

National Framework for Religious Education

Religious Education in all schools has been given a strong boost by the launch of the new National Framework, which has been welcomed by the Church of England. Representatives of the Church of England, alongside those of other churches and faiths, were engaged in its development. RE has been increasingly recognised in recent years as a vital and popular part of the school curriculum.

Canon John Hall, the Church of England's chief education officer, said, "The new Framework emphasises the right of pupils and students at school to high quality, informative and challenging RE from the age of 3 to 19. It recognises the predominant place of Christianity, which is to be taught throughout each stage of the curriculum from foundation to post-16, but will also enable every pupil to understand and respect the other great faith traditions found in England. Above all it will help pupils with their personal religious development."

More information at: <http://cofe.anglican.org/news/pr4404.html>

Standing with the Peace-makers

British Christians are working for peace between Palestine and Israel by literally standing in the front line to show solidarity with those who are suffering on both sides. They are taking part in the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), a joint project of Churches Together in Britain & Ireland and Christian Aid. The scheme is a response to a call made to the World Council of Churches by the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem and involves volunteers engaging in non-violent activity 'on the ground'.

This year twelve people from Britain and Ireland have joined volunteers from eight other countries to stand alongside Israelis and Palestinians who are seeking an end to the occupation of what are termed "the occupied Palestinian territories".

Some Ecumenical Accompaniers take turns in watching the gates that give farmers limited access to fields in the area. "Before we arrived," said John Lynes, "the Israeli security guards often hassled the farmers. These fields are their daily livelihood... Palestinians are glad to have the EAs with them as we certainly reduce the likelihood and level of potential violence. We also use our contacts with media and human rights organisations to share information and apply indirect pressure on the Israeli Defence Force."

Protection through presence is one of the main objectives of these brave volunteers who put themselves potentially in harm's way. They also support acts of non-violent resistance alongside Christian and Muslim Palestinians and Israeli peace activists. In addition, they engage in public policy advocacy and report violations of human rights.

"Israelis are barred from entering the Palestinian towns to see what is happening," Katharine Maycock, a former accompanier, said. "They live with the real fear that a bus may explode anywhere and at any time. They don't know that half the Palestinians live on food assistance because of imposed closures. Equally, many Palestinians are unaware that 100,000 Israeli families will soon fall under the poverty level, due to cutbacks on welfare spending. Yet the terror felt in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem is the same as that felt in the streets of Gaza, Hebron or the mud alleys of Deheishe refugee camp in Bethlehem."

Anyone wanting to have more information or make a donation should write to Laura Stagnaro, EAPPI, Freepost, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2YS.