

27 June 2011

A request for prayer from Faith Bowers

At Assembly I mentioned that one of our Bloomsbury deacons, Jean Harrison, is to spend the autumn as a peace accompanier in Palestine. She has now successfully come through the recruitment process and is learning as much Arabic as she can. She is due to go on 11 September, and will only be told a few days earlier just where she will be deployed. If all goes to plan ... She expects to return on 10 December.

Jean seeks prayer support both for this work generally and for all those who seek peace in the area but have to live with the present divisions and resultant troubles. She also seeks prayer for herself, that she may be useful there - and at present for her struggle to master adequate Arabic. She will be reporting regularly while there and is required to find opportunities to speak about it on her return. Invitations would be welcome.

Jean is a deacon of Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church. She is the daughter of a BMS missionary teacher and of a Baptist pharmacist who was a keen advocate of lay service for Christ. Jean trained as a secondary RE teacher and taught both in this country and in Uganda during Amin's regime, where her experience included a time of food shortage, severe enough to undermine the health of ex-pats with nowhere to grow their own. She was in Nigeria during the Biafran war. In mid-career she came to London to join the staff of Christian Aid. Her work there included developing educational materials as well as further travels. Subsequently she was one of the original editors of the ecumenical ROOTS study material based on the Revised Common Lectionary. She has also had long involvement with the Camden SACRE.

In the aftermath of war, Jean went to Croatia for three months to provide clerical and logistical support to the ACT office in Osijek, on the border with Bosnia and with disputed Serbian territory (ACT, Action of Churches Together, a coalition of Protestant aid agencies to enable coordinated emergency work). The work there included appraising the projects of local partners and reporting back to the agencies on how emergency money was being used, while also being alert for possible signs of fresh trouble around the border.

At Bloomsbury, Jean leads the team who work with the multi-ethnic group of children and young people. Jean is actively involved in a project between Devon schools and schools in rural Uganda, and has been part of several visits to provide some very welcome in-service training for primary teachers.

Jean, in her mid-60s now, has again volunteered and has been accepted by the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). This initiative of the World Council of Churches was established in 2002 in response to a call from the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem and from Palestinian and Israeli NGOs. The mission is to accompany Palestinians and Israelis in their non-violent actions and concerted advocacy efforts to end the occupation. Quaker Peace & Social Witness coordinates EAPPI in Britain and Ireland. Partner bodies include the Baptist Union of Great Britain, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Churches together in Britain and Ireland/Churches Commission on Mission, Iona Community, Methodist Church, Pax Christ UK, Scottish Episcopal Church, and United Reformed Church. Although BUGB is listed, Jean has been saddened to find that Baptist support has been minimal. After a prolonged preparation process, including learning Arabic. Jean will be in Palestine 11 September to 10 December 2011.

The role of participants in the EAPPI programme includes:

- monitoring and reporting violations of human rights and international humanitarian law
- supporting acts of nonviolent resistance alongside local Palestinian and Israeli activists
- offering protection through nonviolent presence
- engaging in public policy advocacy
- standing in solidarity with the churches and all those struggling against the occupation.

Please pray for her as she participates in this programme.