

Community of Christ and the Holy Land

Community of Christ has connections with the Palestine that go back to 1841. Apostle Orson Hyde on October 24, 1841 prayed on the Mount of Olives for the Jewish people. He wrote his prayer out and it includes these words:

“to dedicate and consecrate this land unto thee, for the gathering together of Judah’s scattered remnants, according to the predictions of the holy prophets — for the building up of Jerusalem again after it had been trodden down by the Gentiles so long.”

George J. Adams, another early church missionary, was originally going to go with Orson Hyde to Palestine in 1841 but was asked to stay in the British Isles because he was such an effective missionary. In the 1850s he started the ‘Church of Messiah’ in Maine. He organised a colony of 156 people to go from Maine to Jaffa, Palestine in 1866 to help Jews return to Palestine. Wooden houses of the American colony still exist in modern Jaffa. Reed and Jean Holmes bought one and it houses a museum that tells this story and that we shall visit.

Reed Holmes wrote several books and a PhD thesis on the church’s work in Israel and was a soft Christian Zionist compassionately motivated by the historic sufferings of Jewish people.

Today, a century and half later the situation in Israel/Palestine is much more complicated, violent, and bitter. How do we pursue peace in a land we sometimes call the Holy Land, sacred geography in which the prophets and Jesus walked and taught?

With empathy, and informed by the equal worth of all persons, we will grapple with:

- The warm and historical attachment to the Land by both Israelis and Palestinians
- Anti-semitism and Islamophobia
- The Holocaust 1933-1945 and Nakba 1948
- Settler colonialism
- Wars and interfadas
- The occupation since 1967 and critical human rights reports by organisations like Amnesty International
- Hamas attacks from Gaza in October 2023
- The Israeli violent response and the high death toll of civilians and children
- And yet still the possibility of peace, dignity for all, and reconciliation