



GATHERING

We gather to continue our Advent journey.

As we face old and new challenges

we follow a pathway through darkness to light.

Let us travel this pathway together.

Springtime blossom transforms into new leaves and fruit.

and crimson sprinkles of pohutukawa emerge from tiny buds.

We watch as the Advent candle of Hope



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shines brightly within the wreath.

Let us watch and wait together.

Let us watch and wait with hope.

As we continue our journey to Bethlehem

gale force winds are calmed into gentle zephyr breezes.

White capped waves settle into sparkling ripples on our harbour/lake/river

LIGHTING THE SECOND ADVENT CANDLE: PEACE

Read Partner Story from Palestine: For Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Growing herbs has been a lifeline to Palestinians living in Aqaba village. Thanks to the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees, they have been able to build eight tunnel houses. Every 40 days they harvest a crop that they will dry and blend to make herbal tea bags. The tea bags are packaged for sale, but their machine is too old. They need a new one. The village is surrounded by arable land, but most of it is occupied by the military. Better teabag production will improve family incomes and security. **Be the lifeline to communities standing for peace.**

Lighting the Advent Candle of Peace

For those whose lives are disrupted by conflict,
For those whose lives are overwhelmed by despair,
For those whose daily lives are crushed by busyness,
We light the candle of peace.

Light the candle

You, Lord Jesus, give us the peace we all long for.

May this light signal a breakthrough, a brighter future,

A new order and a better way.

We watch as the Advent candle of Peace

gleams within the wreath.

Let us watch and wait together.

Let us watch and wait for peace.

We yearn for peace in our time

While summer sun shines down all around

Like Mary and Joseph we yearn for peace

THE READINGS

Malachi 3: 1-4: As a prophet working in the ruling circle, Malachi warns the priests to be open to a messenger who will suddenly come to the temple in Jerusalem (v.1). This messenger from outside their community will offer them a way back to righteousness (v.3).

Luke 1: 68-79: With these words, Zechariah begins to speak. In the Benedictus for his new son, he recounts what God has done and dedicates John the Baptist to be a messenger in turn.

Philippians 1: 3-11: Writing from prison, Paul expresses his attachment to the Philippian community as he begins his letter to them. He encourages the reader to show love for others and to seek the best way (v. 10).

Luke 3: 1-6: John the Baptist finds hope rather than desolation in the wilderness. Away from the clamor of everyday life where food and safety cannot be taken for granted is space for reconsidering life's purpose. These familiar words remind us to be open to new messages of truth in the season of Advent. In this dangerous place, is the salvation of God (v.6).

SERMON NOTES



Our focus begins to change as we reach the second Sunday on the Advent journey. The readings warn against power and complacency, encouraging us all to look beyond the familiar. We need to dig deep to find the signs of peace in our world. In conflict zones, people defiantly seek peace, risking their lives and endangering their families for a vision of a future without

violence. Communities of resistance are often found in the wilderness because they are prepared to take a message of peace into places of danger.

Instead of living in fear that someone may hurt us or someone we love, let us repent.

Listen for the stories of courage in the face of unbearable violence.

- Where are the hurting places in our communities?
- What messages of peace can we hear?
- How can we take up our responsibility to our neighbour and prepare the way of peace?

PARTNER STORY: BE THE LIFELINE TO PEOPLE SEEKING PEACE

In the north of Palestine's West Bank the small village of Al Aqaba nestles in the hills of the Jordan valley. Surrounded by arable land, the residents cultivate less than a third of it. On the land they have access to, the villagers herd sheep and grow crops. At one time 1,000 people lived in the village. After the Israeli military began operations, many fled to a neighbouring village leaving only 300 residents in the village. Thanks to the determined villagers who have garnered international support, some 400 villagers have returned.

Living on the edge of conflict is no easy matter. For years residents stood up to Israeli efforts to force them from their homes. The Israel Defence Force has taken over much of the surrounding land for firing zone. A total of eight people [have](#) been killed over the years as a result of the exercises or from unexploded ordnance. Al Aqaba lies in land designated as Area C over which the Palestinian Authority has limited control. Israel has full control over planning, construction and security. In Area C it is almost impossible for Palestinians to get permits for building, water pumps or other services. At the same time, largescale settlements are being constructed for Jewish citizens on land taken from traditional owners.

Everyday farmers set out to take their sheep to its lush fields or to tend their lands. If the military pile large concrete blocks on the road, they could go no further. Instead they buy feed for their animals or watch tanks and soldiers crush their crops. The constant pressure of military activity and their difficulties gaining access to water and electricity made the villagers more determined to stay on their traditional land. They have learnt to work together for the whole community, building a kindergarten, medical centre, sewing factory, small cheese business, and now a tea-manufacturing enterprise.

One of the challenges is to earn an income. DSPR has been working to improve their resilience on this sharp edge of conflict. Thanks to the combined support of CWS and international donors, they have built eight plastic tunnel house with water tanks and irrigation systems. In the tunnel houses they have planted 39,000 seedlings, producing two tons of fresh herbs every 40 days. The herbs are dried in a storage room built with DSPR help. Once dry, a mixture of 12 herbs is blended and packaged for sale.

DSPR has built a strong relationship with the Rural Women's Development Society who manage the tea manufacturing cooperative. Thanks to the donation of an old packaging machine, the small factory was working well. The high quality tea could be transported to

market when the roads were open. However, now the machine is broken and they need help to buy another.

Be the Lifeline to communities living in places of conflict.

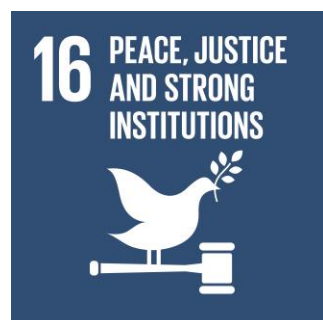
DEPARTMENT OF SERVICE TO PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

DSPR of the Middle East Council of Churches grew from the work of clergy and lay people working together to assist some of the 726,000 Palestinians who fled or were pushed from their homes in 1948. Their programme is organised through five regional committees: Galilee, Gaza, Jerusalem, Jordan and the West Bank. Each has its own history and in 1970 they formally joined together as the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees. The committees are highly respected for the work they do to improve the wellbeing of Palestinian and other refugees.

Last year over 90,000 people received healthcare – in Gaza DSPR operates primary healthcare clinics in three communities without which none would be available. DSPR runs education programmes for all ages including taking Syrian refugees back to Lebanon to sit their exams, something impossible otherwise. In the West Bank, much of the work has been focused on improving water supply and livelihoods. Achieving success is not straightforward. Permits are almost impossible to obtain, services can be cut off without notice, and conflict frequently erupts with the new settlers or military. Over the last two years, 317 Palestinians [have been](#) killed by Israeli forces and 13 Israelis killed by Palestinians. Israeli security forces regularly enter Palestinian homes at any time of the day or night, and Palestinians are arrested on a daily basis. The situation for most continues to deteriorate.

Despite the occupation, DSPR holds on to the dream of a just peace between Israel and Palestine. They advocate for the right to self-determination and the securing of human rights. It is work they cannot give up.

SDG 16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



The 2018 Appeal puts the spotlight on our responsibilities to each other and the planet our home. In 2015, the United Nations agreed to a new agenda for sustainable development made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Goal 16 is a commitment to [promote peace](#) and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. This goal is a commitment to end violence and prevent the harm that can quickly unravel development achievements. From stopping human trafficking and conflict-related deaths to achieving more accountable government institutions and reducing corruption, achieving SDG 16 is far reaching in its ambition. While not directly addressing long standing conflicts, it aims to strengthen human rights protection including political representation and reduce illicit financial and arms flows. This goal encompasses a broad range of objectives that

underpin the achievement of many of the other goals. To achieve this goal will boost achievements in the rest.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

***From our experience we affirm
that the divine energy we call God
frequently breaks through
in unexpected places
so small beginnings can have large consequences***

***We affirm that listening is important
and it is alright to change your mind;
We affirm Joseph listening to his dream
and realising a just man can act justly in many different ways.***

***We affirm divine presence is with us
as it was with Mary and Joseph
as they stepped outside the norm and pushed boundaries.***

***We affirm virgin birthing
is more than myth—as-fairytale
but a living parable of spiritual renewal
which can be born in us,
any day, any hour.***

PRAYERS FOR OUR PARTNERS

Living God, we expect our institutions to work for us
and we assume peace and justice.
But there are places in the world where that cannot be assumed.
There are regions torn by war
and fertile land that cannot be used because of landmines.
There are families displaced and caught in the downstream consequences of conflict.
There are young people who have spent all their childhood in refugee camps.

We know that those who labour for peace and justice share that passion with you.
We are encouraged by positive signs of community cropping up, even in difficult places.
We are in awe at people's resilience and resourcefulness.

We pray for groups like the Middle East Council of Churches'
Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees.
May their work build friendships across divides,

May the micro-enterprises they encourage have a positive and lasting benefit
On the refugee families and communities that are involved with them,
May their helping hand build peace.

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This is our prayer in the name of Jesus – the Prince of Peace.

SENDING FORTH

We travel together

towards the new birth, towards the new start

We follow the signs which show us the way

To do what is right

To seek justice

To walk humbly with God.

We go in peace. Amen.

NOTES

Special thanks to Rev Dr Susan Jones for the opening liturgies, and Rev Clare Lind and the people of Tawa Union for the candelighting, prayers for partners, and the Hope banner. Under the leadership of Roy Bridge who has a background in emergency management and response, the people created the banner. Backdrop – grey hospital/prison blanket – is the primary symbol of justice/illegal incarceration; secondary symbol for relief - shock shelter, warmth (disaster blankets). The Lifeline (rope) continues throughout.



Mayor Sami Sadaq watches sheep cheese production at the small factory in Al Aqaba supported by DSPR. He was wounded by gunfire in 1971 but has proved a tenacious advocate for his village. Trish Murray visited the village in 2017. Rebuilding Alliance produced [this clip](#) in 2016.

Join the Lifeline so all people have food, water, dignity and lives free of violence. Leave no one behind. Support the [Christmas Appeal](#).