

Witnessing Reality

An introduction to Accompaniment

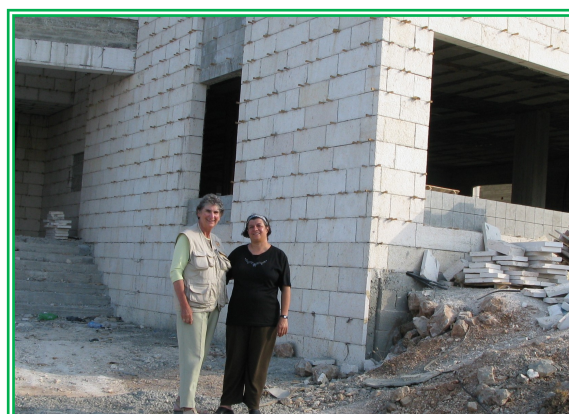


McCabe pilgrim and regular Trust supporter Audrey Gray of West Sussex writes:

My first McCabe pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1987, and a further six pilgrimages, inspired and challenged me to get to know the “Living Stones” of The Land. In April this year I accepted a wonderful opportunity to spend four months as an Ecumenical Accompanier living and working in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. What a revelation this was for me, and how different to being a tourist.

During my time, I visited Samar and the girls in the Lazarus Girls Home. I certainly concur with all that has been written previously about Samar and her inspiration, dedication and indeed her vision for the new premises. It was such a blessing to see Samar’s Christian beliefs in action in everything she says and does. One day, we went together with five young children to visit their mother in prison and to witness the hope that Samar gave to both mother and children.

On the way home a call came for Accompaniers to go to Beit Hanina, a district in East Jerusalem, to witness the demolition of a Palestinian house by the Israeli authorities. This was one of our most daunting tasks, as someone’s complete home is destroyed whilst they stand by helplessly and watch, and we do likewise recording events so that we can tell the world what is happening.



As Palestinians in East Jerusalem live under Israeli Occupation only the Israeli Authorities can give them permits to build or extend their houses. Permits are rarely granted or, as in this case, can take five or ten years to come through, and often cost more than the building itself. In frustration and desperation the Palestinian owners go ahead and build without a permit more in hope than expectation. The house shown in our picture accommodated four families on four floors and was described as the most beautiful in the area. The military precision of the demolition was breathtaking, as the house have been detonated, imploded, with virtually no collateral damage to the adjacent properties, but almost nothing was saved from the possessions of the some sixty plus people involved: heartbreaking and devastating to witness.

To serve what purpose, I ask myself. Israel wants to keep East Jerusalem as party of the Israeli State and it tries to control the number of Palestinians who live in it in various ways. House demolitions are one such form of control. The Israeli authorities claim these demolitions are not a punishment, but a deterrent. Amnesty International’s opinion in that the demolitions are a flagrant form of collective punishment which violate International law and are never permissible.

As Christian pilgrims, East Jerusalem has a particular significance for us. On Pilgrimage, I urge you to visit with open eyes, ears and hearts and to do your bit to bring about a just and negotiated settlement to this conflict within International Law. Palestinians need to know we care.

To find out more about The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) please email eappi@quaker.org.uk or phone 020 7663 1144. Public speaking is part of my work as an Ecumenical Accompanier (EA) so do contact me if you would like to invite me to speak at a public meeting.

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The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) was established in 2002 by the World Council of Churches in response to a request from leaders of Jerusalem Churches. Ecumenical Accompaniers (EA’s) are volunteers who offer protection through non-violent presence; monitor and report violations of human rights and humanitarian law; support Palestinian and Israeli peace activists and do advocacy for the end of the occupation and a negotiated settlement of the conflict on the basis of International Law.