

FEATURE

How legacy of Norfolk priest will help Palestinian refugees

Derek James on how an education project set up in memory of a much-loved priest is surviving at a time of continuing horror in the Middle East



As the horrifying war rages between Israel and Hamas, students at a refugee camp in Palestine are continuing to study at home thanks to "Father John" from Norfolk.

It was almost 20 years ago when the much-loved the Rev John Aves collapsed and died while walking along Star Street in Bethlehem. He has been working at the Dheisheh refugee camp which he loved with a passion.

He had been spending three months with the Ecumenical Accompanier Program for Palestine and Israel (EAPP) Quaker Organisation. He lived in the camp, the largest in Bethlehem.

Following his death the John Aves Education Project (JAEP) was established by his widow Anne, sons Ben and Edmund. The team now includes Elizabeth Magem, Nicholas Taylor and Samia with supporters across Norfolk and Suffolk.

Since then it has paid for the education of 61 young women and 19 men living in the camp to study for an undergraduate degree at their local universities and raised no less than £500,000.

But what of the future at this terrifying time of death and destruction?

Members of the project are in contact with their partners at Al-Quds University, a campus

university in Abu Dis near Bethany, Bethlehem University and their students.

"Checkpoints in the West Bank are closed, which means travel is restricted, so universities are shut and teaching and learning has returned online," members explain.

"Universities are also shut to keep those that live nearer and can walk to the university without going through a checkpoint safe."

"We have heard that four young men have recently been killed in Abu Dis/ Bethany. Our students tell us of nightly incursions into Dheisheh (and other camps in the West Bank) by Israeli Defence Force soldiers. How difficult it must be to live and study in such volatile surroundings," they say.

The work of JAEP feels even more relevant as a grass roots project which financially supports the university education of young adults living in the refugee camp.

As Anne says: "Every time I'm in Dheisheh I understand more and more why John was drawn to these warm, welcoming and dignified people who never gave up hope for a better future."

Reverend Canon Dr John Aves, was the priest in charge of St Giles, Norwich, honorary canon



Members of JAEP meeting the students and joining their classes before home learning was resumed

of Norwich Cathedral, and diocesan director of continuing ministerial education.

A member of a family of builders and farmers, he served at Brixton Prison, St Peter Mancroft, Norwich, and Attleborough before heading back to the city.

He was passionate about his work in the refugee camp where he was when he died aged 52 and would be determined for it to carry on and grow.

For the 10th year JAEP is selling Christmas cards at the Original Norwich Christmas Card Shop at St Peter Mancroft, Norwich Cathedral shop and the Revelation Resource Centre at the St Michael at Plea Church, Redwell Street.

Every card spreads awareness of their work.



Yasmeen who graduated from Al-Quds University and is looking forward to becoming a doctor. Inset left, Razan who graduated from Al-Quds University

FEATURE



The Rev John Aves died almost 20 years ago but his memory lives on
Image: AVES FAMILY PHOTO COLLECTION



Anwaar, supported by the JAEP, with her midwifery degree at Bethlehem University



The Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem



The campus of Al-Quds University - a different world