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Anglican Women's Studies Centre

## *In a land far, far away*

*By Jessica Hughes*



Jessica Hughes wearing her hijab

**Travelling to Israel/Palestine feels a bit like travelling to Narnia.** You read about these places where great things happened by great (and not-so-great) people with a faint image in mind of what these places and people looked like. Despite this, somewhere in your perception of these stories is the feeling that they happened a long time ago in a land far far away; in a fantasy. However, Israel/Palestine is not like Narnia. We don't hear about Narnia in the 6 o'clock news bulletin, nor are we taught about its

conflicts in school. It sounds silly and obvious, but the most confronting thing for me, as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian travelling to Israel/Palestine, is that it is a real land inhabited by real people, both 2000 years ago and in our present day. Join me as I recount my experience visiting some unfamiliar places with familiar names.

**On the first day of our week-long course at Saint's George's College, Jerusalem,** our course director, the archaeologist and Rev'd Canon Mary June Nestler, took us to the Mount of Olives. From the Western side, one can see over Jerusalem, across to the Temple Mount

and glistening Dome of the Rock, down to David's City and follow the Kidron Valley to the sight of Bethlehem in the distance. From the Eastern side, the land tells a different tale. Here, as a juxtaposition to the vibrant and bustling Jerusalem, stands the Judean Wilderness. It reminds one of the landscapes described in fantasy stories; how the Great Desert suddenly gives way to the rolling hills of Archenland, the friendly kingdom south of Narnia.



I remember that someone pointed out that it wasn't very big and that Jesus could've done half-a-day's walk in any direction to a town. It's extremely barren and one feels solemn and mystery when looking out over it. It was very hazy, so we couldn't see the horizon, making it appear as if the earth just ended after the hills.

**The following day, we ventured into the Wilderness ourselves.**

Mary June took us to a look-out over the Wadi Qelt, a deep ravine in the Wilderness. This surprised me; I'd always pictured the Judean Wilderness as a vast, flat expanse devoid of any life.

Alas, here we were, steering down into a deep ravine and across to stony, mountainous bumps which rippled away from us (no doubt gashed by other valleys and ravines), being greeted by some persistent, local Bedouin men and their camel. Mary



*From the Mount of Olives, looking towards Jerusalem*

June, who had bought some pastries for them on the way, paid for them to make us some of the most amazing Bedouin tea – black tea with tons of sugar and dried sage boiled on shrubs that this guy collected from around us, climbing down the corner of the cliff. Mary June pointed out that the Bedouin have lived in the Wilderness for thousands of years and offer hospitality to travellers, selling them tea etc. and begged the question – would Jesus have been alone in the Wilderness?, saying “we often forget that he had neighbours”.

**Later in our course, we visited Nazareth.** It was some mission driving from Jerusalem to Nazareth as, by some administrative error or poor foresight, we were travelling on Yom Kippur and many roads that ran through Jewish towns and communities were closed. When in the geographical bowl containing Nazareth, we visited the Roman Catholic Basilica of the Annunciation built over what is thought to be Mary's family home. Mary June asked us to imagine what the Holy Family did in their day-to-day lives, for example, going to visit a Greek play in the town over. Likewise, we visited a large Greco-Roman town called Beit She'an which sits at the foot of

the hill where Saul was killed and hanged over the temple walls. Walking through the town, one gets a real sense of what it would be like to enter a town of the Jesus-period – and it's a lot more Roman than one would think. At the Israel Museum, the Archaeological Wing contains objects from many of the sites we'd been to prior, during and after Jesus' time up until early Christianity, some from cultures we know,

some from cultures that are lost and with signs of trade and exposure between them. We were invited to think of the rich myriad of cultures Jesus entered and that he didn't live in cultural isolation.

**Another confrontation** I had was understanding that people live there today. When we imagine a place far from our own, we get distance in space mixed-up with distance in spirit. My pivotal experience of this was on our Stations of the Cross walk. Early on a Monday morning, we took turns carrying a literal cross and walked from the College to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. As we walked through the streets of new and old Jerusalem, we passed children heading to school and shopkeepers just beginning to open their stores. We continued through the old city in silence, up and down littered streets which are more like alleyways and where people seeing people carry a cross is as ordinary as butter on toast. We caught people in the middle of their morning routines, doing the things in between things, that is their commute or set-up for work. We feel removed from people in other places and times. We see them as caricatures, and it is these images that



*Jessica overlooking the Wadi Qelt, n the Judean wilderness*

nomadic Bedouin offering tea to passers-by and many traders coming from all corners of the world.

**To see the land and the ruins reminds us that we are connected to the people of the past;** we see an echo of ourselves in those stones. We traverse and see in our minds the same geography and exist in a similar cultural web. Likewise, there are the people of today. The people for whom our holy sites fade into the background of their everyday lives. Israel/Palestine is not a place in a story book. It is real and it is alive.

we hold until experiencing otherwise. These in-between moments are some of the things left out of those images, and it is upon being among people, do we fully comprehend their humanity.

After having visited the geographically small yet historically significant sliver of land on the Mediterranean Coast that is Israel/Palestine, **I find myself with a richer and deeper understanding of the context of the people, land and cultures that the Bible explores.** As anyone who has ever travelled outside of their hometown will tell you, there is an understanding that you can get only from being in a place. When you hear about a particular landmark, you can orient yourself amongst the wider scheme of things. Israel/Palestine is no exception in this regard, but as the setting of the third leg of our faith stool, the understanding a Christian gains is more significant than what one gets travelling to any other country.

We often forget that the Bible, and particularly the Gospels, do not exist in their own canon but in ours. They were not written in cultural isolation; there were the Roman occupiers, the



*Jessica Hughes is undergoing a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy and politics. She is involved with the Anglican Church at a provincial level around rangatahi youth and locally at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Parnell, Auckland. Last year, she got the opportunity to travel to St George’s College, Jerusalem, and undertake their ‘Introduction to Bible Lands’ course. She reflects on this experience from her perspective as a young, Anglican, Pākehā woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.*



# God's Justice: Just Relationships between women and men, girls and boys

## Kenya Gathering for International Anglican Women

Training, formation and equipping of church leaders and ministers in aspects of gender justice are essential as they prepare to show and tell the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Sacrament and Word and in the lives they live.



Photo: IAWN—Members of the Theological Working Group met at St Julian's Centre in Limuru, Kenya from March 11-15th 2019. From left to right: Carole, Gloria, Paula, Moumita, Esther, Pui Lan, Stephen, Terrie, Paulo, Gerald

The members of the theological working group are:

- † Kwok Pui Lan, United States
- † Dorothy Lee, Australia (absent from the meeting)
- † Stephen Spencer, Director for Theological Education in the Anglican Communion, Anglican Communion Office
- † Paula Nesbitt, United States
- † Paulo Ueti, Anglican Alliance Theological Advisor, Anglican Communion Office
- † Moumita Biswas, India
- † Carole Hughes, New Zealand
- † Esther Mombo, Kenya
- † Gloria Mapangdol, Philippines
- † Gerald West, South Africa
- † Terrie Robinson, Director for Women in Church & Society, Anglican Communion Office

### What will the study include?

The study materials include sessions on creating the learning environment; learning strategies; what is gender; gender-talk from a biblical perspective; gender inequalities across cultures; gender-based violence and abuse; theological perspectives; transformative manhood and womanhood; and living out just gender relationships in our ministries.

### Who can join in the study?

The study materials will be offered to theological colleges, seminaries and training programmes as a component or module which can 'stand-alone' or be incorporated into existing curricula and training schemes for women and men who are preparing for ministry, lay or ordained, or who are continuing to develop their ministerial education

### What was the purpose of the study?

An international theological working group currently developing study materials for a course on 'God's Justice: Just relationships between women and men, girls and boys' has met at the St Julian's Centre in Limuru, Kenya from March 11<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The International Anglican Women's Network (IAWN) together with the Director for Women in Church & Society at the Anglican



Communion Office asked the group to produce the study materials, when it was recognised that the training, formation and equipping of church leaders and ministers in aspects of gender justice are essential, as they prepare to show and tell the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Sacrament and Word and in the lives they live.

### What was the process in Kenya?

The working group worked throughout in a deep dialogical environment facilitated by Revd Canon Terrie Robinson. The time together was considered a great moment of learning from each other, fostering deeper connections and commitments and establishing a space of trust where we could agree on the structure, language and contents of the document to be presented. It was a good time for sharing expertise and experience on issues of gender justice, biblical hermeneutics and intentional theology, through sharing stories that enlightened the whole process. An acknowledgement was made to Kwok Pui Lan for her skills in helping the group regarding the editorial process. The result will be shared in due course.

## Introducing Ceridwyn Parr: the new AWSC Administrator

Karena de Pont travelled from Mahurangi West and Ceridwyn Parr drove up from Cambridge, so they could meet at General Synod Office, Tuia, at St John's Theological College.

Karena handed over 4 boxes of files, a filing cabinet, multiple coloured folders of instructions and lists, and a lap top computer. She also demonstrated her vast and empathetic knowledge of how the Anglican Women's Studies Centre works. Ceridwyn asks for your patience as she endeavours to follow in Karena's footsteps.

**Ceridwyn writes:** I am very excited about being involved with the Anglican Women's Studies Council as it is a project dear to my heart.

Women's Spirituality and Feminist Theology have been great interests of mine, weaving in and out of my life as a teacher, both in schools and with the Kip McGrath Education Centres.

In Christchurch I was very involved with a wonderful group of women called **AWESOME**: Anglican Woman Exploring Spirituality on Monday Evenings. We even had T-shirts! This group is still alive and well. We discovered many, many women in the Christian tradition whose voices had been lost. One of them became a great inspiration to me, Hildegard of Bingen.

I have just finished working in the beautiful city of Rotorua, and am now based in Cambridge, with my partner. This position, as administrator, which is funded by General Synod allows for me to work from home, where I can also share the care of elderly family members. I love music, books, movies, travel, and drinking coffee with friends.

As you know, the **Centre for Anglican Women's Studies** was set up to serve and advance the interests of women of this Church, especially those undertaking theological training.

This publication is an excellent vehicle for telling stories and exploring ideas, so please consider sharing your experiences and reflections. I look forward to hearing from you all.



*Karena and Ceridwyn sharing the love of necklaces amongst other things as Karena hands over the 'baton' to Ceridwyn.*



# WE NEED YOU and YOU and YOU and YOU

40 Years of Women's Ordination to the Priesthood within  
the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia

*A new AWSC Publication Project to celebrate this milestone*

## **EDITOR & THREE TIKANGA EDITORIAL TEAM VOLUNTEERS WANTED**

The AWSC Council is looking for an experienced Editor to volunteer to lead a small Editorial Team comprising volunteers from each of the three tikanga for our next publication project over a two year period starting this year.

## **SEEKING WRITERS TOO—Expressions of Interest**

The intention of this publication is to present a variety of essays and anecdotal stories of the experiences of ordained women from each of the three tikanga. It will be an opportunity to mark the significant milestones within each tikanga of women's ordination; the women past and present who have been ordained and their journey towards ordination; to acknowledge the journey and advocacy towards gender equality; to celebrate the many achievements and contributions of ordained women in this three tikanga Province; to share the stories of who mentored those being ordained and why.

These suggestions are just the starting point so we look forward to receiving an email expressing your interest in writing an essay or story along with your proposed topic so that the Editorial Team can contact you.

**Ceridwyn Parr - AWSC Administrator**

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The Centre for Anglican Women's Studies, commonly known as the Anglican Women's Studies Centre was set up to serve and to advance the interests and needs of the women of this Church particularly those undertaking Theological training.

The Link Representatives from each Diocese and Hui Amorangi have been chosen for their leadership ability to identify, gather, facilitate, resource and encourage women in their educational preparation for ministry whether lay or ordained. It is hoped that the Anglican Women's Studies Centre can continue to enjoy the support of each Diocese and Hui Amorangi in this endeavour.

The issue of increasing numbers of women in representative positions across the councils and committees of the Church is seen as a high priority and the practice of intentional mentoring by those already in national and international representative roles, is seen as a good way to expose women of this Church to fulfil their potential as leaders.

Ensuring that women's voices and stories are heard now and in the future is also one of our continued aims, whether it be by traditional methods of publication, or using more contemporary technologies like web publication. We remain optimistic that through continued support, the needs of women throughout this Province will be valued and recognized.

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**EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER:** The Anglican Women's Studies Centre is committed to encouraging and enabling women's voices and perspectives from across the diversity of the Church to be shared more widely. We acknowledge that women's experiences of church differ considerably and that resultant theological perspectives also differ considerably. In general, the AWSC does not exercise editorial control, rather we welcome as many voices as are willing to contribute.