
St George's Update

Annual newsletter of the British Regional
Committee of St George's College, Jerusalem

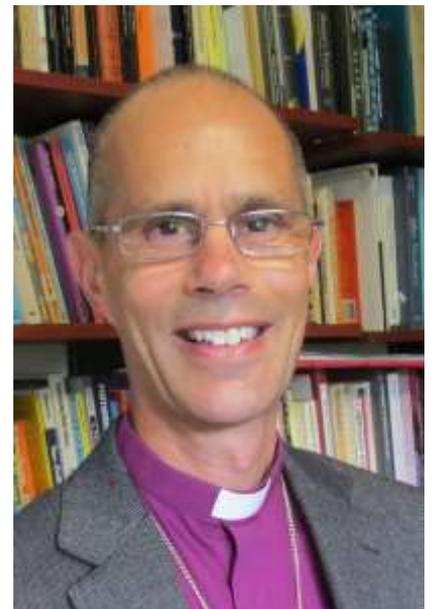
March 2015



Letter to UK Friends of St George's College, Jerusalem **from the Rt Revd Dr Richard Cheetham,** **Chair of the British Regional Committee of St George's College** **and Bishop of Kingston**

Dear Friends,

The whole of the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem and the church in the wider Middle East are under considerable pressure at the moment, and St George's College is no exception to this. We are all very aware of the enormous challenges which face our complex, plural and inter-connected world, and also the particular issues facing both the local church and the people in Israel/Palestine.



St George's College Jerusalem has a unique ministry within this much broader context, and I am delighted to be able to tell you that the Most Reverend Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, has graciously agreed to be its Patron. More good news comes in the form of the decision to strengthen the Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East by the elevation of the Rt Revd Suheil Dawani from Bishop to Archbishop, making him the first Arab Anglican archbishop in the city since 1974. Both of these developments demonstrate the importance of the Anglican presence in Jerusalem and the need to support it in every possible way at this extremely challenging time for Christians in

the Middle East. The Archbishop of Canterbury has also agreed to be Patron of the new UK Friends of St George's Cathedral, which was launched at a reception at the House of Commons on 4th March.

As these changes have been taking place, the Foundation of the College has recently agreed a revised mission statement as follows:

“St George’s College, Jerusalem is an Anglican community of education, hospitality, pilgrimage and reconciliation. Through study, site visits, engaging with the local Christian community, prayer and reflection, lives are transformed and faith renewed.”

The Dean and Course Director are interpreting this by focusing on three main areas with the full support of the Executive Committee and the Foundation of the College. First, it is identifying ways of encouraging wider participation on its excellent courses from across the Anglican Communion and beyond. It is particularly interested in attracting people who training for ordination or are near the beginning of their ministry. The College is also developing opportunities for interfaith dialogue,



particularly between members of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish faiths. Indeed, by the time you read this I shall be at the College as one of the leaders of a course for Christians and Muslims called, “Sharing perspectives: Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land.” A third priority is the provision of resources to the local Diocese of Jerusalem and the Anglican Church in the Middle East.

The British Regional Committee, too, is acutely aware of the tensions in Jerusalem and the Holy Land and is fully committed to prayerful and practical support for both the College's unique and developing role and for the Diocese of Jerusalem. It is therefore finalising a 7-year strategic plan which aims to:

- make the College better known to key people including bishops, clergy, theological colleges and Anglican universities
- target bursaries to support ordinands, the newly ordained and other specific groups to attend courses



- build networks with ecumenical organisations in the UK whose interests complement those of the College
- encourage the development of inter faith courses with participants from the UK
- encourage clergy to go on courses with colleagues from their linked dioceses
- develop the annual gathering of UK Friends of the College to appeal to a wider range of people

There is obviously a great deal of work to be done here, and I should be delighted to hear from you if you would like to consider taking a proactive role in helping us to achieve our aims. I also hope that you will encourage people you know to go on one of the many excellent courses at the College. The cost of these is being reduced by making a number of them shorter, and bursaries are available through the British Regional Committee. It is very important that more people become aware of the courses which the College runs and I hope that you will play your part in making its excellent work more widely known.

With all good wishes,

+ Richard

Learning: a reflection

The Very Revd Dr Graham Smith, Dean of St George's College

First published in "The Chronicle", the magazine of the North American Committee of St George's College Jerusalem, Winter 2014

Recently we enjoyed a reflection from one of our pilgrims who participated in the "Children of Abraham" course regarding her learning process for studying a complicated subject. This pilgrim realised that what she came here to study, regarding the three faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, was so complicated that it was necessary to take time away from her setting in parish ministry to learn some basic differences among the faiths. She could not have learned this on her own, sitting in her study, reading.



Instead she came away for two weeks to concentrate on this difficult subject with superb lecturers and a well planned itinerary. Not only did she have to learn a number of things, she also had to unlearn certain assumptions she held about Abraham, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which were not correct. Having sorted out some of those fundamentals and assumptions, she was able to return home to do more reading with a clearer understanding of the similarities and differences of the three faiths which trace their origins to Abraham.

Sometimes we approach a new subject about which we think we know nothing. Yet, the truth is that we pick up bits of knowledge along the way which can prejudice or confuse the way we learn a new subject. It is as if we need to get in touch with what we know which may be wrong and lay these incorrect assumptions aside, before we are ready to learn. Otherwise our learning will remain distorted.

Recently, a friend of mine was having trouble seeing with his current glasses and prescription. He thought that all he needed was a trip to the eye doctor, a new prescription and new glasses. Unfortunately, the eye doctor told him that he needed cataract surgery. Something needed to be removed before he could benefit from a

new prescription! Something that was distorting his vision needed to be removed before he could begin to see clearly.

Our learning process can be like that. We do not always start from zero or a clean slate. We start with things that need to be removed before we can learn properly. St. George's College offers courses for pilgrims to come away from their busy responsibilities in order to concentrate on a complicated subject. Sometimes a process of unlearning needs to happen before a new learning can take place. St. George's can offer that kind of space and undistracted concentration for deep learning to begin, followed by further learning after the course has finished.

Annual Gathering for UK Friends of St George's College of Jerusalem Thursday 15th October 2015

Bishop Richard writes:

During recent meetings the British Regional Committee of St George's College has been identifying ways of encouraging more people in training and in the early stages of their ministry to take part in courses at the College. One important way of doing this is to find opportunities when the Dean or Course Director can visit theological colleges in the UK to talk about the College and to answer questions. As Autumn is a good time for such visits from the theological colleges' point of view, Revd Dr Rodney



Aist, Course Director, is coming to the UK in October and the Committee has decided to move the Annual Gathering from the Spring so that he can give the Annual Lecture as well.

I am, therefore, pleased to let you know that the Annual Gathering and the lecture by Rodney Aist will take place on **Thursday 15th October 2015** at a venue to be confirmed in London. **Please note that you need to renew your membership by the end of April 2015 if you want to receive an invitation to the Annual Gathering and Lecture.**

Study Tour for Ordinands at St George's College, Jerusalem

First published in the Winter 2014/2015 edition of "Commentary" published by Oak Hill College.

Tom Woolford, an ordinand at Oak Hill, recently went on a 2-week ordinands' study tour run by St George's College. It was led by Peter Walker, formerly of Wycliffe Hall, who is now Professor of Biblical Studies at Trinity School for Ministry.

Sitting by the Sea of Galilee, Tom asked Peter about evangelicals visiting the Promised Land.

Tom: Evangelicals are often uneasy with the notion of "pilgrimage". Why do you think that is?

Peter: Our Protestant heritage makes us rightly suspicious of the medieval abuse of pilgrimage, with its relic trade, religious excess and notions of indulgences. We also shrink away from talk of pilgrimage because we believe the gospel is fully available and accessible anywhere round the world. We strongly believe that the implication of Jesus' resurrection is that in a physical sense, "He is not here, he is risen". Jesus is now present to believers everywhere by his Spirit. We don't want to risk appearing to undermine those glorious gospel truths by focusing on particular places.

Given those hang-ups, why do you encourage evangelicals to visit this land?

We evangelicals are often strong on doctrine and spirituality but perhaps sometimes not so strong on the historical and geographical nature of our faith. There's a danger of drifting into a Hellenised or abstracted and philosophical version of our faith – away from its Hebrew roots and the gritty, earthy realism of the Bible, away from the conviction that God has really been involved in the real story of the world. Coming back to this place helps us to get back in touch with the God of earth and history.



That's certainly part of my own testimony. Teaching in the theological colleges, there's a danger that one's faith can become purely academic and de-contextualised. Coming here repeatedly has forced me to exercise faith in the God of history. Reading parts of the Old Testament while in this land, I have found myself saying, "This just makes sense here as a simple story of gritty, earthy, brute historical fact."

Of course, liberal scholars are always telling you that the Old Testament is a retrospective invention – "David never existed; it's all make believe". But coming here and reading the stories in their geographical context gives the lie to that. The God we believe in really was and is active in the lives of ordinary people in their ordinary space.

We've been focusing this fortnight on the places associated with the life of Jesus. What do you think visiting the land adds to our understanding of him?

Coming here, you see there is more to Jesus' life than just a preparation for the cross. Evangelicals are strong, rightly, on the cross and resurrection as historical events. Yet I think coming here makes you engage more fully with Jesus as a real Galilean. He was not just "floating through", proving he was divine with the odd miracle here and there and rushing towards the cross. He was a very credible human being who had an agenda in Israel. He had a ministry, a purpose.

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So, for instance, if we were to ask, "Why did Jesus go up to Jerusalem?", of course the answer is, "To give his life as a ransom for many." However, in the historical context that you can sense more fully by being here, there are other reasons as well. He goes up as prophet, preaching the word of the Lord to his own nation, warning that judgement on the city is coming. He goes up as priest, challenging the temple, its gigantic stones dominating the skyline, rebuking its officials and claiming that he – Jesus – is going to be the place where forgiveness will be found. He goes up to make his Messianic claim clear – the true king of Israel arriving in the "City of the great king".

None of this denies the centrality of the atonement, but rather adds layer upon layer of historical context and meaning, building up a very good base against the liberal deconstruction of Jesus. Sometimes evangelicals make themselves prone to liberal attack by turning Jesus into an ethereal, other worldly figure of whom we may believe many great things, but who has somehow lost his moorings in real history. By coming here we get a sense of the real historical Jesus of Nazareth, who is yet one and the same as the “Christ of Faith”, the second person of the Trinity and the Lord of the church.

Why do you specifically want to encourage those training for church leadership to visit?

I hope and pray that young church leaders can take the experience of visiting this land and use it to pour fresh imagination and vigour into their preaching. The majority of those you will preach to will never have the opportunity to come here. But you have the opportunity as a preacher, once your imagination has been fired by being here, to paint a picture with words so that your congregation can imagine the event with historical accuracy. They can enter more fully into the story and feed off your confidence that the passage describes a real historical event.

I think there’s also great value in church leaders seeing first-hand the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the plight of the church here, caught in the middle – developing sympathies with both Israeli Messianic believers and Arabic-speaking Palestinian Christians. Even though few will be directly involved in the matter, as church leaders we need to model how to think and talk responsibly and sensitively about Israel in biblical theology and today.



This particular course based at St George’s (in the Anglican cathedral compound in Jerusalem) has the additional aim of building up relationships across the Anglican Communion. I have loved teaching the Bible here to people who are going to be resourcing and leading the Anglican Communion in the future. It would be lovely if this course could bring ordinands together not just from the Church of England but also from the Americas, Africa, Australia and Asia, so that we can learn from each others’ perspectives and be the global communion in microcosm.

How should evangelicals prepare themselves in mind and spirit for their visit?

Be appropriately worried about the political situation but not overly worried. Travel is by and large safe. But do come prepared to be disturbed by what you see here. Don't come with a closed heart to the troubles in this land. Come prepared to meet some of the real Christians of this land; be sure to hear their stories and perhaps build up a partnership with them.

Come prepared to meet some of the real Christians of this land. Be sure to hear their stories and perhaps build up a partnership with them.

Come with an open mind to some of the oddities of Christian history. You're going to encounter some very bizarre things when you're here! You may have been well-trained to be suspicious of some of the peculiarities associated with Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic practice. While you mustn't lose your critical faculties, perhaps it's worth giving the "benefit of the doubt" as you observe things here. You may find that there's more going on than you'd understood before. Don't rule out the possibility that you might learn or appreciate something new.

Above all, however, read the scriptures while you're here in a spirit of prayer. There is also some reading you can do beforehand. I wrote "In the steps of Jesus", a guidebook based on Luke's gospel, to help Christians prepare for their visit. Each chapter goes through the biblical data from both testaments concerning a particular place, then gives an historical and archaeological guide to what you would see if you visit that place today. People have found that it is a good thing to read beforehand to orientate themselves. Otherwise they can be overwhelmed by the sheer flood of information that hits them when they get here.



St George's College, Jerusalem:

its history, context and importance

Article by the Rt Revd Dr Richard Cheetham, Chair of the British Regional Committee of the College. It was originally printed in the Winter 2014/15 edition of "Bible Lands", the magazine of the Jerusalem and the Middle East Church Association

The need for places of prayer, learning and reconciliation has perhaps never been greater. The summer of 2014 was dominated by deeply disturbing news of ongoing conflicts in Gaza, Iraq, Syria, and many other places. The fault-lines and divisions are profound. Jerusalem has long been a place where peoples, empires, faiths have all collided – often destructively with terrible consequences, but also creatively offering new understandings. It is a place which is central to the story of Judaism, stands at the heart of the founding events of the Christian faith, and plays a key role in Islam.

Little wonder then, that Jerusalem is a potent symbol of both deep human conflict, and new possibilities of harmony and peace. St George's College is just outside the Old City in a complex that includes St George's Anglican Cathedral and the home and offices of the Bishop in Jerusalem. It is one of the gems of the Anglican Communion and has an extraordinary ministry of pilgrimage, hospitality, prayer, learning and reconciliation. Its 3-storey building can house up to 42 pilgrims/participants at any one time in space which includes a 21,000 volume library (one of the largest English language libraries in the Holy Land), a refectory, common room, chapel, and rooms for discussion and lectures.



St George's College was originally founded in 1920 as a theological school for Palestinian seminarians. However the political complexities and troubles of the Middle East made that original vision impossible. So, in the 1960s, a new and broader vision was developed under which it would educate clergy and laity from the worldwide Anglican Communion and elsewhere in the Church. Over the years it has run countless short courses which have been life-changing for many who have attended. Those who have been lucky enough to attend a course will have been

introduced to the Holy Land in a way which educates, informs and challenges. Courses are run in a context of prayer, hospitality, and connection with the local churches and communities. The College has a dedicated staff which includes the Dean and the Course Director. It is governed by a Foundation and Executive Committee which is chaired by the Archbishop in Jerusalem, but includes representatives from the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand where there are regional support committees. The British Regional Committee works to make the College better known in the UK and, supported by a grant from JMECA and individual donations, offers bursaries to support those going on courses at the College who would not otherwise be able to afford it.



**Rana Khoury, Office Manager;
Genia Stephan, Registrar;
Elen Habash, PA to the Dean**

The College now stands at a real time of possibility for the future. In addition to the regular courses, it is developing more courses to serve the current needs of the global Church, the local Church, and the wider world. In the last two years there have been retreats for the clergy of the Diocese of Jerusalem, courses for ordinands and curates from around the world, two Christian-Muslim dialogue courses, and courses which have included clergy and laity from India, Zimbabwe and other parts of the Anglican Communion.

The unique context of St George's College means it can be a place where clergy and laity from Link Dioceses across the Anglican Communion can meet and share in a deep experience of pilgrimage. Those in training for, or at an early stage in, ordained ministry can be shaped for life by profound encounters whilst on courses. Jerusalem as a meeting place, not only for Christians from around the world, but also for Jews and Muslims, offers huge possibilities for inter faith engagement. All these courses draw close encounter to the local Church, and the College hopes to be a growing resource for the clergy of the Diocese of Jerusalem.

Our complex, conflicted, and confused 21st century world is in real need of centres of meeting, reconciliation, learning and prayer. St George's College is one such place with unique potential. As you pray for the peace of Jerusalem please also remember, use and make known its extraordinary ministry.

Course feedback

The Children of Israel
Canon Janice Price, October 2014

The impact of this course for me will be long and lasting and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to take part in it.

The course's central question was whether the Abrahamic narratives provide a foundation for inter-religious living today. For me this has become 'What can be learnt from the Abraham narratives for mission in a world of inter-religious living?' The core components of the course were site visits, discussions and worship. We visited Tel Dan near the border with Syria and Lebanon and, to the south, Beer Sheva and Tafr Hanockdim where we stayed in a Bedouin camp.

One of my reasons for choosing this course was to understand the Jewish narrative at a deeper level, and the balance of the course was right for this. The special place that is St. George's College was a home, place of prayer, learning and worship from which we went into very diverse and challenging situations and into which we could retreat on our return. The staff were warm, hospitable and looked after us very well indeed, and the organisation of the course was very good.



While all the lecturers gave time to the contemporary situation in Israel and Palestine, Jeff Halpern of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions was the only one to address it on a visit. He gave vital and up to date insights which helped us to interpret the Abrahamic narratives in the light of contemporary contested spaces and to build our knowledge of the political climate. More encounters like this would enhance the experience, perhaps like the unforgettable experience of walking with Ecumenical Accompaniers through Hebron and meeting Palestinians directly.

The small group of five pilgrims (4 from the USA and me) worked well as there was lots of learning and laughter and no competing agendas. I came back with better knowledge of the inter-religious context in Jerusalem and Israel, deepened Christian spirituality through encountering people of the Jewish and Islamic faiths and a greater fluency with the spirituality and foundations of Judaism and Islam. I would definitely recommend it to others and look forward to an increased contact with the important ministry that St. George's College exercises in the Anglican Communion and beyond.

Course feedback

Ordinands' course
Jane Hayes, August 2014

What were some of the highlights of the Study Tour for you personally?

The walk in the Judean desert put a real perspective on the wanderings and temptations of Christ. Re-affirming baptism vows in the River Jordan was particularly meaningful. Visiting a family in Bethlehem gave new insights into the situation in the Holy Land



In what ways was the overall experience different from what you were expecting?

The quality of teaching and the overall experience surpassed all expectation. I was astounded by the breadth, variety and the standard of the visits to sites while still leaving time for personal exploration of the city.

What changes would you make for future courses?

I wouldn't exclude anything. The walk through Hezekiah's Tunnel was an optional extra but the experience of the enclosed dark spaces bonded us as a group so I think it should be included as standard. Sometimes dates were confusing as we moved between BC and nearby AD sites very quickly, and sometimes reflection at sites was a little short. But both are understandable.

How might the course affect your future ministry? It helped me to understand the 'roots' of Christianity, how different traditions have developed, the need to respect and value differences while working towards unity, and the desperate need for prayer to resolve conflict within Christianity and between faiths. It has given me insight into the life of Christ, the issues which shaped his ministry and brought the Bible to life. Hopefully my preaching skills will be greatly enhanced, especially in dealing with aspects of the Old Testament in relation to the New.

Any final comments? The course has been a life-changing experience. It has expanded my academic knowledge, given me a 'feel' for biblical history and a true insight into the life and ministry of our Lord. My faith has been renewed and invigorated by the experience, and I would heartily recommend the course to future ordinands.

Course feedback

Beyond the Edge

Revd Rob Hingley, June 2014

There is so much for which to give thanks from this wonderful experience. My wife, Helen, and I appreciated the very special care which we received at St George's College. It was a very comfortable place to stay and both the American ministerial staff and the Arab Christian staff cared thoughtfully and cheerfully for all our needs.

The retreat was well balanced. There was the wonder and excitement of seeing sights where key events in biblical history and Jesus's life took place. We are grateful for Canon Andrew Mayes' thorough planning, his wise and sensitive leadership and his deep understanding of the Holy Land. His archaeological, historical and biblical knowledge gave us new insights into scripture. And there was silent time at significant sites to pray, to absorb what we had learnt and be in touch with God.

We visited the Pool of Bethesda, whose original size and grandeur have been revealed by archaeologists. Andrew's teaching about the significance of the formerly paralysed man ascending to the temple gave me a new appreciation of John 5 as, until then, I had thought of it as a figment of the Gospel writer's imagination.

Praying during visits to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane was significant for me, looking at the Old City, thinking of biblical times and the religious and racial tension surrounding Jerusalem today. I realised in a profounder way how intractable is the mess we make of the world, and how costly and how radical was the way of Jesus.



Following the Way of the Cross through Jerusalem with an excellent simple liturgy was much more meaningful than any I had done before. I also particularly valued the long morning we had in silence at the Sea of Galilee, each alone, sitting beside the Lake, praying, absorbing the whole experience, reflecting on the impact for our lives.

We are still absorbing the whole experience. I have a new richness to inform my prayers, preaching, teaching and retreat leading. We also feel much closer to all the pain of the political situation in Israel today, the plight of the Palestinian people and the Arab Christians. Our hearts are better informed and so we hope are our prayers.

Courses at St George's College, 2015 and 2016

Please check the College website (<http://sgcierusalem.org>) if you are interested in any of these courses as details are subject to change. At the time of writing \$1 is £0.64

The British Regional Committee has some bursaries for those who might need them to attend a course. Further details are at www.stgeorgescollegejerusalemtrust.org.uk

<u>Palestine of Jesus</u> 12-25 May 2015 8-21 September 2015	14 days	\$3050 (2015) 21 October – 3 November 2015 11-24 January 2016	\$3230 (2016)
<u>Palestine of Jesus</u> 23 June – 2 July 2015 7-16 July 2015 10-19 November 2015 * 9-18 December 2015	10 days	\$2260 (2015) 23 February – 3 March 2016 24 August – 2 September 2016 6-15 September 2016 15-24 November 2016 6-15 December 2016	\$2330 (2016)
<u>Palestine of Jesus</u> 23-30 July 2015	8 days	\$1800 (2015) 28 June – 5 July 2016	\$1870 (2016)
<u>Palestine of Jesus</u> 4-12 May 2016	9 days		\$2100 4-12 October 2016
<u>Palestine of Jesus</u> 16-27 May 2016	12 days		\$2790 19-30 September 2016
<u>Risen with Christ</u> 8-14 April 2015	7 days		\$2030
<u>St Paul and the early church</u> 20 May – 2 June 2015	14 days		\$5600
<u>Abraham and his Children</u> 19 August – 1 September 2015	12 days		\$2310
<u>Ways in the Wilderness</u> 1-14 October 2015	14 days		\$5500
<u>Excursion to Jordan</u> * 20-23 November 2015	3 days		\$700

<u>Old Testament landscapes and narratives</u>	10 days	\$2330
26 January – 4 February 2016		14-23 June 2016
<u>Kanuga course</u>	9 days	\$2050
8-16 February 2016		
<u>Sharing perspectives</u>	8 days	\$1830
10-17 March 2016		
<u>Behold the Man</u>	11 days	\$2200
19-29 April 2016		
<u>Women of the Bible</u>	10 days	\$2330
1-10 June 2016		
<u>Global ordinands' course</u>	14 days	tbc
8-12 July 2016		
<u>The Living Stones</u>	10 days	tbc
14-23 October 2016		
<u>Division and Hope in the Holy City</u>	8 days	tbc
25 October – 1 November 2016		

British Regional Committee of St George's College

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