



To: The Travel-in-the-Ministry Fund Granting Resource Group
From: Elizabeth Todd
Re: 2020 Travel through the Susan Bax Fund
Date: February 8, 2021

In February, 2020, the Travel-in-the-Ministry Granting Resource Group (through the Susan Bax Fund) approved my application to travel in ministry to Ramallah.

Weeks later, airports around the world closed due to the rapidly spreading Coronavirus. Within 48 hours of that, I had arrived in Jerusalem. It was the first of many times 2020 would surprise and remind me that I travel with the Good Shepherd.

There was a plan for ministry and connections that could not be realized as cities there went into complete lockdown for the next month (and wouldn't fully reopen before the rest of the year). The Israeli and U.S. governments urged me to return to the U.S. before the airport closed and checkpoints closed, but I chose to stay. I had only just arrived.

Partly I didn't realize how long and how serious the lockdown would be. But even now, looking back, I would have made the same choice. In that six weeks, stay at home orders meant physical isolation, not connection. Yet I found ways online - phone calls, Zoom meetings, recorded video greeting, text messages... and five in-person visits.

In one way, it seems so small, but people knew that I had chosen to come and chosen to stay. To me, it feels like an important testimony by itself; we travel in ministry from the overflow of love in our own lives. People can feel this especially when they know it isn't partly for personal pleasure.

It is also a witness to Friends in America to connect them with people and events in other places. I stayed in touch with Friends through Six emailed letters, pictures posted on Facebook, and a gathered group Zoom call.

In the end, returning to the U.S. required a two week delay, three canceled flights, and buying a new ticket with another airline. It was strenuous.

I thought that would be all for the year. And it didn't feel good to have a connection grant and experience so many limitations. For instance, I hadn't once been able to attend the Ramallah Friends Meeting, which was closed throughout this visit. All I managed was several outdoor, very distanced visits with individual members.

It was also quite a costly experience for me emotionally. Weeks of isolation weighed on me: the lack of information about Covid, and my own fears about sickness and health care limitations.... All this challenged me spiritually too. But the small group of Friends, who "traveled" with me in spirit, were faithful supports through this time. We video chatted and wrote regularly. So even with the challenges, overall I felt carried along by a deep sense of God as my Good Shepherd. Even if I walked in the shadow of death, Christ was with me, inviting me to do the next right thing:

As for most of us, I suppose, this 2020 experience involved reorienting. Not "I know what to expect," "I can control most things," and "I'm here to achieve particular outcomes. But rather this: "all I am, have and do is by the grace of God."

Summer and most of fall passed uneventfully in Oregon. And then, in November, the door opened again for me to complete my ministry. The risks remained, deepening now with the coming of winter. Nevertheless, the way opened. After all, I still had the return ticket FWCC had funded. I bought the other part and traveled.

My expectations were quite low, so each opening felt a blessing. It was another six weeks and around Ramallah. And in this visit, I managed far more in person visits and one (before they closed the Meeting again - this time for winter) visit to the Ramallah Friends Meeting.

Being known there, I appreciated the warm welcome. And I was so delighted to see Jean Zaru in her place and other Friends in theirs. I assumed my old spot and settled in for worship. We all had ministries to share, along with some songs. It was a blessing to be in a gathered Meeting, to visit afterwards, and to deliver gifts.

One of my favorite moments was sharing, at the end, that I was traveling with support from FWCC. I felt the bonds of long connection linking not just me but all the ones of FWCC who are known and loved in Ramallah.

It had been a long year. Usually each week there are visitors and often large groups. During 2020, there were nearly none. This, there, is added deprivation. Those of us traveling in ministry both give and receive at the Ramallah Friends Meeting and, as a group, we are missed. Given my particular situation, I was one of the only ones who was able to visit. And I felt privileged to bring greetings from Friends and FWCC.

Overall my second visit had such clear open and closed door. It felt rather like being in a waterslide with a strong guiding current. There were some surprises, some stomach lurches, but in retrospect, I'd take it again.

Still, is it too much to hope that my next visit won't be during a time of Coronavirus? Fifteen of the last 52 weeks I spent in isolation or lockdown. It gave me a better understanding of others in such restrictions. It's hard. I returned to the U.S. days before the Israeli airport closed again - and remains closed now. Through a closing door. That seemed a good title for one of my letters - and maybe far more.

Since my return I debriefed with committee members individually mostly by phone (and two in-person). I've really missed being able to do in-person traveling visits, but I've given reports to two gathered zoom meetings: Newberg Friends and Wayside Friends. I've joined in Sunday worship via Zoom North Seattle, North Valley, Camas, Klamath Falls, and a handful of others. I don't always feel led to share, but I am glad to share common hopes and to gather together.

I've not yet realized all the things I learned in 2020 or the ways it will have changed me. Overall, I'd say traveling in ministry helped me reckon with the mystery and fragility of earthly life, as I've chosen to live it. It encouraged me to make the most of every opportunity to share with people who, in divine grace, are part of my life. And reminded me how important it is to travel in ministry together.

Thank you for funding this travel, sharing it with me, and reading all the way through.

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