

Bible Lands

Summer 2026

Magazine of the Jerusalem and the Middle East Church Association

www.jmecca.org.uk

50 YEARS

PROVINCE OF JERUSALEM & THE MIDDLE EAST
DIOCESE OF CYPRUS & THE GULF

1976-2026

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THE JERUSALEM AND THE MIDDLE EAST CHURCH ASSOCIATION

(JMECA)

Founded in 1887

'The Object of the Charity is to benefit the public by encouraging support in prayer, money and personal service for the religious and other charitable work of the Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East and the Episcopal/Anglican Province of Alexandria in communion with the See of Canterbury.'

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Views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the Association.

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Editorial

David Longe, Chair of the JMECA trustees, writes:

While these pages contain much to celebrate and give thanks for – not least the Golden Jubilees of the province of Jerusalem and the Middle East and the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf – it is only right that, as I pen my first editorial of *Bible Lands*, I begin by asking for prayer for what is unfolding across the Middle East, and for the provinces we serve as JMECA.

When the last edition was published, there was a precarious hope that the tragedy in Gaza might ease, allowing space for mourning and the long work of restoration after the horrors of 7th October. Yet that hope now feels fragile, with continuing uncertainty in Iran, Lebanon and across the Gulf. As Bishop Sean has noted, not a single country in his diocese is untouched by the effects of ongoing conflict. We have lost contact with our deacons in Iran as war continues to unfold. In southern Lebanon, suffering is a daily reality, marked by the destruction of infrastructure and even sacred spaces. Meanwhile, people in Gaza and the West Bank endure profound hardship.

What then are we to do? As Christians, our response must be renewed prayer: for bishops, clergy, and congregations; and for the leaders of nations, that they may strive to find the way of peace. In these pages, Canon Don Binder reminds us that while we resist evil, we must refuse to become enemies or victims, and resist the tribalism of our age. We are called instead to be good neighbours 'in a tough neighbourhood' as our Lord taught us, and to model that way of life for others.

As Bishop Ashley reflected following a recent meeting with Pope Leo, 'In a world filled with differences and destruction, every step towards respecting every human being who bears the image of God, and strengthening ties of love and friendship, is one more step towards a necessary and hopeful future'.

It is this future for which we long: deeper union with Christ, where peace truly reigns. We are Easter people, proclaiming a Lord who brings love out of hatred, light out of darkness and life out of death.

Within these pages there are signs of hope, not least as we give thanks for the Golden Jubilees of the province of Jerusalem and the Middle East and the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf. Bishop Clive reflects on the early vision for the province, the formation of the diocese, and the leadership of Bishop Hassan as bishop president.

In the province of Alexandria, there is further encouragement. Archbishop Samy sets out his priorities, and we hear

again of the work of Gusour (bridges), the growth of St Frumentius, and the development of churches in Gambella under Bishop Jeremiah's oversight, where peacebuilding, community development and education remain at the heart of diocesan life.

Across the provinces, the Church continues to witness to Christ, a testament to the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. In the Jubilees, and in the breadth of mission seen in the Province of Alexandria, there is cause for profound confidence that the work of Christ is continually revealed through the mission and ministry of the churches in the region.

The tenacity, courage and steadfast witness of the Christian communities we encounter in this edition of *Bible Lands* speak powerfully in a region where too often justice and dignity are overridden by nationalistic agendas. In their life and witness, these communities are testament to the truth of Jesus' words in the Gospel of John: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it'.

Finally, after almost a year as Chair of JMECA, I would like to offer my thanks to the Board, to my predecessors John Clark and Bishop Anthony Ball for their support, to Gabrielle Higgins for her dedicated work as Operations Manager, and to the Rev Stephen Need and the Ven John Holdsworth for their important work in producing content for the website, Facebook page and for the production of *Bible Lands*. The Board is now preparing for an upcoming Away Day, to review and renew its strategy to serve the provinces.

Writing this on the feast of St Athanasius of Alexandria, I conclude with his words: 'Jesus became what we are that he might make us what he is'.

*David Longe
Chair of JMECA
Feast of St Athanasius, 2026*



Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East



The diocese of Jerusalem, a diocese of the worldwide Anglican Communion, extends over five countries, including Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Israel, within the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East. There are 27 parishes that minister to the needs of their communities, centered on the Cathedral Church of St.

George the Martyr, in Jerusalem. The diocese supports 35 institutions, which include hospitals, clinics, vocational training programmes, kindergartens and schools, as well as institutions for the deaf, the disabled and the elderly, reaching out to interfaith neighbours in mutual respect and cooperation.



Archbishop Hosam Naoum on the war with Iran

As you are all now painfully aware, in the early hours of February 28th this year, a coordinated and massive military assault was launched by the United States and Israel against numerous cities and installations within Iran. This operation, described by the leaders of the two nations as a 'pre-emptive' attack, has brought fire and destruction to the heart of Tehran, Isfahan and beyond, striking at the very centres of governance and civilian life. Moreover, just prior to these events, Israel had also 'pre-emptively' attacked various targets in southern Lebanon where the number of casualties has yet to be determined.

Tragically, the cycle of violence has expanded with terrifying speed. In the hours following, Iran launched a widespread reprisal, with missiles and drones targeting Israel and US military assets across the Gulf – striking installations in Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kurdistan-Iraq, Jordan and Qatar. Sirens also blared across the Holy Land, warning of incoming missiles from Iran. Suddenly, our people from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf find themselves once again huddled in shelters, fearing for their lives as the shadow of a total regional war looms over us.

These developments strike at the very soul of our province of Jerusalem & the Middle East. Every single nation now engaged in this combat, and those bearing the brunt of the retaliatory strikes, resides within our ecclesiastical boundaries. Our brothers and sisters in the diocese of Iran are currently enduring the terror of aerial bombardment; our members in the diocese of Cyprus & the Gulf are witnessing the arrival of war at their doorsteps; and our faithful in the diocese of

Jerusalem face an unprecedented threat of military escalation.

In the face of such overwhelming force, we recall the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' (Matt 5.9). Today, that calling feels heavier than ever before. When the 'spirit of fear' threatens to consume our hearts, we must anchor ourselves in the 'spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind' (2 Tim 1.7).

First, I call upon the global Church to join us in urgent, unceasing prayer. We implore God to protect the innocent—the mothers, the children, and the elderly—who are caught in the crossfire of this 'Operation Epic Fury' and the subsequent 'crushing responses'.

Second, we must offer each other the sanctuary of Christian love. I therefore urge our clergy and laity to be beacons of comfort. In a time of 'regime change' rhetoric and military ultimatums, let our message be the unchanging promise of Christ's peace. Finally, we must remain 'Bridge Builders'. Even as diplomatic windows seem to slam shut, the Church must keep the doors of reconciliation open. We refuse to see our neighbours as enemies, whether they be in Tehran, Tel Aviv, or the military bases of the Gulf. I extend an urgent invitation to the wider Anglican Communion and all people of goodwill: intercede for us now. The hour is late, and the danger is great. We remain 'battered and bruised but not defeated'.

Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East

Small, wise and generous The province of Jerusalem and the Middle East – fifty years



The Bishop of Chelmsford, the Rt Rev Guli Francis-Dehqani, remembers...

Fifty years in the context of the history of the Anglican Communion is a relatively short period of time, within the scope of Christendom even shorter and in the life and turmoil of the Middle East just a blip. However, these past fifty years are testament to the faithful and persistent witness of this beloved and significant province, which formed me and still informs much of my ministerial life.

I was only nine years old when the province of Jerusalem and the Middle East was inaugurated in 1976 but I do have distinct memories of there being something major afoot in the life of the Church. My father, Hassan Dehqani-Tafti, and Bishop in Iran at the time, was having even more meetings than usual, travelling extensively and having long detailed phone conversations sometimes from our living room. It was clear that there were to be changes in the life of the Church, yet I had no understanding of the importance of these changes or how they would affect our church and our family.

The past five years as a diocesan bishop in the Church of England has shown me how structural change in parishes can be difficult and often painful. How much more for those who led this major development in Anglican presence in the Middle East. In rereading some of my father's written recollections, along with those of Bishop Handford and the late Bishop Stopford, I am struck by the wisdom shown in complex negotiations and I cannot help but wonder about the personal pressure they (and those close to them) lived through.

I know that my father was deeply conscious of the unique position of a province clustering around the Anglican presence and witness in Jerusalem. However, he was not overwhelmed by a deference to it and was committed to ensuring the dignity and autonomy of the other founding dioceses of the province. Jerusalem, of course, with its presence in the land of the saviour's birth with all the ecumenical interaction that would bring, but also the newly founded diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf with its particular service to expatriate communities, and Egypt with its important relations with the Coptic Church and a

history of British Missionaries, not forgetting (for him at least) the small pearl that was Iran.

The complexities of each diocese were heightened by international geopolitics and, it ought to be recognised, by the high levels of competitiveness within the differing characters in this process. In all of it there was for my father a real desire that the authentic identities of the various communities involved should be recognised, preserved and celebrated.

So it was that when the Archbishop of Canterbury ceded his metropolitan authority to the central synod of the province something new was created. Not just a new province but a different way of being Anglican. Following the American and Scottish pattern there was not to be an archbishop but a bishop president holding the office for a maximum of two five-year terms. My father felt strongly that this structure honoured all the various complexities which the province had inherited, allowing for a new form of independence for four dioceses united around a central synod comprised of equal numbers of lay and ordained representatives. He was elected the first bishop president and always maintained that his position was primarily as president of that central synod, the repository of metropolitan authority. Honesty requires me to say that in his latter years my father was deeply pained by the decisions to return to an archepiscopal model of leadership. During his tenure as the first bishop president, he neither sought such a title for himself nor saw any lack in his colleagues for not having it.

In conclusion, I always consider it the highest honour that at my consecration as a bishop, in Canterbury Cathedral, another former Bishop in Iran and primate of the province, Bishop Iraj Mottahedeh, was the preacher. In his very person, slight of stature, rooted in the theology of his inheritance, generous in his estimation of others, I see the province of Jerusalem and the Middle East in microcosm: small, wise and generous. My father had a short prayer which he used to say faithfully at the halfway point of his daily walk in Basingstoke where he and my mother lived for 25 years. I say it often and I offer it now in thanksgiving for the province and in blessing for its future:

May the Name of the Lord be blessed in the Past
May the Name of the Lord be blessed in the Present
May the Name of the Lord be blessed in the Future

+Guli Chelmsford

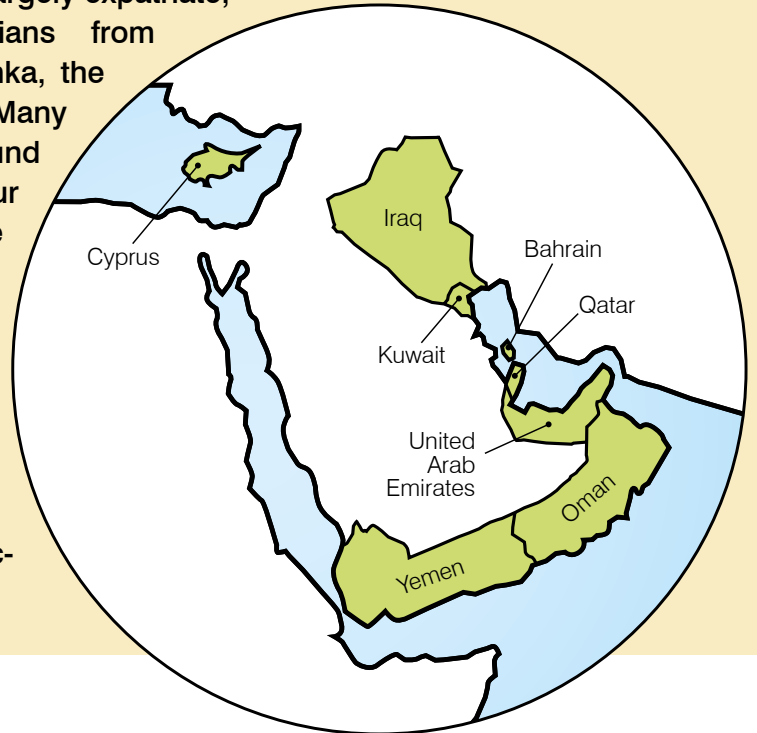


Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East



The diocese of Cyprus & the Gulf covers Oman, the Yemen, the seven United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq and the whole of Cyprus. In every part of the diocese, except in Cyprus and Iraq, the congregations are largely expatriate, made up of Christians from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, the

Philippines and the African continent. Many do not come from an Anglican background but find a welcome church home in our Anglican congregations. Through some intricate and special relationships, the diocese is often responsible for churches and congregations which are not Anglican, some of which are still working out their relationships with the bishop and synod. Worship is largely in English but in some locations we have liturgy in Arabic, Syriac-Aramaic, Tamil and Urdu.



New dean of Nicosia

'I love God, I love Jesus, I love the Church and I love people'. So says the new dean at St Paul's Cathedral, Nicosia, the Very Rev Walter Brownridge, in answer to the general question: who can I say that you are?

He adds, 'husband of Tina (his wife of forty-three years) and father of two sons, Alec and Martin'. It is no accident that both are named after prominent African or African American pioneers for justice, peace and reconciliation.



Dean Walter's journey to Nicosia has taken both an international and ecumenical route. He was born in Ohio, USA. His mother was a prominent Methodist and he was brought up in that tradition. He went to a Lutheran primary school and then Jesuit Catholic secondary school. He was attracted to it not only for its academic excellence but because of its sports facilities, especially tennis. He says the school had a great impact on his formation. In due course he was confirmed as a Roman Catholic.

After a degree in political science, he joined the US Marine Corps. On reflection, he says that was a time for formation and discernment. After three years of active service during which time he travelled extensively,

largely in Asia, he got married and promptly began a Master's degree in International Relations. His supportive wife, Tina, was a schoolteacher.

In 1991 he was received into the Episcopal Church and in 1996 went to an Anglo-Catholic seminary in New York City. He was ordained as a priest in 2001, serving in his native Cleveland, Ohio after which he moved to St George's Cathedral, Cape Town. There the distinctive traits of his ministry began to show as he helped to start the HIV/AIDS ministry and became involved with the Community of the Cross of Nails (based in Coventry, UK). Following this, he returned to the USA as Associate Dean for Community Life at Sewanee Theological Seminary. After five years, he became Dean of Honolulu in Hawaii. Then after service in parishes in Michigan and Vermont, he came to Nicosia.

Here he hopes his interest in social responsibility can help build on the existing work the cathedral does with asylum seekers and immigrants. He wants to develop the culture of welcoming the stranger, helping make the cathedral a centre of excellence and mission. He has a serious interest in Liberation Theology.

Tina will join him in the summer. Considering his CV, she must be an incredibly tolerant woman I say, and he readily agrees. To complete his domestic bliss, he is very keen to get a dog. Oh – and anyone for tennis?

Cyprus and the Gulf – Golden Jubilee celebrated in London

On 5th January, 2026 the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf celebrated its Golden Jubilee. Exactly fifty years earlier on 5th January 1976, its creation was formalised during Evensong in the Collegiate Church of St George the Martyr in Jerusalem (now St George's Cathedral) when the Rt Rev Leonard Ashton was invested as the new diocese's first bishop.

Preparation for this landmark event had been planned for some time. After retiring from the RAF in 1973, serving lastly as the RAF's Chaplain-in-Chief and Archdeacon, Leonard James Ashton was consecrated on 22nd January 1974 at St Clement Danes Church in London by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Michael Ramsey. The Rt Rev Leonard Ashton was appointed as an Associate Bishop in the diocese of Jerusalem with the intention that he would become the first bishop of the new diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf when it was officially formed. The countries within its geographical extent, then and now, include Cyprus, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Oman and Yemen, all of which until 1976 were under the ecclesiastical authority of the Anglican diocese of Jerusalem.

Half a century later, the Golden Jubilee of the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf was commemorated at two services at different churches in London, each with special significance to the diocese, and each service different in character.

On Saturday 24th January, 2026 the Rev Nicol Kinrade, Vicar of All Hallows by the Tower, with other parishioners, hosted a celebratory Eucharist service and reception. All Hallows has welcomed and gathered the people of the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf since 1978 when the Association of the Friends of the diocese was formed, an initiative proposed by Bishop Leonard Ashton at the first Diocesan Synod in 1976 (in Cyprus and in the Gulf). His idea was that a diocesan association would foster communications between Cyprus and the Gulf region, and it would nurture continued interest among people who had lived in the diocese. When in 1977 the Rev Peter Delaney became Vicar of All Hallows, his wide network of contacts included Bishop Leonard and so they decided that All Hallows might become the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf's spiritual home in the UK. It remains so today.

In his sermon on 24th January this year, Bishop Sean



Semple remarked: 'from its inception, the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf had an improbable quality to it: it is the largest diocese in the province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, is twelve times larger than the diocese of Jerusalem, and twice the size of the diocese of Iran, and is the second largest Anglican diocese in the world after the diocese of Europe... The diocese is constituted of Anglican Churches in ten countries or jurisdictions, nine of which are Muslim-majority, and eight of which operate under Sharia law. In every country in which we are present we have no right to practice our faith – we are the guests of gracious, far-sighted and tolerant rulers, churches, or religious authorities. To be an Anglican diocese in this complex, vast and politically volatile context seems improbable indeed. But here we are, and here we have been for fifty years, determined to embrace opportunities, remaining united in diversity, and driven and enriched by a common mission'.

The second of the two commemorative services took place on Sunday 25th January, 2026 at St Clement Danes, the Central Church of the RAF. In the form of Choral Morning Prayer, a professional choir and organ music profoundly uplifted the aura of celebration.

In honoured memory of his ministry to the Royal Air Force and as first bishop of the diocese, Bishop Len's crozier, pectoral cross, and episcopal ring were loaned by the RAF museum for Bishop Sean to wear and use during the service. In his sermon, he expressed gratitude to Padre Ashley Mitchell and the people of St Clement Danes, and to Archdeacon Giles Legood (current Chaplain-in-Chief for the RAF) for his generous efforts to revitalise and strengthen the relationship between the Royal Air Force and the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf. It may be fair to say that the diocese has some RAF DNA in it.

At each commemorative service, more than sixty Friends of the diocese and invited guests attended, many having travelled long distances.

Canon Angela Murray

Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East

From Bishop Sean Semple of Cyprus and the Gulf



The past is a foreign country – even the recent past – as I reflect on how this year began with celebrations in Jerusalem and London to mark the fiftieth anniversary of our province and diocese in their current forms.

At the beginning of January, commemorative services were held at St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem to recognise all that had come into existence exactly fifty years earlier: the Episcopal Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, with its constituent dioceses; St George's Collegiate Church which became the Cathedral Church of St George the Martyr; and the Jerusalem and the Middle East Church Association (JMECA) which so generously continues to support the province and its dioceses.

Each was born under a star, the star of Bethlehem, for they came to life on the Feast of the Epiphany. The theological motif of the Epiphany seems particularly apt. We are an Epiphany province, that moulded by the wind of the Spirit is constantly reshaped and renewed, and continues to reveal Christ to the nations in some of the most traumatised, complex and challenging places in the world.

At one of the commemorative services in St George's Cathedral it was a profound honour to be installed as an Episcopal Canon.

Towards the end of January two Commemorative Services were held in London specifically to celebrate the Golden Anniversary of the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf. The first took place at All Hallows by the Tower which has welcomed and gathered the people of the Diocese for forty-eight of its fifty years - thereby affectionately coming to be known as the Diocese's 'spiritual home' in London. Then we were honoured to be hosted by St Clement Danes - the Central Church of the Royal Air Force (RAF).

Within days we were in Bahrain for our Golden Anniversary synod. The theme was appropriately 'A year of Jubilee' (Leviticus 25). As we reflected on our common life over the last five decades, we recognised how demographic shifts had created a distinctly multinational identity.

A particularly tranquil memory of synod is of a sunset interfaith prayer service held on dhows off the coast of Manama. Within three weeks this peace would be shattered by the outbreak of war. Seven of the ten countries of the diocese lie next to or directly across

the Strait of Hormuz from Iran and all were targeted severely by missile and drone attacks. Cyprus too was attacked, and attacks from Yemen on Israel meant that nine of the ten countries of our diocese have become involved in the war.

Our churches have without exception rallied quickly and effectively to meet the challenges they were faced with. In some countries it was too unsafe to attend church in person and so the skills learned during the pandemic were dusted off and churches went online. Much effort has been put into reaching out and caring for distressed parishioners and in keeping the churches operational. St Christopher's Cathedral, Bahrain began hosting a daily online service of Evening Prayer, that continues, and attracts people from all around the world to pray with us.¹

In solidarity with what our churches in the Gulf were living through, I visited the UAE in Passion Week; and Bahrain, Qatar, and the Arabian Peninsula during Holy Week and Easter. Reports cannot do justice to the experience of living with the constant threat of death or injury; and the fatigue that comes from night after night of sleep interrupted by phone alerts, the wail of air-raid sirens, and overhead explosions.

The sense of security and prosperity of the region has been shattered. Parents are traumatised by not being able to comfort terrified children. Education went online, and young people became isolated at home as they were during COVID-19. As I write this the shaky ceasefire is coming to an end and there is a deep sense of uncertainty that pervades every attempt to just 'get on with life'. Food and fuel inflation is beginning to bite; some workers have experienced reductions in working hours and income; and there is increasing pressure on the supply chain of food and other basics due to the blockade of the Strait.

As an Anglican diocese on the forefront of this war, we recognise that it will leave its marks on us. There will be demographic shifts as people leave the region, and we will need to provide pastoral care for people living with war trauma. Church income is negatively affected, and the future recruitment of clergy will be challenging.

But the adversity of this time has also revealed the power of faith, hope and love as our people have simply carried on despite their fears and fatigue; have reached out in small practical ways, have put the needs of others before their own, and have continued to trust in the goodness of God. In so doing they 'shine as stars in the world'² – stars of an Epiphany diocese.

¹ 18h00 Bahrain time. Link can be found at www.cypgulf.org

² Ephesians 2.15

John Holdsworth interviews the Anglican bishop in Cyprus and the Gulf

Bishop Sean Semple has oversight of a diocese that includes half the Middle East, and which has a huge, largely ex-pat, Christian presence. Stretching from Iraq to the Yemen and including virtually everything in between, it is at the absolute heart of the present regional crisis and war. The countries of the diocese



Bishop Sean Semple

have been and continue to be attacked. Yet, as he ruefully admits, the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf is not what comes readily to mind for people, especially Christians, in the West. It is effectively hidden in plain sight. And he believes passionately that it has a story to tell.

I meet him at his Cyprus HQ on Monday morning as he is collecting data from all his churches for the previous day and making contact with his clergy. With so many different scenarios – the diocese covers ten political jurisdictions, depending how you count them – he is keen to keep abreast of the situation on the ground. He believes that the role of the bishop in these circumstances is to make sure that local clergy are encouraged and equipped, knowing that the bishop is closely supporting them, in prayer and with whatever other means he can.

He is aware of the specific pastoral need for those who may be far from their natural home and family support mechanisms. In this situation he is proud of the efforts being made by local churches. Possibilities vary according to local circumstances. In Doha, people are unable to travel or gather, so everything is online, but very imaginatively so, whereas in the UAE it is possible to have in-person services. Even then, of course, some people are still afraid to travel. He quotes some figures from the previous day. In Abu Dhabi there were ten warning alerts during a service that brought together eighty-five adults plus children. In neighbouring Jebel Ali, also affected by alerts, there was a congregation of a hundred and sixty-seven and thirty-one children in Sunday School.

In his sermon the previous day at the installation of the new dean of Nicosia, Bishop Sean had commended the example of the sister cathedral in Bahrain. Bahrain has come under sustained attack and there everything is online. A strong Council and excellent locum priest have provided daily online services viewed by people from around the diocese and indeed the wider world. 'Occasions like this show a person's mettle,' he says. All in all, the clergy and congregations are 'in good heart'.



Nicosia Cathedral

The bishop thinks that the wider Church world needs to know what is going on in this uniquely placed diocese (and believes JMECA has a role to play here). It has a special ministry of welcome and hospitality and it is placed as a Christian presence exuding a message of love and hope. It is perhaps the most inclusive of all Anglican dioceses. Most Gulf congregations have literally dozens of different nationalities present each worship day (which may be Friday as well as Sunday). It has a unique opportunity for interfaith dialogue and for ecumenical cooperation.

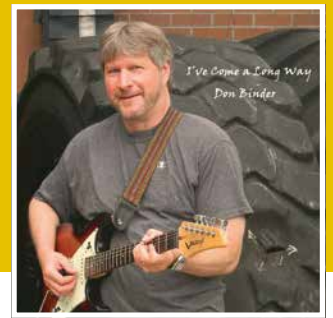
Following a most successful synod meeting in February in Bahrain, there are exciting plans for mission and growth. The bishop cites a couple of examples. In Cyprus there is a new emphasis on student chaplaincy, particularly in the north of the Island. And in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Regional Government, which has already issued a licence for a new church in Erbil, has just invited him to a prayer breakfast to take the project further. 'There is enormous potential for this diocese to offer a Christian space in many ways and places,' he says.

He is anxious though that the challenges of the present are responded to with gospel assurance. Acknowledging that this is a time of stress and uncertainty, he is well-aware of the need to encourage perseverance. He quotes Romans 5.

...we also exult in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

From Pohick to Palestine...

The Jerusalem Archbishop's Chaplain



Think of Americans associated with the name or title Don or Donald, and who comes to mind? Don Corleone perhaps, or Don Williams or most probably Donald Trump. Within the province of Jerusalem and the Middle East though, the likelihood is that the first name to come to mind would be the Rev Canon Dr Don Binder. Like Don Corleone he claims to live in a tough neighbourhood. Like Don Williams he is a singer songwriter with thousands of fans and followers; and like Donald Trump? Well actually that's where the comparisons run out, though they do have in common a strong social media presence.

Most of Don's ministry to this point has been in Virginia, reaching its zenith as Rector in the historic area of North Virginia that includes Fort Belvoir, Mount Vernon and particularly the church at which George Washington was a vestryman, at Pohick near Lorton, where he served for seventeen years.

Don describes himself as a 'poster boy for second vocations'. In the Episcopal Church, (TEC), there is opportunity, after serving for thirty years, to take a different course as a 'missionary', and that is what brought Don to Jerusalem to serve as Chaplain to Archbishop Suheil Dawani in 2018, a post which has continued alongside Archbishop Hosam.

Don's links with the Middle East go back much further than that. As a Biblical archaeologist – his PhD was an investigation into the development of Synagogues during the Second Temple period based on archaeological evidence – he had been involved in digs at key Biblical sites since the 1980s. He is an acknowledged scholar in his field, invited to contribute to academic publications and, in person, to lecture on his subject. Like many ordained scholars he wants his scholarly work to inform his ministry, primarily, and he is thus able to bring some biblical accounts to life. He speaks with excitement, for example, about visiting the site of John the Baptist's execution at Machaerus and being able to walk on the very dance floor described in Mark's Gospel.

Don's initial posting was as Chaplain to Archbishop Suheil, though his role is more akin to what TEC describes as, 'Canon to the Ordinary'. What it actually involved was a huge amount of administration, contributing to a steep learning curve. When Archbishop Hosam did not appoint a new dean, Don's work as Canon Pastor had further responsibility. Don is also Undersecretary to the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem. During recent times they have had a high public profile and issued a series of statements which, in this capacity, Don has had new responsibilities in coordinating and communicating. He is

also a conduit of information between the Churches and the diplomatic corps.

Communication has been a key role for Don during the Gaza war. He has taken subscriptions to local and international media outlets as a result of which he has been able to share key insights which would otherwise not have been so widely distributed. He sees his contribution as one that offers a wider perspective than that the western press is able to provide; also deconstructing the state of Israel's own published narrative of the war. He hopes and believes (rightly) that this is a valuable service carried out on behalf of people who are not in his unique position. His position at Archbishop Hosam's right hand means he has found himself in situations and company he never dreamed he would share. He says he is 'the Forrest Gump of Clergymen'.

Like so many in the diocese and elsewhere he is persuaded of the importance of a ministry of presence, and continuing presence for Christianity in the land of its birth, even though, or especially because, Christians now form only two per cent of the population. At the most recent Majma (synod) of the diocese of Jerusalem he offered a reflection about the Christian response to political events and narratives. A quotation from his presentation reflects what are clearly strongly held convictions.

While we resist evil, we must refuse to become enemies. We must refuse to become victims. We must refuse to fall into the primitive tribalism that has become such a mark of our present age. We must understand the meaning of being a good neighbour in a tough neighbourhood, as our Lord taught us, and model that behaviour for others to see.

Those whose contact with Don has only been at formal church occasions might be surprised to know about his alter ego as a singer songwriter. He has been writing pop folk songs since he was 14. In his last parish he used to write songs to accompany parish retreats and collected some of them into collections he terms Shrine Mont Soliloquies (named after the retreat centre where they met), which can be accessed on Spotify. In 2022 his songs had over 76 thousand hits, with 10 thousand listeners in 98 countries.

The song that he wrote just before he left Virginia, "I look to my friends," accompanied a parish retreat on the theme of Christian friendship and has become one of his greatest hits. If I were to choose a song to accompany this article it would probably be a 14-bar blues progression, the cover for which shows him standing outside some re-tread tyres by the gym in which he used to work out. It's called "I've come a long way."

Diocese of Iran

Iran
Vacant

Bishop Hassan Dehqni-Tafti DD – first bishop president of the province

In this fiftieth anniversary year of the province, it is good to remember its first Bishop President, the Rt Rev Hassan Dehqani-Tafti. Bishop Hassan succeeded his father-in-law William Thompson as Bishop in Iran in 1961 thereby enabling the diocese to move from a missionary led church to one which was Persian led. By 1976 when he was elected by the Central Synod of the new province, meeting in Amman, he was a well experienced, clear leader as a diocesan bishop and known in the wider world. He was an accomplished author in both Farsi and English, an evangelist, and a poet, seeking to interpret the Christian faith in ways sensitive to the history, literature and culture of Iran.

He had also been heavily involved with what he described in his autobiography as 'the long and arduous discussions' that led to this new arrangement of Anglican jurisdiction in the Middle East. He describes this as a 'deep joy and privilege but also an exacting calling and a heavy trust' to provide leadership and pastoral concern for one of the largest provinces in the Anglican communion from Iran to North Africa, from Ethiopia via the Arab Gulf states to Cyprus and including the heartlands of the Christian faith in Israel/Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan.

To provide some sense of mutual belonging, he launched an occasional letter 'The Presence' to provide news and reflection. He also established an office base in Isfahan run by the experienced administrator Jean Waddell who had served as secretary to the last English archbishop in Jerusalem and Robert Stopford, the Vicar-General, under whom the new province had come into being. Bishop Hassan regarded it as incumbent to visit the four constituent dioceses as widely as possible. Together with his wife Margaret he visited each diocese at least twice during his first five years. It was also important to develop connections with the wider Anglican Communion which included visits to the USA and to the UK.

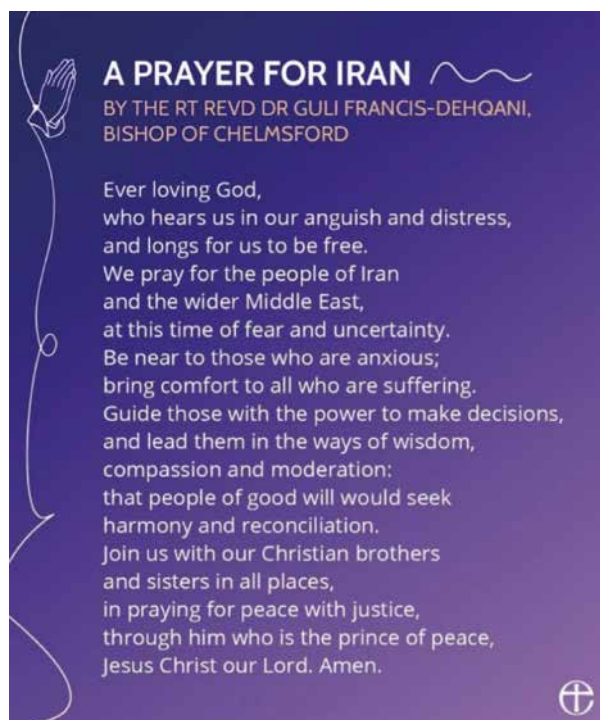
But during the first three years the situation in Iran darkened. Even so, it was possible to hold a meeting of the province's Central Committee in Isfahan in the autumn of 1978. In early 1979 the Shah was overthrown and the Islamic Republic established. A week after the Revolution one of his clergy the Revd Arastoo Sayyah was murdered in Shiraz. During the summer the hospitals, schools and other social

institutions of the diocese were expropriated. Bishop Hassan protesting at this injustice, was called in for questioning. In October assassins entered his bedroom and fired shots at close range. His wife throwing herself over him was wounded in her hand, but the bullets missed him forming a halo round his head (the bullet-holed pillow is now framed and kept by his daughter the Bishop of Chelmsford).

Later in October he attended a meeting of the primates of the Anglican Communion in Cyprus at which he was advised not to return to Iran as he was more useful to the province and the Communion outside a country at which his life was at risk. He always insisted that he did not flee Iran but acted on strong advice. On May 1st, 1980 Jean Waddell was shot and seriously wounded and six days later his son, Bahram was murdered. Hassan was in Cyprus at the time and wrote a most moving prayer about those who had murdered his son. The first Christian martyrs of the Revolution came from the Anglican Church.

His term as bishop president was renewed until 1986 and exercised from England where he was joined by a recovered Jean Waddell as his Secretary. He was succeeded by Bishop Samir Kafity of Jerusalem whose title changed to president bishop.

He retired in 1991 and during the rest of his life continued to write including a three-volume work in Persian on Christ and Christianity in Persian Poetry – an autobiography in Persian and English, and a translation adapted for Iran of Kenneth Cragg's *The Call of the Minaret*.



A PRAYER FOR IRAN

BY THE RT REVD DR GULI FRANCIS-DEHQANI,
BISHOP OF CHELMSFORD

Ever loving God,
who hears us in our anguish and distress,
and longs for us to be free.
We pray for the people of Iran
and the wider Middle East,
at this time of fear and uncertainty.
Be near to those who are anxious;
bring comfort to all who are suffering.
Guide those with the power to make decisions,
and lead them in the ways of wisdom,
compassion and moderation:
that people of good will would seek
harmony and reconciliation.
Join us with our Christian brothers
and sisters in all places,
in praying for peace with justice,
through him who is the prince of peace,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fifty years of Jerusalem

by Bishop Clive Handford, bishop in Cyprus and the Gulf (1996-2007), president bishop (2002-2007)

As I write this, my mind goes back to Jerusalem on 6th January 1976. It is a day that marks an important new chapter in the life of the Anglican Church in the Middle East.

The Archbishopric in Jerusalem, established 1957, was an important step towards the province. With the establishment of the diocese of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, it brought together the five dioceses of the region. The metropolitan authority, however, was still vested in the Archbishop of Canterbury and some felt that there was still an element of colonialism in the way things operated.

Soon after his appointment as the second Archbishop in Jerusalem, the Most Reverend George Appleton recognised that there was need for further development. He understood the desire of the local indigenous Arab Christians to move into leadership roles. Accordingly, discussions were activated among the dioceses and a committee was established to make proposals. The eventual outcome was more or less the province as it now is. It had originally been expected that the diocese of Sudan would continue as a member of the province. However, in 1975 it was agreed that it should separate, in effect, beginning the process of forming a separate province.

In July 1973, the Anglican Consultative Council gave general approval to the making of a new constitution for a church in the Middle East. By the time Archbishop Appleton retired in March 1974, constitutions for the province and the dioceses were still to be drawn up. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, could not relinquish his metropolitan authority until this happened. Accordingly, he appointed the Right Reverend and Right Honourable Robert Stopford, recently retired as Bishop of London, as Vicar General for a period of up to two years with the task of confirming proposals and drawing up constitutions.

Robert Stopford's appointment was not universally welcomed. There were those in Jerusalem who

regarded it as just another delaying process. Arab church members were suspicious because, as Bishop of London, Bishop Stopford had been Chairman of the Jerusalem and the East Mission which they regarded as a colonial institution. However, the Bishop very quickly allayed their fears. They found that he was a patient listener, sympathetic to their cause and basically on their side.

Travelling around the existing dioceses and listening to

those he met, Bishop Stopford was able to confirm the suggestions for the new structure and began the process of embodying them in constitutional form for a new Central Synod and for the dioceses. Two people who worked closely with the Vicar General and were a great support in all the preparations he made for the new province were Canon Fred MacDonald and Miss Jean Waddell. The former was an experienced priest from the Episcopal Church in the USA who served as his chaplain. The latter had been Secretary to Archbishop Appleton. She was utterly discreet and invaluable in dealing with correspondence and the writing

up of constitutions. After the formation of the province, she became Secretary to bishop president Hassan, the Bishop President, in Iran. It was there that she was imprisoned by the new Iranian regime and released by the mission of Terry Waite.

With a view to his eventually becoming Bishop in Cyprus and the Gulf, Leonard Ashton was consecrated as an assistant bishop in Jerusalem. The consecration service took place in St Clement Danes in London, the central church of the Royal Air Force from which the bishop had recently retired as Chaplain-in-Chief.

Following the Vicar General's consultations, three other bishops were appointed. It was decided that there should be two assistant bishops for the proposed diocese of Jerusalem. Their nomination and appointment were the prerogative of the Archbishop of Canterbury. He asked for guidance in the form of confidential votes. The result was the appointment of Canon Faik Haddad as Bishop



m and the Middle East

Coadjutor and the Reverend Aql Aql as Assistant Bishop, based in Amman. They were consecrated in Jerusalem on 29th August 1974. Bishop Aql sadly died before the new province was inaugurated. (He was succeeded by the Reverend Eliya Khoury in 1979). The third person was Archdeacon Ishaq MUSAAD, consecrated as Bishop of the diocese of Egypt in All Saints' Cathedral, Cairo, on 1st November 1974. Along with the appointment of bishops, constitutions were drawn up for each of the dioceses and for the new Central Synod, which, rather than an individual, became the metropolitan authority. In addition, St George's Cathedral for the first time had its own constitution and became formally known as 'cathedral', rather than as formerly 'collegiate church'. The Jerusalem and the East Mission now became 'the Jerusalem and the Middle East Church Association'. Bishop Stopford was adamant that decisions on matters such as property and finance must now be made by the bishops and Majmas (synods) and not by him even though he might be legally entitled to make them.

On the eve of the formal establishment of the new province, the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf was officially created during the service of evensong with Leonard Ashton as its bishop.

On the morning of 6th January, the cathedral was full to overflowing. It was a source of joy that some eighty persons had been able to come from Amman. Planning who should be invited, and where they should sit, was not without its tensions. In the event, there was wide political and religious representation. The only minor problem was that the Samaritan High Priest sat himself down in a seat intended for an Orthodox Archbishop. Just before the service was due to begin and the members of the clergy were assembled in the cloisters ready to process into the cathedral, one of our priests who was resident in Tel Aviv and had elected not to robe came to me and said that he was concerned about a young man in the congregation who had a rucksack with him. He was a person known to us, mildly eccentric and with Israeli sympathies. I took off my cope and went into the cathedral to talk to him. I concluded that he was not a security risk. Fortunately, this proved correct and the service proceeded without incident.

Central to the service was the reading of the mandate of the Archbishop of Canterbury in which he relinquished his metropolitan authority to the new Central Synod. It

was read in English by Bishop Stopford and in Arabic by Bishop Cuba'in. There was an irony in this in that it marked the end of his diocese of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. He now retired, a much-respected leader who by his knowledge, patience and statesmanship had guided the diocese through the past eighteen years.

Immediately after the Eucharist, the second part of the ceremony began. Bishop Haddad knocked on the West door of the cathedral and, as dean, I welcomed him in the traditional dialogue, in Arabic. The canons and I then escorted him to the crossing where he was met by Bishop George Appleton, Bishop Najib Cuba'in and the Vicar General. After the bishop had taken the oath of office, he was presented with the pastoral staff of the See of Jerusalem and then led to the episcopal throne where I duly installed him.

The day's ceremonies were not quite over. At evensong, I was able to install three episcopal canons: Bishop Leonard Ashton of Cyprus and the Gulf, Bishop Hassan Dehqani-Tafti of Iran and Bishop John Howe, Secretary General of the Anglican Consultative Council. They were symbolic of the cathedral's representation, together with the bishop, of the wider Anglican Communion in the mother city of the faith.

Next morning, those who had been elected or appointed members of the Central Synod met in Amman. Bishop Hassan of Iran was elected bishop president, the Venerable Samir Kafity as Secretary and Mr Ibrahim (Abe) Wakid as Treasurer. With the Central Synod duly established, Bishop Stopford returned to Jerusalem to pack and leave for England. I recall his first words to me were 'they've elected Hassan, Clive, relax'. He had completed his task well under the prescribed two years. There were those who would have liked him to stay on but he quite clearly said 'Nanny's going home'. The succeeding fifty years have seen pressures both political and ecclesiastical, growth and decline. Through all, the province has mostly been in good heart and faithful to its call. Recent years have seen the transformation of the diocese of Egypt into a separate province but the historic links remain.

For those of us who were privileged to be there fifty years ago and those who have continued to serve down the years, there remains a strong feeling of being part of something special.

A reflection on John 20:19-23 in the light of contemporary Iran

On Saturday February 28th, just before the internet and communication networks were shut down in Iran, my sister called from Yazd, a city in the centre of the country. She said not to worry – they had supplies, they would stay home, and they would lock their doors. Yet for many Iranians, 'home' has never fully meant safety. By Sunday evening, 1st March, reports indicated that the area where my sister lives had been bombed. That brief phone call brought back many memories of locked doors in Iran and a passage I have read many times before – John 20:19-23. For comfort, prayer, and perhaps clarity, I turned to it again.

'On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear... Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you'.'

John tells us the disciples were gathered behind locked doors because they were afraid. Their fear was not weakness; it was a reasonable response to violence and political uncertainty. The death of Christ had shown them what power could do. Locked doors were an instinct for survival. The phrase *'behind locked doors'* remained with me. It resonates deeply – not only because of the present moment in Iran, but because it describes a long history of struggling to live carefully, cautiously, yet with resistance in Iran. In societies shaped by prolonged authoritarian rule, closing the door is not simply retreat; it is learned wisdom. Private space becomes a fragile shield against surveillance, detention, and violence. And yet, even locked doors do not – and did not – always protect us.

My childhood unfolded in the shadow of prison. Visiting my siblings in prison was part of ordinary life. My brothers were detained for political reasons; imprisonment was the cost of dissent. Yet even within prison, there were signs of dignity. I remember the handbags and handicrafts prisoners made, which we bought to support them. Only later did I understand that they were more than objects; they were quiet acts of resistance. Beauty created under constraint. Such memories shape how I respond to the present geopolitical moment. As a family, we did not support the Iranian regime. My story is marked by resistance to its coercive practices. Yet opposing domestic authoritarianism does not automatically mean embracing foreign intervention.

When Jesus appears in John 20, Rome has not fallen. The empire remains intact. The disciples remain vulnerable. And the risen Christ shows them the scars in his hands and his side. The scars remain visible. Resurrection does not erase violence; it carries it forward in transformed form. That detail speaks into our lived experience. I have seen scars caused by interrogation and torture, even more vividly after I became a Christian. I have seen cigarette burns on a friend's side, leaving small holes in his flesh because of his faith. These are not distant stories; they are part of our shared memory.

John's narrative resists two temptations. It does not deny fear – the doors remain locked. Nor does it promote retaliation. Instead, Christ speaks peace into a room shaped by fear. This peace is not sentimental calm. It is an invitation to a different way of being present. 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you'. The disciples are not commissioned to take power, but to embody another kind of power.

Perhaps Iran feels like a locked room right now – the rage of war, full of fear, rumour and unresolved history. Perhaps my own heart feels like that room. The news of war, uncertainty about the regime, the possibility of collapse – all of it presses in. When Jesus says, *'Peace be with you'* it is not the peace of empire. It is not the peace of silence. It is the peace of wounded hands that did not retaliate. I am Iranian. I am Christian. I carry scars.

John 20 also speaks of breath. Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, *'Receive the Holy Spirit'*. Breath recalls creation – a new beginning. It suggests that renewal does not begin with domination but with interior transformation and shared vocation. Applied to Iran, it suggests that lasting change emerges from dignity, accountability and resistance. It resists the reduction of our future to pure power calculations.

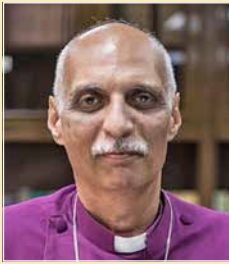
Christ enters the locked room without dismantling the door. He does not rebuke the disciples for their caution. He neither glorifies fear nor demands reckless exposure. He stands among them, shows His scars, and speaks peace.

John 20:19-23 does not offer escape from uncertainty. It offers orientation. Peace is spoken into fear, not after fear is gone. Scars are acknowledged, not hidden. Commission follows encounter. The locked room becomes not only a place of confinement, but a place from which vocation begins.

Sara Afshari

Dr Sara Afshari is an Iranian theologian working at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

Province of Alexandria

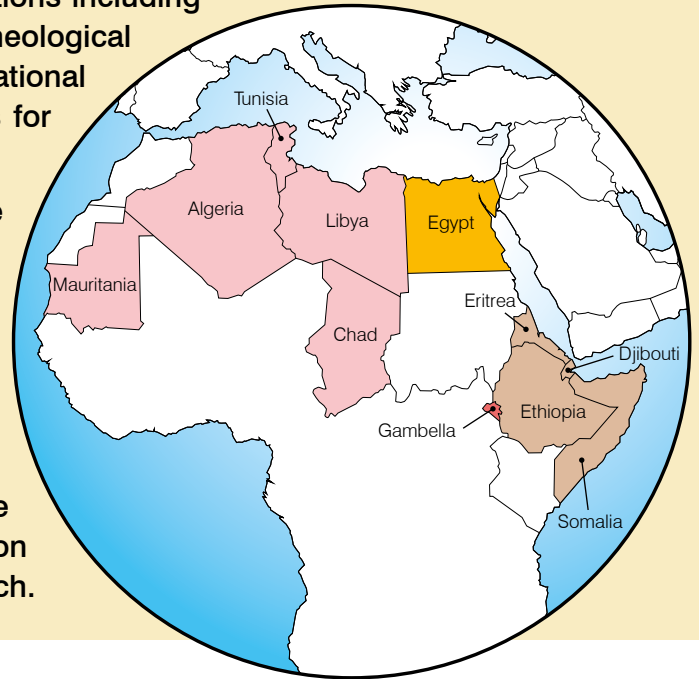


From its beginning in 1839, the diocese of Egypt was committed to serve others as Jesus did. The new Episcopal Anglican province of which the diocese of Egypt is now a part, continues this commitment to serving all people holistically regardless of their religion or social status. Numerically, we continue to grow and in this strategic part of the world we have a great opportunity and responsibility to be ambassadors of our Lord Jesus, demonstrating in 'Word and Deed' what our faith means to

us. The province supports numerous institutions including hospitals, clinics, nurseries, schools, a theological seminary, micro-enterprise ventures and vocational training programmes, as well as institutions for the deaf and the disabled.

The five goals of the province are: to reach the unreached with the Gospel of Christ; to grow Christ's church by making disciples and equipping leaders; to serve our neighbours; to work for unity among all Christians; and to dialogue with other faith communities.

Support from the Jerusalem and the Middle East Church Association (JMECA) to the province will be directed to helping with mission work, ordination training and medical outreach.



Mission in the diocese of Egypt – Centre for Christian-Muslim Understanding and Partnership (CCMUP)

Previous posts have described the work of the Arts-based group **Gusour** (meaning bridges in Arabic), which brings together young people of all faiths and none to learn more about each other's cultures through participation in artistic activities. Some of these, such as music, have led to a complete orchestra being formed. Others have concentrated on the dramatic arts and led to both new learning and performances. There is even a Film Club. You may also have seen the development of the **Granita Restaurant** on the cathedral campus, devised as a place where it was safe for all to meet, and which has become one of the swishest places to eat in the Zamalek area of the city. There have been other reports posted on the website of boundary-crossing and confidence-building conferences.

Now, with the support of the Dutch and Irish governments, a series of conflict resolution and peace-building workshops has been held in centres throughout the country. This initiative owes much to the energy and vision of Archbishop Emeritus

Mouneer Anis and is fully supported by his successor Archbishop Samy Fawzi. The sessions are highly valued by each of the communities taking part, and for the Anglicans this is one more example of being (as the diocesan motto describes it) 'a Living Church for a Better Society'.

Archbishop Mouneer describes with characteristic enthusiasm the ground covered by the workshops. Groups study sacred texts from a variety of cultures that describe peacebuilding, to establish common ground. They look at the concept of citizenship with the aid of a document signed both by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam, 'Human Fraternity'. This invites discussion of the rights of women and children and the marginalised, and the concept of sacred space in communities.

They take head on, sources of sectarian dispute and violence, which are often based on misconceptions (Christians use magic because they burn incense; or Christians believe in three gods); and they look at common problems such as those that are raised by mixed marriages. The aim is to put these things in perspective. On the intentional side, participants are introduced to positive steps in peace-making such as developing listening skills.

Province of Alexandria

Gambella hit the ground running in 2026...



Bishop Jeremiah Paul has signalled a vigorous start to the Church's mission in 2026. One of the priorities is peace building and already

this year the Church has hosted important community meetings to help mutual understanding.

The other is clergy development. Through the St Frumentius branch of the Alexandria School of Theology, the bishop, who is himself currently taking part in a Doctor of Ministry programme, has taken a hands-on approach to teaching. He has a passionate regard for education which he says, 'is not simply a key to self-sustaining life, but rather a tool for making our world a better place for human co-existence through development and peace building'. And again, 'Peace is not the absence of conflict but the ability to prevent violence through law enforcement, fact findings, fruitful dialogue, honesty, truthfulness, forgiveness and reconciliation.'

These two foci are part of the greater mission for the Church in Gambella. The Church in Ethiopia has been growing rapidly in the past few years mainly due to the Sudanese refugees who fled Sudan and South Sudan and brought their faith into the refugee camps

in Gambella which borders South Sudan.

Bishop Mouneer, who was bishop before the diocese of Gambella was formed from the diocese of Egypt said: 'when the war erupted between the north and the south, many women and children walked to Gambella to find shelter. They were kept in refugee camps. They built Anglican churches in these camps and we provided pastoral care and support for these churches'.



New generations became Ethiopian citizens and settled outside the refugee camps. In 2000, there were just seven churches. By 2011

the number of churches became one hundred. Now it is excess of one hundred and fifty. The St Frumentius Bible School in Gambella has also been established to train local church leaders.

Bishop Jeremiah sees peace building, community development and education as intimately connected and has ambition for what can be achieved in the real world. He says: 'This is just the beginning. We are going to grow into a well-organised movement of agents for change'.



... NEWS FLASH FROM JERUSALEM ...

The Rev Canon John L. Peterson receives the Saint George's Cross Award of Excellence



At a solemn evensong at St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem, recently, Archbishop Hosam Naoum presented the Saint George's Cross Award of Excellence to Canon John Peterson in thanksgiving for his long and outstanding ministry within and for the diocese of Jerusalem.

Canon Peterson served as the Dean of Saint George's College for twelve years and later as Secretary General of the Anglican Communion. He also led numerous pilgrimages to the Holy Land and helped raise awareness of the ministry of the congregations and institutions of the diocese.

Everyone is grateful for Canon Peterson's ministry for the diocese and for his wife Kirsten and daughters Emily and Carrie.

The Conundrum of Christian Zionism

by Clare Amos



My first direct encounter with what I would now call 'Christian Zionism' came in 1977 in the courtyard of St George's Cathedral, Jerusalem. I was Course Director of St George's College and on a day off I spotted a friend of mine, Najwa Farah, a

Palestinian poet, married to Rafiq Farah, then the Anglican priest in Ramallah. Najwa was breathless and almost hyperventilating with shock. She had been at lunch at the guesthouse of Christ Church, the other Anglican Church in Jerusalem. Located in the Old City just inside the Jaffa Gate it was affiliated to the *Church's Ministry Among the Jewish People* and its ministry particularly focused on Christian relationships with Judaism.

Over lunch a western Christian visitor to the country had asked Najwa who she was, and in Najwa's reply she referred to being a Palestinian, a Christian, and an Anglican living in Ramallah where her husband was the Anglican priest. She was startled by the response: 'You can't be a real Christian because if you were a real Christian, you would have known that God has given the whole of this land to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and you would have got up and left the country'. Najwa was incredulous, and I was mortified for her – and angry on her behalf.

During my years living in Jerusalem from 1973, I had encountered a variety of attitudes by Christians, both locals and visitors, to the Israeli state and to the Israeli presence in East Jerusalem. But nothing remotely as crude and blatantly personal as this. It was a reminder of how particular Christian theological positions can affect the real lives of real people. My encounter with Najwa on that day has impacted my own theological work in the years since. Her interlocutor's aggressive remarks were clearly based on biblical texts drawn from the Pentateuch, in particular the Book of Genesis and the 'promises' to Abraham expressed in verses such as Genesis 12.1-3. When, years later, I wrote a commentary on the Book of Genesis, an interpretative principle that I adopted was 'How can we as Christians read Genesis, this key book of our Bible, in a way that offers justice to Najwa and her people?' I hope that I succeeded, at least in part.

Over the years since, I have engaged intentionally with what is now often called 'Christian Zionism'. The term seems to have been first used by Theodore Herzl in 1897 at the First Zionist Congress. He employed it to describe Christian

supporters of Jewish Zionism. But intriguingly although Jews at the time largely supported 'Zionism' for secular and political reasons, 'Christian Zionists' did so based on their particular understanding of Christian theology.

The ideology of Christian Zionism, though not the name, goes back to the early post-Reformation period in England. Initially referred to as 'Restorationism', it is the belief based on certain prophetic texts in the Old Testament as well as the Book of Revelation in the New, that there would shortly be a mass return of Jews to 'the Promised Land' accompanied by a mass conversion on their part to Christianity. This would either trigger, or be caused by, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The precise order in which these apocalyptic events were to happen, or indeed who would survive them might vary: however, the vision included a great eschatological battle, the infamous 'Armageddon', as well as a belief that Christ would physically reign on earth for a millennium.

Often the physical rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem was envisaged. An underlying assumption was that God's covenant with Abraham and his physical descendants (i.e. the Jewish people) was eternal and still had to meet its final fulfilment.

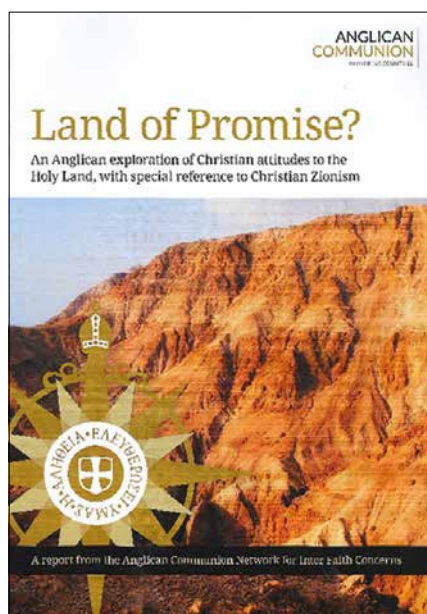
Although the roots of 'Restorationism' go back to the 17th century, and a century later its theological schema is vividly expressed in one of Charles Wesley's least known hymns (The Zionist Hymn of Charles Wesley (1762) – Fuel for the Journey), it was in the 19th century that such beliefs became increasingly prominent in English-speaking evangelical circles, drawing also on the theory of 'dispensationalism' taught by John Darby. Whether consciously or not Britain's increasing role in the Eastern Mediterranean helped to popularize such teachings, as it meant that 'England' was seen as God's divinely appointed emissary to carry out his work. By the twentieth century such a vision had crossed the Atlantic and become highly influential among many US evangelical Christian groups. There is even a series of novels, beginning with 'The Late Great Planet Earth' by the American writer Hal Lindsey, which dramatize these events.

Among some Christian Zionists the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 was seen as the beginning of the fulfilment of this eschatological vision: such linkage became more widespread after the Israeli capture of East Jerusalem and the West Bank in 1967. Christian Zionism has grown exponentially since then, both in influence and popularity. It has been a significant factor in influencing the development of Jewish religious Zionism whose voice has also become much more loudly strident during the last fifty years. Organizations such as the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem heavily promote Christian Zionism through

its activities such as its annual 'Feast of Tabernacles' pilgrimage to the city. The ideology has become a phenomenon influencing current US policy towards Israel and the Middle East. Ambassador Mike Huckabee's recent suggestion that Israel has a God-given right to control much of the Middle East exemplifies this. A statement by the Jerusalem Patriarchs and Heads of Churches made in January 2026 makes clear how damaging to the wellbeing of indigenous Christians they feel it is: 'Recent activities undertaken by local individuals who advance damaging ideologies, such as Christian Zionism, mislead the public, sow confusion, and harm the unity of our flock.'

Even more alarming is the development in which 'Christian Zionism' was recruited as an ally in the US-Israeli campaign against Iran. It was reported that a US military commander has sought to encourage his troops to fight because the war was 'all part of God's divine plan' citing references from the Book of Revelation referring to Armageddon and the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

What should be our response? I answer this question out of my own religious tradition as an Anglican Christian, for a publication that is primarily Anglican in readership. I was in fact involved in the writing and publication of an Anglican Communion report on the topic which appeared in 2012: *Land of Promise? An Anglican exploration of Christian attitudes to the Holy Land, with special reference to 'Christian Zionism'*. It is available online. Although there are points where I would now seek to update it, I still believe that it wrestles with the challenge of Christian Zionism in a way that is appropriate for the Anglican tradition.



Professionally I have worked both in biblical studies and interreligious relations. Our response to Christian Zionism requires us to take both fields seriously. The Christian Zionist reading of biblical texts makes me want to ask underlying questions about the Bible itself, the authority of scripture and the nature of biblical interpretation. I have increasingly come to feel that an 'Anglican' engagement with scripture needs to be a genuine conversation between the text and the reader. It is a 'serious' conversation, but it is also one in which we are entitled to raise challenges to particular scriptural texts, and a conversation in which our interpretation of the Bible needs to take account of Richard Hooker's famous three-legged stool which gives a role also to tradition and reason.

My understanding – which I believe to be profoundly Anglican – that the incarnation of God in Christ is a – the? – core Christian doctrine both honours my own humanity, and can and should affect how we human beings are invited to engage with scripture. The Christian Zionist reading of scripture, which certainly in its apocalyptic and dispensationalist forms is associated with strands of fundamentalism, fails on several counts my criteria for

reading the Bible in the Anglican tradition. However, there are Anglican scholars reflecting a different church tradition to mine who have importantly challenged Christian Zionist interpretation of biblical texts working from within their evangelical constituency. These include Peter Walker, Colin Chapman and Stephen Sizer. It is also good to remember that there are Palestinian Anglican Christians, especially Naim Ateek, who have engaged with Christian Zionism, drawing on their reading of scripture based on Palestinian Liberation Theology.

But as someone who has spent much of the last twenty years engaged professionally in interreligious dialogue I am committed to allowing our dialogue partners to speak for themselves. We do not have the right to define what they should believe, however inconvenient that may be from our own Christian perspective. We also need to be sure that we are not demanding more of our dialogue partners than we demand of ourselves. So I am wary of

Christian attitudes to Judaism which seek to incorporate Judaism within a Christian schema. This applies to those apocalyptic Christian Zionist beliefs to which I referred above which are not interested in Judaism *qua* Judaism but instrumentalise Jews to play a supporting role in what is ultimately intended as a Christian eschatology. But I am also wary if Christian critique of Christian Zionism seems to adopt a supersessionist viewpoint: a genuine hazard since the belief that Christianity has superseded Judaism in the purposes of God has been a normative Christian understanding for most of the last 2000 years. Such beliefs have been a primary cause of the antisemitism that has plagued Christian history.

Is there a way forward? Sometimes, as now, the future looks very dark. Yet I believe that there are two things that Christians and Jews can draw on which allow us jointly to engage the challenges that Christian Zionism presents to the life of the Church and the world today. The first is an acknowledgement that within both our faith traditions is the interplay of particularity and universality, and that both threads need to be taken seriously; the second is that the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, our common scripture insists on human dignity because all human beings, without exception, have been created in the image and likeness of God.

Clare Amos, a former Course Director of St George's College, Jerusalem, has led work for both the Anglican Communion Office and the World Council of Churches in the field of interreligious dialogue. She was awarded a Lambeth Doctorate of Divinity by Archbishop Rowan Williams to mark her contribution to the life of the Communion in various areas of theological education. Clare is also a Director and Trustee of JMECA.

Obituary

The Rt Rev Henry (Harry) Wylie Moore – Bishop Harry

2nd November 1923 – 16th December 2025



It was a privilege to represent Bishop Sean, the diocese, and the Friends of the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf at the funeral service of Bishop Harry held at Middleton Parish Church, Manchester on Tuesday 30th December followed by a committal at Blackley crematorium.

The service itself was delightfully informal in Middleton Parish Church, where Harry had served as both curate and later as rector. It was marked by: stirring hymns that reflected Harry's faith – *How great Thou art*, *My song is love unknown*, *Abide with me* and, more reflectively, *Make me a channel of your peace* at the crematorium; and a variety of reflections – from a former curate, from a former primary school teacher in Middleton, from a colleague in CMS and from one of the sons-in-law, who gave an overview of Harry's life, which was followed by a photo montage shown on a screen of pictures of both Harry's ministry and his family life. There were Bible readings from 1 Thessalonians 4. 13-18 and John 14. 1-7 and a brief sermon from the rector, the Rev David Brooks, on the message of the gospel underlying Harry's passion for mission.

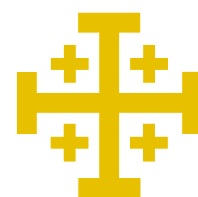
The family was at the very foundation of Harry's life and ministry: his sixty-six years of marriage to Betty; their five children, ten grandchildren, and twelve great-grandchildren. He constantly expressed his love and pride in them. It was clear that family life, wartime service in the Indian Army and working as a clerk for the railways, really earthed his ministry. His curate, David Smethurst (himself 89) spoke of Harry as a model and a mentor throughout his life and ministry. He had a discipline of prayer and service, and especially regular pastoral visiting in the parish. Mark Oxbrow from CMS spoke of Harry being a practical man, who never forgot his Northern working-class roots and, as a bishop, was refreshingly unlike the public school and Oxbridge bishops that were ever present in the Church of England. He was gifted in pulling a team together, humble enough to learn from others, and believed passionately, after service as a missionary in Iran, that Britain also needed to be on the receiving end of mission. He remained a lifelong friend of the exiled former Bishop of Iran, Hassan Dehqani-Tafti, and Bishop Guli Francis-Dehqani, (his daughter and the Bishop of Chelmsford), sent her greetings.

As Home Secretary of CMS, Harry was wonderfully complementary to the visionary Simon Barrington-Ward, rooting the vision in reality. When he became General Secretary, after three years as the second Bishop of Cyprus and the Gulf (1983-86), he provided the leadership needed in a time of great change for CMS. Following his retirement, he served as an Assistant Bishop in both Durham and then Hereford dioceses only fully retiring in his nineties.

The world and the Church are undoubtedly richer for Bishop Harry's life and ministry, and he will be remembered with great fondness by all who knew him.

Chris Butt

The Rev Canon Chris Butt, Dean of St Christopher's Cathedral, Bahrain (2009-2019)

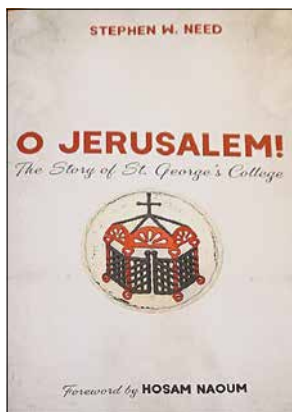


O Jerusalem! The Story of St. George's College

Stephen W. Need *Wipf & Stock, 2026*

...tells the multi-layered saga of how in the nineteenth century, the Church of England under Queen Victoria and the Prussian Church under King William IV established a Protestant presence in the Middle East. They built a church in the Old City of Jerusalem and a cathedral outside its walls. In the early 1960s St. George's College was born close by. Over the following decades, through mounting political turmoil and upheaval, this unique Anglican/Episcopal Center grew into a hub of pilgrimage and learning, attracting students from around the globe.

Immerse yourself through these pages into the life and times of one of the most enticing institutions in the world. Follow the exciting story of building and renovating a state-of-the-art facility in East Jerusalem. Meet the committed and energetic 'founding fathers' whose vision gave birth to the college and helped it



grow beyond all expectation. Travel with courses through the Holy Land, Sinai, Jordan, Turkey, Greece, and Rome. Encounter a host of dynamic personalities in ecumenical and interfaith contexts. Participate in "life-transforming" journeys of 'faith seeking understanding'. The fascinating story of St. George's College, Jerusalem, is told here with vitality, vigor, and verve. (From the book cover.)

O Jerusalem! The Story of St. George's College is available from Wipf and Stock publishers in the USA (See *O Jerusalem!*-Wipf and Stock Publishers) and from Amazon.

Stephen Need is rector in the parish of St. Peter with St. Michael and All Angels, Bexhill-on-Sea, teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame (USA) in England and was dean of St. George's College (2005-11).

The Anglican Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf. The Unfolding Story

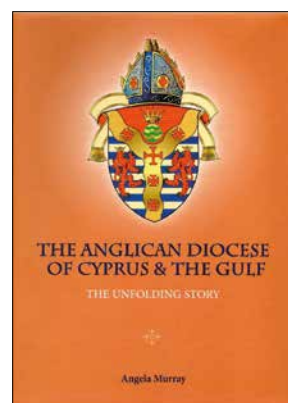
Angela Murray *Gilgamesh Publishing, 2020*

...is an impressive volume – over 450 pages with illustrations throughout – charting the evolution of the Anglican Church in Cyprus, Iraq and the Arabian Gulf region since the nineteenth century, and of the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf since its institution on 5th January 1976.

When the book was published in 2020, the Rev Canon Matthew Rhodes wrote: (almost a third) 'describes the origins of the diocese, setting it in the context of the often-complex politics and ecclesiastical landscape of the region. Canon Murray ably navigates the many forces that contributed to the diocese's creation in 1976 as part of the new province of Jerusalem and the Middle East...The differing contexts of Cyprus and the countries of the Gulf, mean that different chaplaincies developed in varied ways and Canon Murray manages to reflect these differences while telling a very engaging story. Along the way we learn of the transformation of the Gulf...This is a story of amazing faithfulness and resilience in the face of often very challenging circumstances, a real joy to read and an important marker in the continuing story of the Diocese of Cyprus and Gulf'.

The Anglican Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf: The Unfolding Story is available from JMECA (£20 plus p&p). Contact: Gabrielle Higgins Secretary@jmeca.org.uk Or from the Diocesan Office in Nicosia, Cyprus (Euros 25 plus p&p). Contact: helen.perry@cypgulf.org

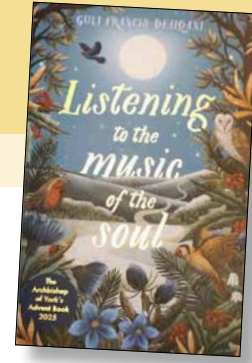
Canon Angela Murray MBE began her career in BBC in radio and television production. After gaining an BA in History & Archaeology and an MBA, she became an historian based in Bahrain; worshipped at St Christopher's Cathedral, served on its church council (1997-2020) and as a Lay Member of the Diocesan Standing Committee (2013-2019), was installed as an Honorary Lay Canon of St Christopher's Cathedral in 2018, and in 2023 became a trustee of the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf's Foundation, based in England.



Listening to the Music of the Soul

Guli Francis-Dehqani

SPCK, 2025



The author of this attractive little book is the Bishop of Chelmsford, Rt Rev Guli Francis-Dehqani. She is widely known for being the daughter of Bishop Hassan Dehqani-Tafti, the first Anglican Bishop in Iran. Her personal story is told elsewhere in this edition of *Bible Lands* and much of it is told in this book. Guli Francis-Dehqani came to England in 1980, grew up here and eventually became bishop of Loughborough and then of Chelmsford. Her personal story is woven here into a series of meditations which form the Archbishop of York's Advent Book, 2025.

Bishop Guli begins with the Magnificat and Mary's willingness to do God's will. Joy and pain come together in Mary and her example binds this book together. The significance of migration is then brought out, linking biblical and contemporary issues about migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Issues of identity and welcoming the stranger frame the question of what gives us identity and of losing identity in order to find it. Pain and violence are everywhere in life and the biblical story of Job and the unanswered questions of suffering are introduced, leading on to judgement, forgiveness and grace. In a chapter on angels the bishop introduces readers to questions and experiences including being an angel to others. Fear, hope and reconciliation lead into the importance of silence, darkness and light.

The Radio 4 programme 'Desert Island Discs' provides a conceptual structure for the book, and pieces of music are provided for further reflection at the end of each chapter, including, for example, Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' 'Into My Arms', Philip Stopford's 'Do Not Be Afraid' and Sinead O'Connor's 'Take me to Church'. QR codes are provided. The musical suggestions are accompanied in the text by numerous biblical, literary, political and theological references providing pointers for further reflection. The polish politician and author Vaclav Havel, the American theologian and writer Barbara Brown Taylor, and the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa are only a few.

This short but powerful book provides a series of reflections for Advent or indeed any time. The author's own story, including the murder of her brother, Bahram, gives the book a depth that will resonate with readers' own tragic experiences. Through theological and spiritual reflection, the author provides a tempting invitation into a life of faith in which music resonates with fundamental melodies of the soul. The final goal is life with God, contemplative prayer, and the strength that comes through it. You will want to return to this book again and again. (Editor)

Advent in Bethlehem. Reflections on Scripture and Bethlehem Today.

Nicholas Taylor

Sacristy Press, 2025



This stimulating and thought-provoking book for study during Advent focuses on Bethlehem the place, on biblical texts associated with Bethlehem, and on life in Bethlehem today.

Readers will encounter major characters connected with Bethlehem in the Old and New Testaments, as well as contemporary political issues in the region. With six chapters, the book is flexible enough to be used in different ways by groups or individuals. The author, Nicholas Taylor, has spent time living near Bethlehem and brings a good deal of experience of the local area into the discussion.

The first four chapters focus on Old Testament characters: Rachel, Ruth, David and Elijah. The main

figure associated with Bethlehem, of course, is Jesus. Readers are encouraged to study the nativity stories just before Christmas and to focus on distinctive features of the gospels of Matthew and Luke. A final chapter entitled 'Epiphany Reflection' takes the Advent journey beyond Christmas to the feast of the Epiphany on January 6th.

The book is illustrated with black and white photos, and 'Points for Prayer' are provided at the end of each chapter. There is also a short bibliography for further study. In all, this is a useful, refreshing and challenging Advent resource. And you don't need to have been to the Holy Land to benefit from using it! (Editor)

Praying round the Provinces



**The Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East,
and the Province of Alexandria, home to the three Abrahamic faiths
and the centre of the world's political conflicts,
ask your prayers for...**

● PROVINCE OF JERUSALEM AND THE MIDDLE EAST

1st The province of Jerusalem and the Middle East. The president bishop of the province, the Most Rev Hosam Naoum.

● THE DIOCESE OF JERUSALEM

2nd The Archbishop and Dean of St George's Cathedral, the Most Rev Dr Hosam Naoum and his wife Rafa and family. For wisdom as he leads the church in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The administrative staff.

3rd The clergy serving the parishes and institutions in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon and the congregations who keep the faith and sustain the churches in troubled times.

4th The hospitals and centres that tend the sick: the Diabetic Clinic Ramallah, St Luke's Hospital Nablus, the Ahli Arab hospital Gaza, and the Penman Clinic, Zebabdeh.

5th The schools that prepare the next generation: St George's Jerusalem, the International School Jerusalem, the Arab Episcopal School Ramallah, the Vocational Training Centre Ramallah, Christ's School Nazareth, St John's School Haifa, the Ahliyyah School for Girls, the Bishop's Kindergarten and the Bishop's School for Boys Amman, the Schneller Vocational Training Institute Amman, St Saviour's School Zerqa, St John Baptist School for Integration of the Blind Irbid, and St George's School Lod.

6th The centres of healing: the Jerusalem Princess Basma Centre, the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf Salt, the Jofeh Community Rehabilitation Centre Jordan Valley, St Luke's Centre for the Mentally Disabled Beirut, the Home for the Elderly Amman, the Episcopal Home for Children Ramallah.

7th The guest houses that provide hospitality and refreshment for pilgrims and all visitors: St George's Jerusalem, St Margaret's Nazareth, St Andrew's Ramallah, the Schneller Institute Amman and Christ Church Jerusalem.

8th Those who work for peace: the Peace and Reconciliation Movement, Kids4Peace, Sabeel and people from all sides who seek peace and pursue it.

9th St George's College Jerusalem and its courses: the dean, the Very Rev Richard Sewell and his wife JulieAnn, the Course Director, the Rev Dr Rodney Aist, the chaplain, and their families.

*Almighty God, from whom all thoughts of truth and peace proceed,
kindle, we pray, in the hearts of all your people the true love of peace.*

● THE DIOCESE OF IRAN

10th All in leadership roles in the Church in Iran.

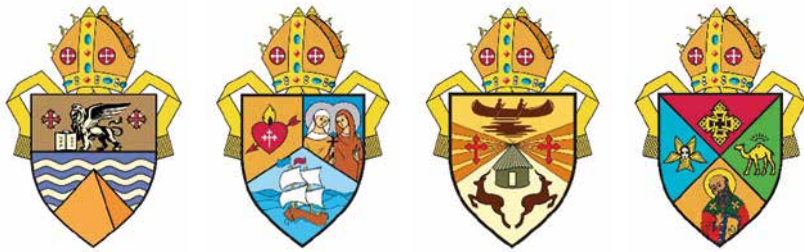
11th The political leadership of the nation. The wellbeing of all people in Iran.

12th The congregations of the Episcopal Church in Isfahan (its suburb Julfa), Tehran & Shiraz. The cities where congregations have worshipped in past years – Kerman, Yazd, Ahwaz.

13th All involved in ministry among Iranians through media, literature, witness and leadership training.

14th The diaspora of Iranian Christians scattered in many nations.

*Guide with your pure and peaceable wisdom those who take counsel
for the nations of the earth, that in tranquillity your kingdom may go forward,
till the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love.*



Praying round the Provinces

**Blessed Lord, who faced the time of trial
have mercy on our failings and out of our weakness
bring your strength.**

● THE DIOCESE OF CYPRUS AND THE GULF

- 15th The bishop, the Rt Rev Sean Semple, his wife Jenny and their family. The diocesan administrative staff.
- 16th The Ministry of St Paul's Cathedral Nicosia. The dean, The Very Rev Canon Dr Walter Brownridge. The Ministry of St, Christopher's Cathedral Bahrain.
- 17th The Archdeacon in the Gulf, the Rev Mark Derry. The Archdeacon in Cyprus, the Ven Paul Carr and his wife Paula.
- 18th The clergy and people of Cyprus in Nicosia, Kyrenia, Larnaca, Limassol, Paphos and Ammochostos. The work of the Katafiyio room at the Angel Hills Hotel.
- 19th The clergy and people of the Gulf in Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Dubai, Ras al Khaima and the Northern Emirates, Oman, Doha, Aden and the clinic at Ras Morbat, and the scattered congregations of the Arabian Peninsula who keep the faith privately.
- 20th The Church in Qatar and the Epiphany Centre, Doha. The congregation of Baghdad led by Canon Faiz Jerjes. The people of Iraq, of all faiths, and all the Iraqi Christians who are sheltering in other lands.
- 21st The political leaders in Cyprus, Iraq and the Gulf States, that all may seek and create just and stable governments.
- 22nd The Friends of the diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf.

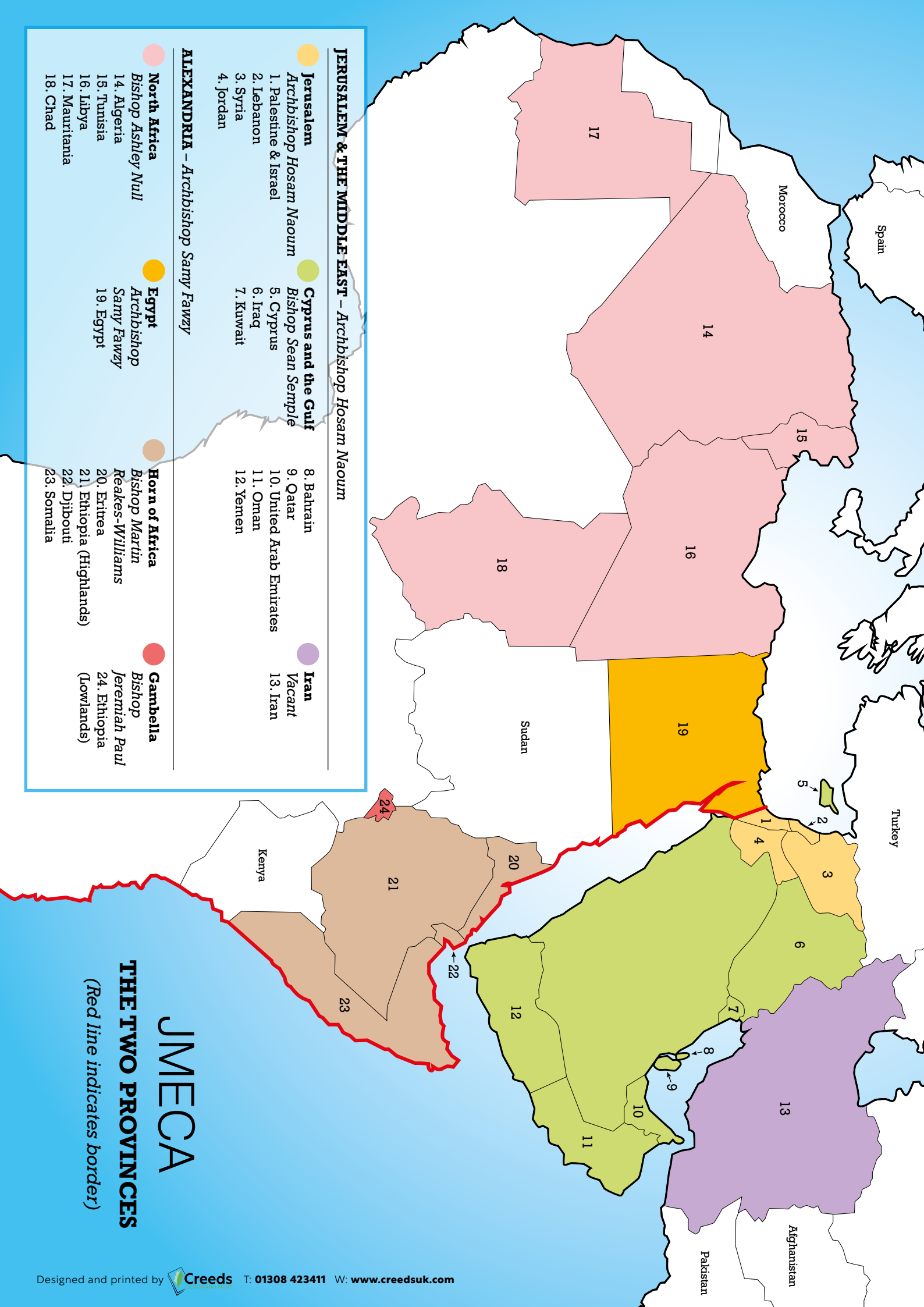
*Almighty and everlasting God, creator and giver of all good gifts, mercifully hear our prayers
and grant to this diocese all things needful for its welfare.*

● PROVINCE OF ALEXANDRIA

- 23rd The province of Alexandria. The archbishop of the province, the Most Rev Dr Samy Fawzy.
- 24th The diocese of Egypt. The bishop the Most Rev Dr Samy Fawzy and his wife Madelaine and their family and all who work in and for the diocese.
- 25th The diocese of North Africa. The bishop the Rt Rev Dr Ashley Null, his family and all who work in and for the diocese.
- 26th The diocese of the Horn of Africa. The bishop the Rt Rev Martin Reakes-Williams and all who work in and for the diocese.
- 27th The diocese of Gambella in Ethiopia. The bishop the Rt Rev Jeremiah Paul, his wife and family and all who work in and for the diocese.
- 28th The Alexandria School of Theology Education System and its campuses throughout the Province. The Chair of the AST Board of Governors, the Rt Rev Dr Ashley Null. All staff and students and their families.
- 29th The Friends of the Anglican Province of Alexandria, the Friends of the Anglican Church in Ethiopia and all friends of the dioceses.

*Strengthen the faithful, protect the children, comfort the sick, uplift the fallen
and bring us all to be of one heart and one mind within the fellowship of your holy church.*

- 30th The Jerusalem and the Middle East Church Association. Its Chair, the Rev Canon David Longe. The office staff: Miss Gabrielle Higgins and Mrs Sarah Branch. All whose gifts, past and present, sustain it.



JERUSALEM & THE MIDDLE EAST – Archbishop Hosam Naoum

Jerusalem

Archbishop Hosam Naoum

1. Palestine & Israel
2. Lebanon
3. Syria
4. Jordan

Cyprus and the Gulf

Bishop Sean Sempke

5. Cyprus
6. Iraq
7. Kuwait

Iran

Vacant

8. Bahrain
9. Qatar
10. United Arab Emirates
11. Oman
12. Yemen
13. Iran

ALEXANDRIA – Archbishop Sammy Fawzy

North Africa

Bishop Ashley Null

14. Algeria
15. Tunisia
16. Libya
17. Mauritania
18. Chad

Egypt

Archbishop Sammy Fawzy

19. Egypt

Horn of Africa

Bishop Martin Reakes-Williams

20. Eritrea
21. Ethiopia (Highlands)
22. Djibouti
23. Somalia

Gambella

Bishop Jeremiah Paul

24. Ethiopia (Lowlands)

JMECA

THE TWO PROVINCES

(Red line indicates border)