Our primary concern was to give glory to God not by being ultra Anglo Catholics, or by being loyal Anglicans, or even Christians , but by being human beings fully alive to all that God was empowering us to be.

One of the most revealing remarks about the nature of Ordination came in an off the cuff remark by Pope Benedict on his visit to Britain. He asked an Anglican bishop how long he had been ordained. Informed that it was over thirty years, the pope replied, " that is a long friendship"

This I think is a most fruitful way of reflecting on what our Ordination means to us. It is essentially to be the friend and partner of Christ. Everything we have done and been, is to draw others into this transforming friendship.

As we reflect on the years of ministry we have been given, we might wish to echo Charles Kingsleys words when asked what was the secret source of his energetic championing of the Christian faith. He simply replied, "I had a friend" His friendship with F D Maurice transformed his faith and his way of life,

You perhaps know the beautiful story from Persian history about the Emperor Shah Abbas. He was renowned for the love he had for his people. He loved to escape from the stifling conventions of the court and

mingle with his subjects in disguise. One day he visited a poor man whose job was to keep the fires burning at the public baths. When the midday meal came, the monarch shared the simple food which the lowly subject offered him. A friendship was formed, and the Shah would often visit him to hear how his people lived, and what were their needs. The time came for the emperor to reveal his identity, and he expected the man to ask for an expensive gift,

Instead, the old man replied " You left your palace and your glory to sit with me in this dark place, to eat my coarse food, and be my friend, whether I was sad or happy. You may have given priceless gifts to other people, but you have given me something much more valuable: you have given me yourself. My request, O great king, is that you never take away your gift of friendship from me .

At the heart of this Divine friendship through the years is the sharing in the stillness of prayer of the needs of the community in which we minister pressing on our minds and hearts, Today in retirement that ministry of intercession continues. It is a central part of the friendship we treasure.

Sometimes words will not be necessary. In the 1950s the two great Russian composers, Rostropovich and Shostakovich formed a deep bond. Often late at night there would be telephone calls from Shostakovich "Slava, Slava", the composer would plead, "You have to come and see me immediately. Immediately, I need you to come" Rostropovich wrote, "I thought perhaps he wants to speak to me about some concert coming up. I would go to him. And he would move a chair over to his desk and say , " Sit , Slava , sit" And then he would say, "Now let's just be quiet" And the two musicians would sit there in a shared silence. Perhaps for fifteen minutes. And then he would get up and say to Rostropovich, "Thank you for coming to see me" and his friend would go.

The composer needed not mere words, but the support of his friend's presence, a friend who understood everything that was happening to him without explanation, In this we see a reflection of our prayer with Christ.

At the heart of our ministry lies this transforming friendship. As we look back over the years, we recognise Him as the friend who comes searching for us when we falter, as the friend who is never put off by any failure or betrayal. the friend who is always faithful and true. Much of this is true for every Christian, but especially for those called to the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments. "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet"

*George Bennett.*

# A Little Sanctuary



*Saxted Porch April 21.*

The noticeboard tells me this is 'A Little Sanctuary': a churchyard providing 'a haven for insects, birds and mammals'. Like many church porches in rural places, this one reminds us that God's creation contains the visible and invisible, the animate and inanimate, life we depend upon (like the bees flying in and out of the stonework above me right now) as well as all we harvest and from which other forms of life find a sheltering place.

Long before it became urgent to talk in terms of an environmental theology, many church porches have carried information about management of the 'yard', our responsibilities as stewards of creation. I can see an old copy of the Churchyard Rules opposite me now as I sit on a bench to write these words: it speaks about how to take care and exercise respect for God's Acre. This particular acreage is at Saxted Bottom, a little way from Saxted Common and its wonderful Post Mill. In summer the wide greens are carpeted with Lady's Smock but here, in a little churchyard, it is the flowering cherry trees that are so inspirational. I can see one of them by looking through a convenient window, peering out from this sunlit porch, marked by a rustic brick floor at my feet and waiting swifts' nests above me. I am looking into a massive weeping Mount Fuji, possibly some 35 foot across. It squats like a perpetual, breaking wave, cresting, rising, falling, white on white.

I stood in this porch at the end of many services; gathering up little threads of information and concern with which one weaves ministry. As Curate here in the late 1980's, I needed to learn what ordination really means. An Art teacher for years before, I had to discover a new way of seeing into souls and articulating beliefs. But like so much making of art, being a priest brings liberation as well as fresh vulnerabilities, burdens and exhilarations akin to the creative process. My own ministry led me into urban and city-centre parishes, ending with five wonderful years at the heart of Swansea

And yet, half-hidden by chestnut trees, bordering a fruit orchard and hawthorn hedges, this little church and churchyard is where I think of as my 'spiritual' home.

Now in retirement and living just 10 miles down the road, this awareness is even greater. The same porch, which acts as my writing desk this morning, has always been a place of conversation. Recently it sheltered me from the worst of the Spring weather as I struggled to get a drawing finished. As a family we gather here regularly to tend my father's grave, drink his health and gossip; which I trust my own children will do for me one day. It does indeed mark one's 'going out and coming in'. I spent many years exhorting folk to not leave their minds at the porch door when coming to worship. But equally, I urged them not to leave their hearts within the sacramental event which, however strong and meaningful, is not where we meet Him in the working days ahead. So a Church Porch is a kind of 'interlocking place', between one world and another.

It binds us to the work in hand, whichever direction we might be facing or travelling and, while not itself a sanctuary, all porches provide access to sacredness. Whether within the confines of a church building or channelling us out into the sacred world, I like the idea of the whole universe being 'The Great Sanctuary', into which God's holiness has been continuously poured. As priests we are especially charged with making obvious, for our time. Each has the means of doing so, not necessarily nowadays regularly at an altar or in the pulpit. However, here today, in the sounds and sights of a Suffolk Spring, I am reminded that churchyards can also be little sanctuaries. Through their being a focus for remembering loved ones, they also speak of how everyone's story matters to God, of the ways by which the whole earth is meant to exist as a divine harmony. As many other far younger voices are now reminding us, biblical principles include being judged by how we care for nature; mirrored by the way we care for our past. In my view, that makes the church porch a very special sort of viewing place. Like an art gallery, it is where we can see those truths in fresh ways and, by learning to appreciate and care for the past, we grow to know ourselves better, engaging with the Maker of All that is and thereby assisting in creating a New Creation

*Andrew Vessey*

## Llangasty Snippets

Two Little stories about Llangasty which may be of interest:

I was very fortunate in that I spent the summers of my school and college days on Llangorse Lake. One Sunday, in the mid 50s, my parents had gone for a run around Llangorse lake, and saw there were sailing boats on it. So they went down, found there was a sailing club, that they knew several of the members, so the next thing was that my father bought a sailing dinghy! That summer was a steep learning curve, but it began a love of sailing that has stayed with me ever since.

To get to my point: it was about then that Llangasty Vicarage came on the market. The sailing club were thinking that it would make an impressive and comfortable club house, being above flood water level unlike their actual site, alongside Llangorse Common, which flooded every winter. They were making the usual enquiries, and were quite dismayed when they learned that Miss Raikes had arranged to buy the Vicarage and set it up as a retreat house. The story that then became current in the club was that she had done this just to prevent the club from buying the vicarage and thus disturbing Sundays at Llangasty, since Sunday was the club's main day for racing.

Raikes, who learning that Silyn loved fishing insisted he borrow a rod and go fishing one afternoon. Silyn gladly took up the offer, borrowed the equipment from Admiral Raikes. Now I am quite sure that that was not the uppermost thought in Miss Raikes' mind. To organise the setting up of a retreat house is not something to undertake lightly, and to persuade the

Knowle sisters to take it under their wing was no mean feat, and Miss Raikes did brilliantly. But at the back of my mind is the niggle that perhaps secretly she was relieved that by having the retreat house there, Sundays could continue undisturbed. Who knows?

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My second snippet relates to my SSF days. During my postulancy and early novitiate I was at the brothers' house in Cerne Abbas, and at the time the guardian there was Br Silyn. Some of you may remember him. He was from North Wales, Welsh being his first language, and having a strong North-Walian accent. Realising I came from Brecon, he told me the following:

Once he was conducting a retreat at Llangasty, probably in the early 60s I should think. While there, he was introduced to Admiral and found the spot he'd been recommended, I presume on the Usk bank somewhere, where the Admiral had his riparian rights. While he was out in the water, in waders and shirt and braces, along came the bailiff. He asked to see Silyn's permit, and on being told that Silyn had been invited to fish there by the Admiral, his reaction was total disbelief. He asked Silyn for his name and address, and being told that Silyn was a Franciscan friar taking a retreat at Llangasty, his reaction, understandably, was along the lines of "Yes, and I'm the Queen of Sheba!". Silyn told me, gleefully, that it was not until he took the bailiff along the bank and showed him his habit and cord that the bailiff was prepared to believe him! Collapse of stout party?

*David Jenkins*

## *Apostle to the Indians*

In Mt. Hope cemetery in Lander, Wyoming the Rev. John Roberts was laid to rest on a cold winter day. He

died on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1949 after a ministry in Wyoming that stretched 66 years. He lived a rich and exciting life, a life of challenge, inspiration, tribulation, dedication, sacrifice and faith. Born at Llewellyd Farm in Dyserseth, Denbighshire on March 31, 1853 he would become an honoured and respected man among the Native Americans in the west central part of Wyoming. In short his life is legendary.



Roberts attended Ruthin Grammar school and then went on to St. David's College, Lampeter where he graduated in 1876 with a BA. In 1878 he was ordained deacon by the Rt. Rev. George Augustus Selwyn at Lichfield Cathedral. For a short time, following his diaconate, he served as Curate in Dawley Magna in Shropshire, but his calling, he believed, was missionary work. A calling that had possibly been encouraged by Selwyn who had served as the first Anglican Bishop of New Zealand. This led him to the Bahamas, that same year, not traditionally regarded today as a location for missionary work, nevertheless it was an important part of John Roberts journey. At Nassau in 1878 Roberts was ordained to the priesthood by the Rt. Rev. Francis Cramer Roberts and was appointed as Chaplain at St. Matthew's Cathedral. Part of his duties required him to minister to the leper colony on the island. It was not however the task that Roberts felt called to do. He was of the belief that his calling was not being fulfilled since the people of the islands were already Christians. Even though he met Laura Alice Brown, the Cathedral organist who was to become his wife, he grappled with his vocation and the dissatisfaction of ministering to the Christian community and looked to more challenging opportunities.

That opportunity came when, in 1880 Roberts sailed for New York where he met Bishop John Franklin Spaulding, the Missionary Bishop of Wyoming and Colorado, and sought a position ministering to Native Americans. Initially Spaulding sent Roberts to Greeley, Colorado and then to Pueblo, Colorado to work with the gold miners, but in 1883 he left Colorado, as instructed, for the Shoshone/Bannock area, which became known as The Wind River Indian Reservation, at Green River in Wyoming. Travelling first by Stagecoach, and then a goods sled/wagon, what should have been a two-day journey took eight because of blizzard conditions. When Roberts arrived at Fort Washakie in Green River the temperature was 60 degrees F below zero.

On the reservation two tribes had been resettled through President Grant's "Peace Policy." The Shoshone and the

Arapaho. They were very different in culture and neither were friendly towards each other. Nevertheless, Fr. Roberts gradually gained their trust and respect, learning both of their languages and encouraging them to retain their culture whilst adjusting to a changing world. An almost unheard of, and heavily criticized, approach at the time. During his first year at Wind River Roberts wrote to Laura Brown, the organist who had become his fiance before he left Nassau in 1880. He attempted to dissuade her from leaving her beautiful home in Nassau for the trials of Wyoming. Her response was that she would be there by the end of 1884! Only 19 years old Laura travelled from Nassau to Liverpool and then to New York before journeying west, a total of 5,000 miles to marry the man she had not seen for three years. They were married on Christmas day 1884 in St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Rawlins, Wyoming. Together they had six children, but one died in infancy, Eleanor, Gwen, Marion, Gladys and Edward all became fluent in native languages and were taught alongside the Shoshone and Arapaho.

Although disputed, but nevertheless memorialized, John Roberts is credited with having officiated at the burial ceremony for Sacajawea, a translator for the Lewis and Clark expedition which discovered the route to the west coast. His name is inscribed upon her headstone at the grave near Fort Washakie which is a place of pilgrimage for many tourists and Native Americans.

During his time of ministry in Wyoming, through seven decades, Roberts established several schools, along with churches in Lander, Milford, Dubois, Thermopolis, and Hudson to name a few. Many still function today within their respective Episcopal Dioceses. As a result of his work Roberts was honoured by several colleges. His life, work and witness is commemorated in the liturgical calendar on February 25<sup>th</sup> when the flag of Wyoming is flown at the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. in his honour.

Laura, his wife, died in 1941 at the age of 77 and is buried in Lander, Wyoming. Roberts served his people for as long as he was able. In his later years he suffered from blindness but could identify his visitors by their footsteps. His ministry is still cherished in Wyoming to this day. When Rev. Roberts died in January of 1949, at 95 years of age he was laid to rest alongside his wife.

*Philip Morgan.*

## Patrick Bronte



Over the winter I have been reading the extensive biography of the Bronte family, with a particular interest in the clerical career of Patrick, the father of the celebrated poets and novelists, by Juliet Barker. The book runs to 900 pages of text and is a very good counter measure against the biography of Charlotte by Mrs Gaskell which rather tended to blacken Patrick's name. I was especially interested in the changing times and significant events which Patrick observed.

He came from a very humble background in the North of Ireland but by his own efforts was able to enter St John's College Cambridge in July 1802 at the age of 25 as a sizar - a position which enabled men of promise, but with no means, to benefit from the University Education. He spent four years there. He had left Ireland with £7 in his pocket and having only the income which the college was able to give him he was obliged to apply for funds from more wealthy men like William Wilberforce. The curriculum was in Latin in which he was largely self-taught.

At the end of his first year, he gained a First Class in his exams and was awarded prize books - the works of Horace and Homer's Iliad in dual Greek and Latin text. In the Lent term of 1806 Patrick was called to the Examination halls as a 'Disputant'. He would have, over the previous fortnight, prepared a dissertation in Latin upon a 'Proposition' which he would read to the examiners and then three fellow students would argue with him in Latin on his 'Proposition'. He was awarded an ordinary degree, proceeding to Honours required a written examination. None the less Patrick was now free to apply for ordination. As well as his work in the Classics Patrick had attended almost all the lectures in the Divinity School, absenting himself only for three excellent reasons.

So, it was to the Archbishop of London's Palace in Fulham that Patrick went and on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1806 he came out as a deacon to take up the post as a curate in Wethersfield in Essex where the vicar was Joseph Jowett, Regius Professor of Civil Law at Cambridge who spent only the long vacations in the parish. Patrick's first duty on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1806 was a marriage. His next move was in 1809 when he moved to Wellington in Shropshire as curate at All Saints Church in the town arriving in early January.

This was at the heart of one of the main events of the Industrial Revolution, the smelting of iron using coke, and a time of change within the Church of England, John Wesley and his brother Charles were busy riding about the land preaching where they could. One of their associates was John Fletcher, the vicar of Madeley, who like Patrick, belonged to the Evangelical wing of the Church of England, but one who did not have meticulous respect for the conventional ecclesiastical discipline of the Church of England. Fletcher had died in August 1785 but his ideas and practices lived on. All Saints Church in Wellington was an Evangelical church in Fletcher's tradition and Fletcher's widow, Mary,

continued his work. There Patrick found comfort and encouragement for his professional purpose in life. The Archdeacon of the area had been moved to comment that the church secretaries at Madeley, and others, would be just as at home in the Methodist chapels as in the Parish Church. The break between the Anglicans and the Methodists came later by which time Patrick was in Haworth. One of his friends had been the headmaster of a boarding school for the sons of Methodists and when the break came his friend, as an Anglican, was asked to resign his post.

Patrick's next move was to Yorkshire where he was to have a fresh curacy. This was to be in Dewsbury in West Yorkshire and at a time of great revival particularly among both the Anglicans and Methodists. It was also a centre for the increasing industrialisation of the wool trade. Here, Patrick threw himself into parish life and 15 months later he was invited to move to Hartshead some five miles away. With regard to the industrialisation of wool manufacture this was an area of Luddite protest. Locally they attacked a set of cropping machines as they were being brought across Hartshead Moor and throughout the next few months there were attacks on the mills. On the night of 11<sup>th</sup> April men from all the villages in Patrick's parish mustered to attack Rawfolds Mill some two miles away and passing Patrick's home as they went. While in Hartshead Patrick married and his first two daughters were born.

This was a period when workers were joining together to try to improve their lot. The masters were equally determined that they were in-charge. On one occasion when the workers stopped work and demanded more money their leaders were sent by the mill owners to the magistrates for breach of contract, found guilty and jailed. It was then pointed out that the masters had imposed a reduction in wages partway through a shift. This too was a breach of contract. The men were released from prison but no action seemed to have been taken against the masters.

In May 1815 the family moved to Thornton, east and north of where they had been and closer to Bradford. It was here that the four younger children were born. Their next move was to Howarth where Patrick took up the post of perpetual curate with an income of £200 pa. It was here that Patrick took an interest in the major problems of the C19: poor housing, poor water supply and poor sanitation all of which led to poverty. Over the years Patrick was to campaign and to write letters about these matters seeking to get something done.

The statistics Patrick knew, he took the funerals, comforted the sick and dying, the mortality rate was 10.5% higher in Haworth than the bar at which something had to be done. Average life expectancy was 25.8 years, 41.6% of children died before the age of 6, excrement ran down the street, the houses were poorly ventilated and overcrowded with several families living in cellars. It was not for want of trying on Patrick's part,

it just took time for those with the power to do something, to act.

Only in 1850 were the authorities moved to do something about it. In April of that year Herschel Babbage came to the town as an inspector commissioned by the General Board of Health in London. His report called for the installation of sewers, the provision of a piped-water supply and at least one water closet for every three houses, the setting up of a public slaughterhouse and the closing of the churchyard.

Patrick continued his ministry in Haworth until his death in June 1861, a life well lived.

*Paul Baker*



BETHLEHEM  
BIBLE COLLEGE

As Israel and Palestine are once again in the global headlines, many have asked me to comment on recent events from the perspective of a Palestinian Christian.

Let me first begin with an image. Recently, I was on a tour of old Nazareth. As we strolled through the streets of the city, our guide showed us a painting on a wall. For me, the image was explosive: a picture of a map of historic Palestine around which was painted a common Palestinian image of a house key. What made the painting unique was the additional images of a huge olive branch and a dove, both which stood out very clearly.

Let me explain what these images mean to a Palestinian. When Palestinians were evicted from their homes in 1948, around five hundred villages were evacuated and many of them razed. People were also evicted from their houses in major cities like Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Ashkelon and many more. Many of the evicted families escaped with only the keys to their homes, expecting to return after the war ended. We all know that this never happened-neither their return home, nor the end of the war, which has dragged on in various forms for decades. The 780,000 refugees who fled their homes have remained refugees in their own country or in a neighbouring country. We refer to this event as the *Nakba*: the catastrophe.

How can one be a refugee in one's own land? They are refugees because they have not been allowed to return to their original villages, sometimes just miles away. They are refugees outside their country, because they have not been allowed to come back to live *anywhere* in the land. Many have never even been allowed to visit.

For me, the image of the map, the key, the dove and the olive branch tell a clear story of the recent history and aspirations of the Palestinian people. We have stretched

out our hands for peace, even conceding our claim to most of our historic homeland and have been willing to build a relationship with Israel. Our only condition was that we would have the chance to live in dignity - to have freedom of movement and be able to decide our own future with self-determination within the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, including East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.

In recent months, a militant group of Israeli settlers have been pushing hard toward the eviction of several Palestinian families who have lived in a block of houses in a Palestinian neighbourhood (called Sheikh Jarrah) in Jerusalem for decades. Many of them were refugees who first lost their homes in 1948. As a settlement with the United Nations and Jordan, a small piece of land was given to them in 1956 upon which they were allowed to build houses. However, after the Israeli Occupation began in 1967 (which we call the *Naksa*, or setback) they were not able to get proper papers proving their ownership. Shortly thereafter, in 1972, Jewish settlers (backed by the Israeli government) began to pressure the families to leave their houses. The first cases of evacuation occurred in 2008-9, when three families were forced-without any compensation-to leave their homes. Now the court is dealing with another eviction of several families. In the next few months, it is expected that twenty-five more families will be forcibly evicted so that Jewish settlers can move into their homes in Jerusalem.

These events have certainly enraged the Palestinian people. They are a reminder that our *Nakba* is still ongoing. As a result, many Palestinian and Israeli activists began demonstrating peacefully in front of the houses which are going to be seized from their owners. In response, the Israeli army began forcibly dispersing the crowds. This ended in violence, as vigilante settler movements joined the clashes, and new protests spread to the Dome of the Rock and then even spread outside of Jerusalem to many Arab towns in Israel. Cities like Nazareth, Um El Fahem, Jaffa, and Lod have all had demonstrations, and many of them also were dispersed violently by the authorities. The struggle even spread to Gaza, where Palestinian groups began shooting missiles towards Israeli targets. Now, it appears that we are in another micro-war. Violent events are breaking out all across the country, between Jerusalem and Gaza; and from Jaffa to the Galilee. Without justifying any of the violence that is happening on either side, this situation should concern Christians all over the world, particularly in two areas:

First, the global Church should always be concerned about justice and peace, not only here in the Holy Land, but also across the earth. "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

If seeking justice is a Biblical mandate, we are likewise called to stand against injustice. I was recently reminded

of the biblical story of the evil king Ahab and his wife Jezebel. Together, they plotted against a simple man who had a little piece of land close to the king's palace. Through deception, they found a "legal" way to steal his land, merely because they wanted it and had the power to do so.

The "land grab" is certainly the motive of such people like the settlers. They usually target the land and houses of Palestinian families who for some reason cannot defend their cause. Today, the Palestinians are calling for the "Elijahs" of the world to confront "Ahab" for his crimes. If so, maybe he will repent and return what he has stolen (1 Kings 21:1-27). If not, he will no doubt continue along a path that will only lead to more destruction. How many more years must these things continue?

Secondly, besides being a prophetic voice, Christians need to pray for the situation. Are these sort of actions the demonstration of Our Lord Jesus's will or His kingdom? No! He declared in John 10:10, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." Certainly, death and injuries and violence are never from the Lord. It is the evil one who causes these things. Our Lord desires *life* for all the people of the Holy Land.

It is my plea that we, as the global body of Christ, will commit to pray against the spirit of evil and death, and pray for the people to have life-and life in abundance. May the true prophetic spirit, armed with grace and truth, find its home in us. For the sake of justice and peace, may Elijah arise.

**Rev. Dr Jack Sara** (Dr. Sara is the Principal of the Bethlehem Bible College with whom I am in contact- Ed.)

**The Retireds Group.** We are still hopeful of being able to begin our meetings in September when restrictions allow.

**Our contributors.** Once again I am grateful to all our contributors and look forward to receiving news of activities in which people are involved in time for the Autumn issue of *The Newsletter*.

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Please send suggestions, comments, items of news by September 1<sup>st</sup> for the Autumn issue.

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