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# SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



## EDUCATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS

WHEN STUDENTS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO GO TO SCHOOL



EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools

## EDUCATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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(Cover page) Two children at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. (EMS/Uwe Gräbe)

(Back page) Remote schooling on TV is often the only way for refugee children to obtain education. (SAT-7)

**Dear Reader,**

How can schooling take place when teachers and students are not allowed to meet? In the first few months of this year, all the schools were shut down within a short period of time to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The Editorial Team wanted to know how our partners – first and foremost the two Schneller schools – are coping with this situation. Under extremely difficult conditions, they ensure that children from very poor families receive a good education.



The Directors, George Haddad and Khaled Freij, report on their experiences with remote schooling on digital platforms. Jayson Casper, a journalist living in Beirut, visited inclusive educational facilities in Lebanon and describes the special challenges facing the parents of handicapped children. Kurt Johansen, Director of the SAT-7 Europe television channel, describes how the Christian satellite station has designed its educational channel so that children and young adults can continue learning at home on school television. And Ramez Atallah, General Director of the Egyptian Bible Society, is surprised by the positive developments which the coronavirus lockdown has forced on his institution.

More good news comes in the form of the final report about the preschool for internally displaced children in the Valley of the Christians which the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) set up in 2013 together with members and partners in Syria and Lebanon. The success of this exceptional project was possible due to the uninterrupted willingness of our donors over all these years.

During the past weeks, we also remember with gratitude the overwhelming willingness of many people to support our partners in the Middle East. We hope very much that this willingness will continue. This is because the explosion in the port of Beirut at the beginning of August was the last straw for Lebanon – the country fell into an abyss from which the people there will be unable to extract themselves without long-term help from outside. We intend to stand by the side of our partners and for this we need your help.

With the plea that you remain loyal to us, I send you many greetings on behalf of the entire Editorial Team.

Yours, Katja Dorothea Buck

## GOD FINDS HIS WAY TO US

**D**oes God speak to us in digital or analogue mode? God keeps up with the times – but what about communication with Him? By this I don't mean that a large number of church activities all over the world have gone digital in the past several weeks or that meanwhile the internet is full of countless online services and proclamation forums. Much more specifically, the question is: "How does God actually speak to us?"

"For God speaks in one way, and in two, though people do not perceive it," writes Job (Job 33:14, NRSV). Now we could take this as proof that God speaks to us in both analogue and digital mode. If you look up

»For God speaks in one way,  
and in two, though people do  
not perceive it..«

(Job 33,14)

the biblical text, you will quickly realise that it's nothing to do with digital communication but the fact that God also speaks to us in our dreams.

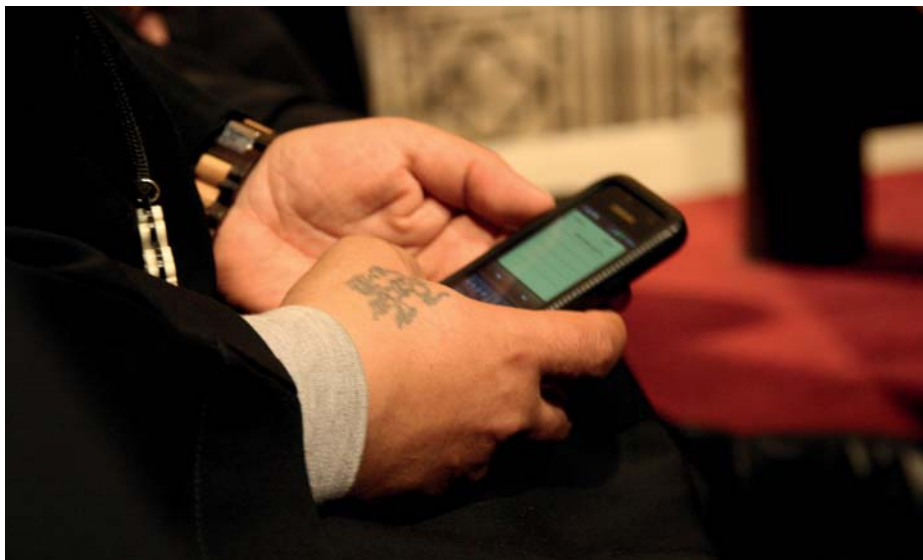
"Let your word be 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything more than this comes from the evil one." (Matthew 5:37, NRSV) Again, this seems to favour digital communication since in the digital world there are only two possibilities: one or zero, yes or no – and nothing in between. And we can still assume that Jesus would not demand anything from us he wouldn't do in

the same measure. So, does God communicate in digital form? On this point we could perhaps even add something from Genesis. There it says, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them;" (Genesis 1:27, NRSV). Now that sounds very much like a virtual (visualised) world. So, from God's point of view, we would only be a part of a greater picture – not really existing but only imagined, an intellectual game. And we wouldn't even realise that we are merely a tiny particle in a large digital matrix.

### A direct link to God

But I don't want to unsettle you with this kind of mind game. Instead, I'll bring you back down to earth with a short anecdote from the world of Ecumenism. The story goes that a Catholic priest arrives in his new parish. When his Evangelical colleague comes to see him for the first time, he sees that his colleague has a large red telephone on his desk. "What on earth is that?" he asks and his Catholic colleague replies: "That's our direct link to the Lord!" "You don't say," replies the Evangelical pastor enthusiastically, "can I just give it a try?" "Help yourself," says the Catholic colleague. "The only thing is, we charge a fee of 50 Euros." For the Evangelical pastor it is money well spent. He tries out the red telephone and actually manages to reach God personally.

A few weeks later the Catholic priest comes to visit his Evangelical colleague and sees that he too has a red telephone on his desk. "Oh, I see you have one too. Practical, isn't it?" he says happily. "May I also make a call on your phone?" "Yes,



A monk checks his mobile at the Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo.

of course,” says his Evangelical colleague. “It costs 12 cents!” “12 cents?” “Yes, from here it’s only a local call!”

### God comes close to us

You will probably have guessed by now that I was told this story by an Evangelical colleague. But for me, it’s not at all about whether Catholics or we Protestants have a better link to God. In fact, we’re even glad that in the meantime many places have a joint link. The important thing for me is a different one – it’s the fact that, when God speaks to us, He comes very close to us.

When you look in the Bible, you will very quickly realise that God and humanity communicate with each other in an incredible number of different ways – during a service, in prayers, by praising God, in songs as well as in the written word – the Bible. God sends us messages, some-

times to totally normal people like Hagar in the desert – sometimes even to animals like Balaam’s donkey and, as in Psalm 104:4, even the winds, fire and flames can be God’s messengers. The way in which God contacts us is as different as we humans are. He comes to each of us in a very personal way. So the actual question is not whether God communicates with us in digital or analogue mode. He will always find the right way to find us!

*Reverend Dr Dieter Heidtmann,  
General Secretary of the Evangelical Mission  
in Solidarity*

## THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN DIGITAL PROGRESS

The lessons the JLSS learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic

**The Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) was already well prepared for online remote teaching before the Covid-19 pandemic broke out. But when the emergency situation arrived in March, it revealed how much it depends on the parents' or relatives' financial means whether a child can follow the online courses or not.**

**T**he JLSS started the shift to online schooling as early as September 2018. The teachers attended a three-day seminar led by a certified trainer on how to use the software and Cloud teaching. This was followed by a refresher session at the beginning of 2019 and an advanced course in September 2019. The aim of all that training was to utilise the technological revolution in classrooms to make teaching more interesting to students and to widen their horizon by training them to search safely for information on the internet.

Teachers also benefited from the advantages of preparing lessons, quizzes, presentations and lesson plans online with the opportunities this opened for collaboration among colleagues and students. This also allowed coordinators, heads of department and the administration to monitor the work of teachers and provide them with feedback. An additional benefit was also for parents who could follow up the work of their children 24/7 and coordinate with teachers online. Naturally, this benefit is for parents who have the skills to benefit from this development.

Thousands of dollars were spent on installing the necessary infrastructure and training teachers. All this was only made possible by generous grants from the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS), the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg, the family of Martin Ruopp, the Lutheran Board for Mission Support in the USA, the family of Ernest and Frida Stammeier, EMBRACE the Middle East UK, the Swiss Association for the Schneller Schools (SVS) and the Schneller Alumni and Friends Association (SAFA). We are all very grateful to them for placing the JLSS in a position to accomplish this important shift.

Although digital remote teaching was planned from the very start, we only saw it as a way for sick students to follow lessons from home. When all schools in Lebanon had to close on 28 February due to COVID-19, we were delighted that all our teachers and students of Grades 7 to 9 were ready for remote lessons online, or we thought they were ready.

The first two weeks were an ordeal. Only a few teachers were ready for teaching remotely. They were the young teachers who we had employed over the last few years. But the older staff members were having a struggle. We soon realised that a few did not even have the basic skills to operate a computer. Apparently, during training sessions, teachers were helping each other to achieve what was requested. When they were on their





A familiar scene before Covid-19: students stand close together during the morning flag raising ceremony at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. When will they be allowed to assemble again?

own, they had to rely on a son, daughter, niece or nephew. With young people being what they are, they were mostly away when their skills were needed. It was a nightmare to get some teachers to do the most basic of lesson plans. Fortunately, the young teachers were doing an amazing job even beyond our expectations.

The students were very enthusiastic the first two weeks. The Lebanese currency had not collapsed, and a good tablet was available in Lebanon for 200 to 300 US\$. This amount was reasonable to a few of the day-students. Others managed by working

on their mobile phones, friends' laptops or tablets, or from web cafés.

After the first two weeks we started noticing a big decline in students following lessons online. We communicated with parents, even threatening to fail students who did not follow their lessons. Our threats worked only for two additional weeks, after which a trend for not following lessons was clear.

With one month of closure, teachers and even the Minister of Education started talking about ending the school year. →



EWS/Martina Waiblinger

Digital remote lessons with the youngest is a special challenge. It's much better when children can learn together.

Students saw this as a Godsend, and they stopped following lessons. We only managed to get students who had official exams to continue. At the end of the month we only had two girls in Grade 9 following lessons and all the boys stopping work altogether.

We communicated again with parents or relatives but this time we discovered a huge divide between the very few who had internet, tablets, or laptops, and the majority who due to poverty did not have internet and certainly did not have tablets or laptops. Working on their old cheap second-hand mobile phones was a struggle, and they soon gave it up.

This was the breaking point. We realised it would not be fair on the majority of our students if we continued with school lessons. We stopped remote teaching when even official exams were cancelled. Our plan is to bring students back to school in summer to catch up with les-

sons. This we hope to do if Covid-19 is under control and the Minister of Education allows schools to open.

This experience revealed what we always knew. The majority of our students need JLSS to meet the most basic of their needs. We knew this included food, care and education, but we now know it includes access to technology. We are eagerly waiting for their return to provide them with all these rights.

*Reverend George Haddad, Director of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School*



# EXPERIENCES FROM THE CRISIS

## How the TSS organised remote learning

**The Jordanian ministry of education reacted to the lockdown caused by Covid-19 and the national closure of schools by ordering online teaching for all grades on an eLearning platform and by broadcasting educational programmes on television. The Theodor Schneller School (TSS) tried to keep up with this major step and made its own experiences.**

**T**he TSS designed a teaching platform on the school's website so that the students and teaching staff could communicate with each other. The school also ensured that all students and all teachers at the day school had access to this platform on computers, tablets or smartphones.

Most of the teachers had to spend a lot of time preparing for online lessons as they had to keep an eye on the individual differences between the students and the requirements in each of the subjects.

They uploaded learning videos and illustration materials, set assignments, quizzes and exam sheets online and also offered the students question times. These question times mainly took place in video chats or in Zoom meetings. During this time, the best way for eLearning for our kindergarten children was to set up WhatsApp groups and offer videos and eLearning possibilities suitable for their age group.

We also used the time to allow all the teaching staff at the TSS to take an online course on the mental health of children

and young adults. Some of them also did further online training on topics relating to gender equality and the protection of the best interests of children.

eLearning was a totally new experience for the vocational training department at the TSS. The Director of the TSS and the advisor for vocational training at the school attended courses offered by the Technical University of Dresden and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) in Jordan. The course subject was "Blended Learning for Cooperative Technical Vocational Education and Higher Education".

We hope and pray that the Covid-19 pandemic will soon come to an end and that life will return to normal. Our experience from the time of eLearning has shown us that the development of learning formats combined with presence and online courses are indispensable for more successful and effective schooling and vocational training.

*Reverend Khaled Freij, Director of the  
Theodor Schneller School*

## WHEN PARENTS BECOME THERAPISTS

**Inclusive institutions in Lebanon struggle to survive**

**Parents whose children have specialised care needs were hit particularly hard by the school closures in Lebanon due to Covid-19. Special education is expensive. And in a country already teetering on the brink of economic collapse, the future of many institutions looks precarious.**

**S**even-year-old Elias Saadeh sat on the floor with a bar of chocolate. It was all his mother could do to get him back to his online studies, and prevent another violent fit. Partly due to quarantine stubbornness, COVID-19 had shut down the entire Lebanese school system by mid-March. But it was partly to do with his autism. Diagnosed also with ADHD, this was the first time Elias was in the 24/7 care of his parents. “I have to pray for him every day,” said Rebecca Saadeh, his mother. “It is exhausting, but it is a war we need to fight.”

Elias, a kindergarten student at the special needs-inclusive Lebanese Evangelical School (LES), would usually be with specialists. At the LES he was in a mainstream class with a personal shadow teacher, pulled out six times per week for Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and other therapy sessions as part of the cutting-edge autism support offered by the school. And during summers, he would spend time at the home of his shadow teacher and other speech and occupational therapists. “Now it has been three months without anything,” said Saadeh. “Today we tried to have a Zoom lesson, and he pretended to be dead.”

LES, like schools across Lebanon, scrambled to provide online learning options. From day one the teachers recorded lectures for the student body consisting of 1,700. The 125 children with special needs received additional individualised lesson plans. But students like Elias – and their parents – needed something more. “We work hard to include the parents in all decisions,” said Samar Rahme, coordinator of the LES Student Support Department. “And as a Christian, I have witnessed miracles in some families.”

With Lebanon going stir-crazy in quarantine, miracles would be needed now. Zoom calls were arranged for the parents. Special tips and videos were sent home, guiding how to work with their children. And on April 22, Rahme shared them with the world.

At the 8th annual National Day of Inclusion conference, 1,400 participants from 17 countries joined in a Zoom call dedicated to crisis care for struggling parents. A ten-fold increase over past gatherings held in person, national coordinator Nabil Costa encouraged all to keep the faith.

“Amidst some of our nation’s darkest days ... the simultaneous spread of the coronavirus and a downward spiralling economy is driving our families into a severe survival mode,” said Costa, also executive director of the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD). “However, a commitment to the rights and protection of individuals is not meant to be of service only when all the circumstances align well.”

LSESD, also known as the Baptist Society, launched the National Day of Inclusion in 2013, in coordination with the British Council and the Ministry of Education. Two years earlier Costa founded SKILD – Smart Kids with Individual Learning Differences – to address a gaping need in Lebanon. A handful of private schools like LES, and their counterparts in the Sunni and Shi’ite communities, offered inclusive education. But none in the public school system. It wasn’t until SKILD ran a national survey in 2014 that officials realised up to 13 percent of students had a potential learning disability.

The next year SKILD launched a pilot programme with seven public schools. By 2018, there were 30, and their teacher training manual was adopted by the Ministry of Education. “When I first started, principals would say we don’t have special needs students, and hang up the phone,” said Hiba Al Jamal, director of SKILD. “Now, they are calling us for help.”

There are an additional 50 inclusive private schools in Lebanon, and SKILD works with partner institutions to extend specialised care to as many as possible. While LES manages its own staff, SKILD provides teacher training and eight therapists in support of the 98 special needs students at Khalid ibn al-Walid school, part of the Muslim private education sector, under a reasonable contract.

“SKILD believes we are all in this together, and are very generous,” said Jinan Khaywa, director of the school’s Makassed Learning Abilities Center, who also shared



A speech and occupational therapist working with an autistic child at the ECIL. The ECIL is a branch of the Shi’ite Imam Sadr Foundation.

tips at the National Day of Inclusion. “And now during COVID, we are directing parents how they can be the therapists for their own special needs children.”

Another Muslim-led institution, ECIL, which belongs to the Shi’ite Imam Sadr Foundation, is also seeking to expand training. As the only Lebanese center serving special-needs children up to 3 years old, the initiative to transfer their skills to other therapists is also driven by the crisis.

COVID-19 has worsened already bad economic conditions – especially for schools, and the Ministry of Health has yet to pay ECIL its budgeted share. Perhaps training workshops can bring in revenue, as they also seek online donations. “Every little bit helps, and we trust God, of course,” said director Maliha el-Sadr, noting ECIL both employs and serves all religious communities. “The most important thing is that we support these children as if they are our own.”

But ECIL is not the only institution facing a shortfall. SKILD, which runs partially on donations, is operating at 30 percent capacity. LES had to let go all their full-time therapists, and 30 percent of their special education teachers. Special education is expensive. Jamal hopes it can continue. “Our mission is to reach out to the marginalised, and reflect God’s love,” she said. “God doesn’t make mistakes, so these children are here for a reason – and we must serve them.”

*Jayson Casper is an American journalist living in Beirut.*

# EDUCATION AND PREVENTION VIA SATELLITE

SAT-7 is a TV station that provides all people with access to education

For several years the Christian satellite TV station SAT-7 has provided school television for refugee children. When schools were closed all over the Middle East due to COVID-19, the TV station expanded what it calls its SAT-7 Academy. Now it broadcasts programmes on how to handle the COVID-19 situation – free of charge and for people everywhere.

The Middle East and North Africa is the region of satellite dishes. Almost every household – even the poorest of the poor – has a TV and a satellite dish. Satellite TV is the main source of information and entertainment in the Middle East.

One of the SAT-7 channels is designated for children – “SAT-7 Kids”. This channel also operates “Sesame Strasse-style” educational programmes under the brand name SAT-7 Academy. For the last 5 years, SAT-7 Academy programmes specifically for children, parents and teachers have been produced and broadcast across the Middle East and North Africa. The main target is the millions of refugee children or children in schools with very low standards. The region has one of the highest out-of-school rates in the world, leaving millions of children with little hope of a better future and as easy targets for fundamentalism. SAT-7 Academy is there for all those who would like to have education despite the lack of adequate schools.

The mission of SAT-7 Academy is to provide Arabic-speaking viewers from all parts of society with complimentary edu-

cational opportunities. By providing this support, we aim to equip the next generation with the tool they need to build a better society, one marked by tolerance and creative free thought; and help teachers and parents to develop a more effective, child-centric approach to learning.

SAT-7 Academy covers the syllabus from kindergarten to 3rd grade in the core subjects of Arabic, maths, English, science and French. SAT-7 Academy also goes live on Facebook three times a week so children can connect with their teachers for further support. One of the programmes on SAT-7 Academy is Puzzle. It is an attractive game show aiming to promote children’s rights through play and was created in partnership with local Lebanese NGOs and is sponsored by the Danish government.

SAT-7



This unit of the SAT-7 Academy appears to deal with the subject of dancing.



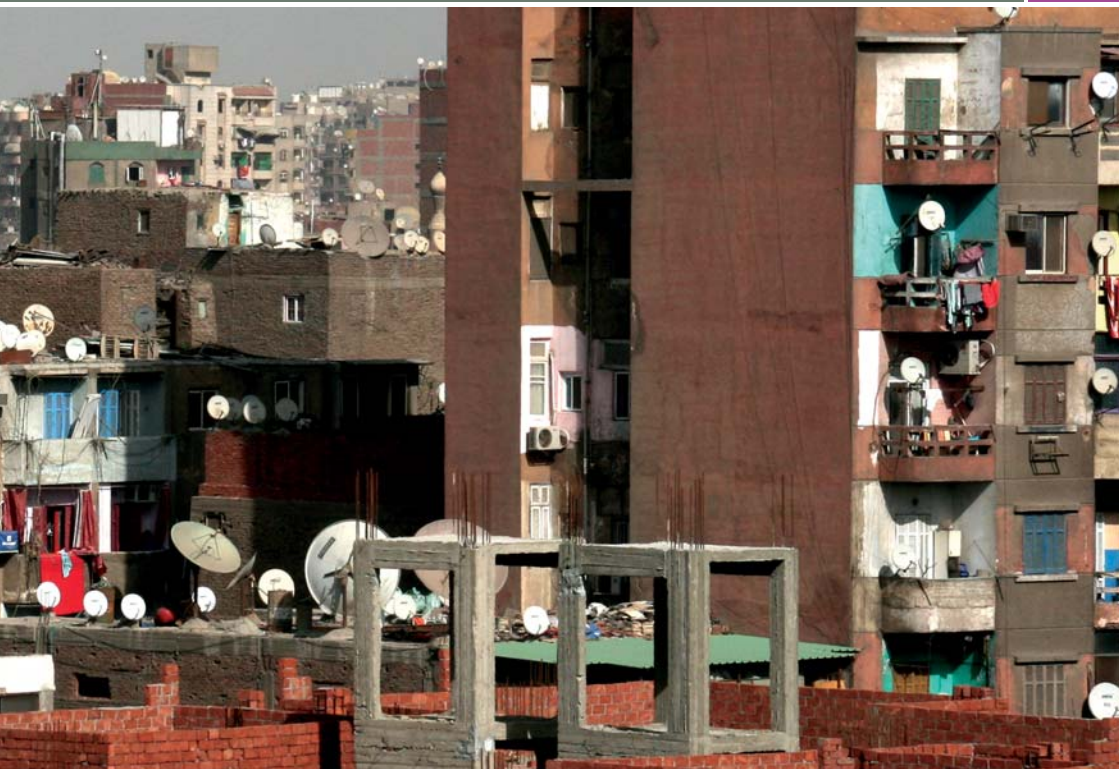


The roofs of Cairo: A Christian TV station has no problem reaching its audience as satellite dishes belong to the

In a time of COVID-19 where all schools, institutions and churches have been closed, SAT-7 has increased the SAT-7 Academy as well as programmes on how to handle the COVID-19 situation and offers this as a comprehensive online package. The hope is that this online package will be used widely to give vital ongoing educational support to children who are now out of school and assist NGOs in continuing their invaluable educational activities with the most vulnerable children on the ground. The online package contains special programmes on the COVID-19 pandemic, including awareness campaigns and prevention messages and educational and development programmes which target Arabic-speaking school-age children.

In today's troubled Middle East, anxiety about COVID-19 is adding to the existing pain of millions already living in poverty, in conflict zones and in refugee and displacement camps. SAT-7 Academy is supporting the continuing education and social development of millions of children from all religious and socio-economic backgrounds through satellite TV and social media. SAT-7 Academy is a free-to-air offer to everyone in need every day and everywhere.

*Kurt Johansen, Director for SAT-7  
in Europe and Asia*



basic equipment of almost every household in the Middle East.

## A CHRISTIAN TV STATION FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

SAT-7 is a Christian satellite TV station and was founded in 1995 by various churches in the region and in cooperation with the Middle East Council of Churches.

SAT-7 is ecumenical, holistic and never criticises any religion or denomination. SAT-7 broadcasts on four TV channels 24 hours a day in the three major languages of the region: Arabic, Turkish and Farsi. The TV programmes



are mainly produced at SAT-7 studios in Cairo, Beirut and Istanbul. SAT-7 gets its funds from a large and diverse number of partners all over the world, including twenty missions and dioceses in Germany.

For several years, the chairperson of SAT-7 was Dr Habib Badr, Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut, to which the Johann Ludwig Schneller School belongs.

# FORCED TO CHANGE

Digital media at the Bible Society in Egypt

In many countries, the lockdown due to Covid-19 has given a new boost to digital media. The Bible Society in Egypt is also profiting from this, although its previous work was very dependent on a personal exchange with customers and donors.

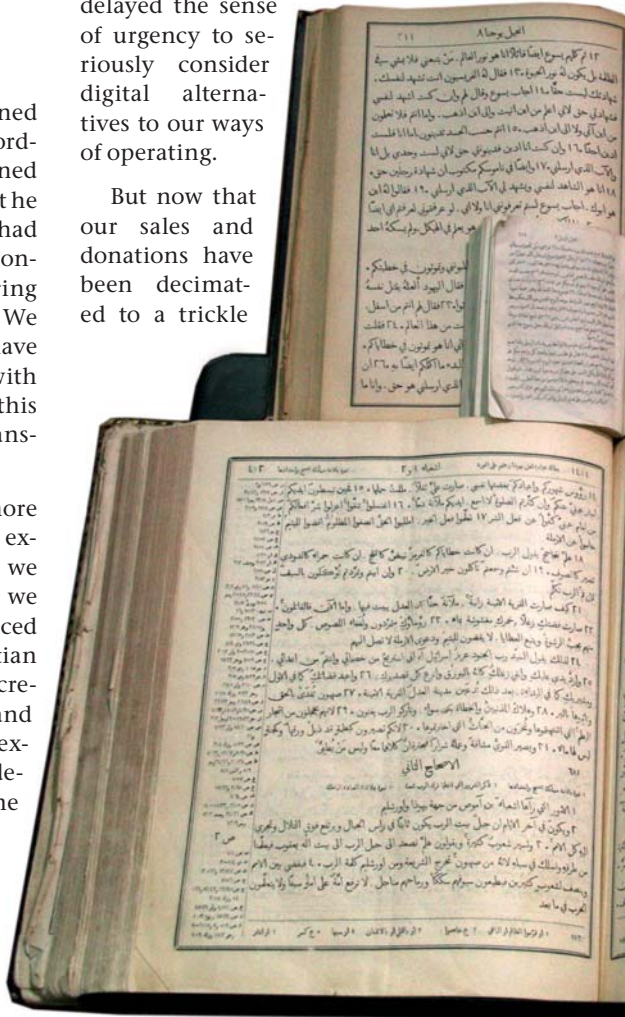
When Joseph was imprisoned in Egypt – by the way, according to the legend, it happened near where I live – he probably felt that he would never ever get out and that he had no future. Many around the world, confined to their homes, are now wondering if things will ever return to normal. We at the Bible Society of Egypt (BSOE) have similar feelings. But I want to share with you how we see that God may be using this terrible pandemic to help radically transform our organisation for the better.

I have been leading the BSOE for more than 30 years. Over the years we have expanded our print publishing so that we now have nearly 700 products which we distribute, most having been produced by us. Because of the absence of Christian distribution channels, we have had to create our own with 8 regional branches and 17 bookshops plus warehouses. Our expertise and success have been in widely distributing these hard copies of the Scriptures nationwide.

But the world is rapidly moving to digital media and we haven't been able to move into that field rapidly enough. This is why we depend on donations. Also, our fundraisers still have to visit their donors to physically

collect donations in cash. One of our restraining factors preventing us from fully embracing digital technology has been the feeling that “since things are going so well, why consider a change?” This has delayed the sense of urgency to seriously consider digital alternatives to our ways of operating.

But now that our sales and donations have been decimated to a trickle





by Covid-19 and the rise in infections in Egypt, we are all seeking alternative ways to distribute God's Word. Providentially, early in 2019 we established a Digital Media Department which is now in full operation. The incredible teamwork between this new Digital Media team and our Soft-

ware Development team has helped us, during this unprecedented crisis, to begin seriously moving into the digital media world.

The response from Church workers has been extremely encouraging. They are so grateful to have digital Bible products they can share with the people to whom they minister. With children at home and families cooped up for long hours of curfew, these relevant programs, such as our daily online Bible Competition, are needed more than ever and are now widespread.

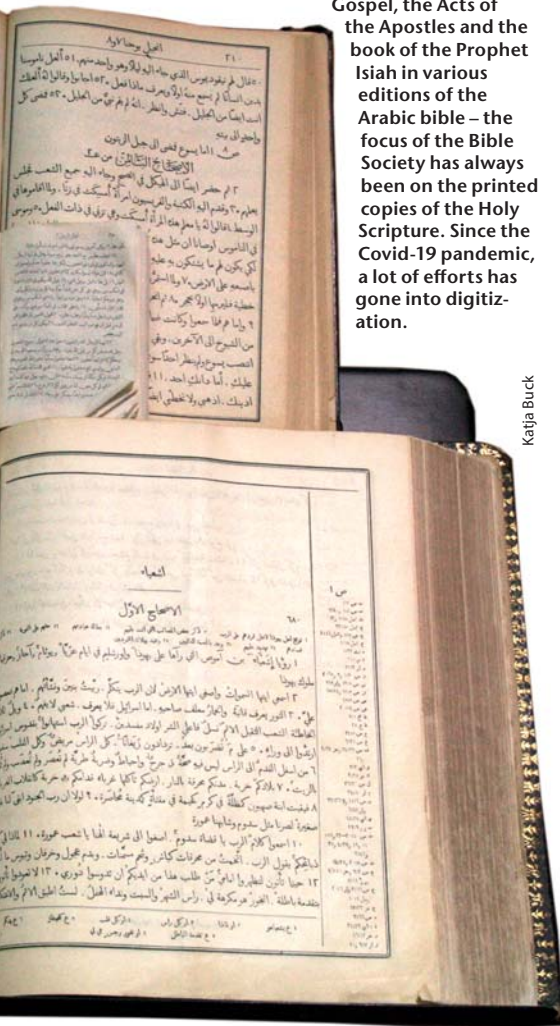
While our bookshops are still operating on a reduced schedule with only one employee at a time (also providing free home delivery), our sales and fundraising staff are now eagerly desiring digital alternatives to the way they were operating (online shopping and digital donations). This new mindset change will, I believe, place us in a much stronger position to serve God's Word with up-to-date tools and technology.

I don't think we could have made this paradigm shift in time if the pandemic had not forced us to do so. Unbeknownst to us, God has been preparing our staff for this new challenge and opportunity.

At the end of Genesis, Joseph, looking back at his life, told his brothers, "...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." (Gen 50:20 NRSV). My prayer is that as we look back on this frightening worldwide pandemic, we will have the same perspective as Joseph had.

*Ramez Atallah is the General Director of the Bible Society of Egypt.*

Pages from Saint John's Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles and the book of the Prophet Isaiah in various editions of the Arabic bible – the focus of the Bible Society has always been on the printed copies of the Holy Scripture. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of efforts has gone into digitization.



Katja Buck

## ELECTRICITY COSTS ALMOST ZERO

**Amman/Khirbet Kanafar (EVS).** Starting last year, the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) does not need to pay for electricity any more. Thanks to the funds gathered from the offering during the opening worship services of the Evangelical Kirchentag in 2015, it has been possible to install a photovoltaic system. Meanwhile, it produces so much electricity that the TSS can cover its own requirements very well and needs only to pay an annual meter charge of just under €70.

The savings are substantial. In 2017, the TSS had to pay more than €90,000 for electricity. In 2018, this was still €28,000. During the summer months, the photo-



The photovoltaic system saves over €90,000 a year in electricity costs for the TSS.

## NEW BISHOP CONSECRATED

**Stuttgart (EVS/EMS).** The Very Reverend Dr Hosam Naoum was consecrated Bishop by the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East on 14 June. In January, an electoral body composed of lay staff and full-time officials of the diocese elected him as successor to the incumbent Archbishop of the diocese, Suheil Dawani. Until Suheil Dawani retires from office in 2021, Naoum will be familiarised with all his episcopal duties as Bishop Coadjutor.

Naoum has been Dean of Saint George's Cathedral in Jerusalem since 2012. Before that, he was priest of the Arabic-speaking parish of the cathedral and ministered the parishes in Nablus and Zababdeh in West Jordan. Naoum studied at Rhodes University in South Africa and received his doctorate at the Virginia Theological Seminary in the USA. Hosam Naoum has been associated for many years with the Theodor Schneller School in Amman which



Bishop Hosam Naoum (r) after his consecration; on the left

belongs to the Anglican diocese in Jerusalem.

The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) would like



voltaic system at the TSS feeds considerable amounts of electricity into the public grid. Unfortunately, this is not remunerated. On the other hand, when required, the TSS can buy electricity from the grid at a much lower tariff. However, no such demand has occurred yet; over the past two years, the school has been able to cover its own electricity consumption all year round.

It is also planned to make a similar investment at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS). The Beirut Cosmopolitan Rotary Club has joined the Bietigheim-Vaihingen Rotary Club and other Rotary Clubs to expand training for electricians

at the JLSS in preparation for the future subject of photovoltaics. The school will then be equipped with a photovoltaic system of sufficient size. If the International Rotary Foundation approves a funding request, it may be possible to start installing the system this autumn.

Funds promised by the various Rotary Clubs are large enough but are linked to confirmation by the Foundation. And this is again dependent on the implementation and sustainability of the training concept.



Diözese Jerusalem

## FUNDS FOR CLASSROOMS AND CAMERAS

**Stuttgart (EVS).** In July, the Executive Committee of the *Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* decided to give the Theodor Schneller School €15,000 from the foundation's earnings to purchase surveillance cameras. As the school site is so large, it is not easy to ensure the safety of the children, the staff or the institute itself. The school in collaboration with professional consultants therefore devised a safety concept, part of which is the installation of cameras.

The Johann Ludwig Schneller School will also receive €15,000 from the foundation's earnings. The school will use the money to equip classrooms on the floor above the newly built carpentry workshop. A sum of €10,000 was transferred to the free reserves.

to warmly congratulate Reverend Hosam Naoum on his election and are delighted that an advocate of ecumenism and inter-religious relations has assumed this office.

the retiring Archbishop Suheil Dawani.

## AT LAST, LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

The EVS expresses its thanks to all donors

**In March, the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Jordan was still in the middle of a severe crisis that threatened its very existence. But thanks to the wonderful support from all those in Germany and Switzerland closely connected to our work in the Middle East, the future of the institution looks much better now.**

**T**he drinking water network at the TSS had collapsed last autumn (see our report in SM 2-2020). Then the Covid-19 pandemic reached Jordan and paralysed public life completely. For the TSS, the loss of all income from the guest house was bitter. At the same time, the school was forced to continue paying staff wages. The final straw came when the Jordanian authorities responsible for infection control announced that the school could only open after the summer holi-

days if the dilapidated water system was renovated. This was too many challenges to deal with at once.

To solve the drinking water problem, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) managed to provide sufficient funds thanks to its many donors. The international EMS Fellowship supported the TSS with €10,000 from the Coronavirus Emergency Fund. But how should the wages of the highly committed staff be financed, at least until the start of the summer holidays in June?

In the middle of July, I appealed once again to our donors in a “begging letter”, something that I rarely use in this form. We expected to receive about €30,000 and we even hoped donations would reach perhaps €50,000. However, the results of the appeal exceeded our wildest dreams: in very few weeks, we had received a total of about €215,000. Straight away, we transferred €77,000 so that the TSS could pay wages up to and including September. Wages will continue to be paid from the remaining €138,000 as long as the normal budget funds are sufficient to tackle the other urgent problems.

From the bottom of my heart I would like to thank all donors for the wonderful and generous support given to the TSS!

*Reverend Uwe Gräbe,  
EVS Executive Secretary*



EMS/Gräbe

As unexpected as the rains which transformed the site of the TSS into a green garden in March 2018 were the donations which the school fortunately received.

## A LULLABY FOR HOOLIGANS

Alumni reminisce

**Christian Schmid (30) was volunteer at the Theodor Schneller School in Amman in 2010/2011. Today, he is development engineer at a medium-sized company.**



Back then, my duties included looking after a residential group of 3rd and 4th graders during playtimes and homework hours and assisting the educators during everyday life at the boarding home. After a few months at the boarding home, I started singing an English and Arabic version of a German lullaby at bedtime. After less than three days, this became a regular ritual as the boys requested the song more and more when they were going to bed. It was beautiful to see how much even the most hardened hooligans longed for this kind of attention.

One person I would really love to meet again from my time at the TSS is the educator who I worked with most of my time there. I would really like to know what she thinks about that time after so many years and what she thought about me as a German who had just graduated from school without any knowledge of Arabic and without any experience of education. What does she think of the concept of the voluntary service then and now? Or of the risk of the European habit of superiority when it comes to matters regarding education, morals and communication – a risk which was much discussed in the preparatory workshops before starting voluntary service. Looking back, I can now say there were many different approaches and concepts in these areas which caused most of the friction.



Christian Schmid as volunteer at the TSS with boys from "his" family

My voluntary service is now exactly ten years ago but as before I still feel very connected to the Schneller schools. About the question why, I am mainly reminded of how intense this experience was and how important it still is for me personally. As before, I am still convinced of the concept of bringing up children of different religious, ethnic and family backgrounds in a region which is in religious and ethnic turmoil.

If I was to offer any advice on what should not be done during voluntary service under any circumstances, I would say it depends on a person's inner attitude. In my opinion, it is essential NOT to start a voluntary service with the attitude of wanting to do good for needy people or of wanting to help them. On the contrary, a volunteer should go into voluntary service with the aim of learning as much as possible.



## A PLACE TO FINALLY FIND PEACE

Conclusion of the preschool project in Syria

**“We extend our special thanks to you.” “God bless you all.” “We want to stay in contact with you!”** These words were spoken in German during a mobile video in Syria. A clip on Facebook shows the teachers and the children at the preschool in the “Valley of the Christians” taking leave of this unique project at the end of June at the beginning of the summer holidays. After a period of six and a half years, the project has finally come to an end.

And what an exciting time it was for all! At a conference which took place in Beirut in 2013, discussions centred on the future of Christianity in the Middle East. On the side lines the General Secretary of the EMS and the Chair and Executive Secretary of the EVS were asked whether they would be prepared to support a similar project to the Schneller schools in war-torn Syria.

Contagious enthusiasm spread like wildfire through the Mission Council, the EMS Secretariat and the Schneller Association: Yes, we do! Soon, the first small steps began in Wadi Nasara, the “Valley of the Christians”, in January 2014 at a time when the “Islamic State” militia were gaining ground everywhere in Syria. Together, the leaders of two Evangelical churches in Syria and Lebanon appealed to the EMS General Meeting in November 2014: perhaps our two churches could grow closer together by cooperating in this project!

Not to mention the opportunity to visit Syria itself – in 2014, 2015 and last in 2018. The faces of the children left an in-

delible image in my memory: little Aboudi who had not spoken since witnessing the murder of this father. Noura who smelled of cow shed because that’s exactly where she lived together with her mother, her brothers and her sisters – and who was then given a leading role in the nativity play. Or the little chap (what was his name again?) who rendered me totally helpless when he jumped into my arms and clung to me, not wanting to let me go again. All these children were from families of displaced persons. Some of them had experienced terrible things, but they were finally able to find peace at the preschool.

In Syria, I met an incredibly motivated team of young women (and a few men). Most of them were also displaced persons but as a result of this project they managed to create some sort of routine in their daily lives. How on earth do you manage to get so many children to meditate in silence all at once – or to keep to the rhythm during an aerobics class? After experiencing so many hardships, where do they find the strength to keep on working even during



The “Valley of the Christians” lies to the west of Syria near the city of Homs



“We would like to stay in contact with you.” The last final year students dressed in the blue robes of school graduates express their thanks to all donors. Photo right: The farewell gifts from the school.

the Covid-19 pandemic and still drop off small gift packets on the doorsteps of the children’s families?

Of course, the project had some shortcomings and weaknesses as well. Many times, it was a difficult struggle to prepare a financial report until it met German standards. Once, there was even quibbles about the use of funds. And the two Evangelical churches never really grew closer together during the project. In the end, an NGO working closely with a Syrian Orthodox Church took over the local management of the project. But in the end, it was the many, many committed people who made the project a success – our friends on site as well as those who prayed and donated money for this work. This includes all the German EMS member churches, the member churches of the EVS in Japan, Korea and Africa, a phenomenally active association in Tübingen and many many private donors.

What started off as an emergency measure for the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 was ultimately extended for another three years until 2019. And this was even followed by a final extension until summer

2020 until the last remaining children had found places at a public primary school.

There were always around 75 children attending Grades 3 to 4 at the preschool; over the years, over 200 children must have attended the school. There they not only received schooling and food – above all else they found protection, peace and a feeling of security. Before the summer holidays, they all donned their ceremonial blue robes for school leavers for the last time to celebrate a farewell party together. We reciprocate the team’s thanks – and pass this on to all the many supporters in Germany and the world. May God bless all those involved along their future path – and may there finally be peace in Syria!

*Uwe Gräbe*



## IT'S TOO MUCH!

### EMS partners suffer from the consequences of the Beirut explosion

The Johann Ludwig Schneller School in the Beqaa Valley was not directly affected by the devastating explosion which took place on 4 August. This was not the case for the partners of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) in Beirut. No matter how far away they may be from ground zero in the port of Beirut, more and more people are suffering from the multiple crisis in Lebanon.

The Anglican All Saints' Church sits directly on the esplanade, a mere one and half kilometres to the west of the explosion site. It belongs to the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East, an EMS member and the church to which the Theodor Schneller School in Amman belongs. The explosion at the beginning of August totally devastated the community rooms on the bottom floor;

it was all the more miraculous that the church room above it remained intact.

A little further south, a good two kilometres from the site of destruction, are the church and parsonage of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut (NECB), also an EMS member and the church to which the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Khirbet Kanafar belongs. The church is severely damaged. The shock wave catapulted the heavy wooden door leaves far into the interior; the valuable coloured glass panes are shattered, their metal frames ripped out of their anchors and they now lie strewn across the benches. Bouquets of flowers were ripped apart and are now scattered all over the floor. They were intended for a marriage ceremony which should have taken place that evening. When the 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate exploded just after six o'clock in the evening, the wedding guests were in the process of decorating the church. Habib Badr, Senior Pastor of the NECB, had just put the final touches to his wedding sermon and was on his way to the church. Thank goodness since shortly afterwards, part of the ceiling panelling fell down on his desk.

**“The damage is worse than during the civil war.”**

Four kilometres away the traces of the explosion can still be clearly seen. The Moadieh Evangelical Center for Assisted Living belonging to the NECB is located in the middle of the bustling business district of Hamra, wedged between high-rise buildings. The glass entrance and many windows are shattered. “The glass panes



The port of Beirut days after the explosion. The shock wave also destroyed the surrounding district.

Rashid Khreiss/Ansplash

are not so important. Far worse is that our elderly residents are reliving the trauma from the civil war," said the Directress Joyce Khoury on the phone. "Instead of investing the money we still had left over in glass, we hired a good therapist who has been working with the elderly residents over the past few weeks."

The Near East School of Theology (NEST) is also badly hit. The small theological seminary trains young pastors for the Evangelical churches in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine. The NEST is also located in the district of Hamra. Nearly all the window panes were shattered. Doors were torn out of their hinges. Even partition walls inside the building were hurled through the air and their aluminium frames were bent. "The NEST has never been hit as badly as this," writes George Sabra, the college president, "not even in the worst days of the Lebanese civil war that lasted fifteen years."

### **In the maelstrom of a never-ending series of crises**

Just under 200 people died during the catastrophe on 4 August. 6,000 were injured and 300,000 lost their homes. The disaster struck Beirut at the worst possible time imaginable. Lebanon has long been caught in the maelstrom of a never-ending series of crises. Firstly, there is the political crisis: since 17 October, people have taken to the streets demonstrating against a political caste which is felt to be thoroughly corrupt. They are demanding a fundamental change to the system. Secondly, there is the economic crises: since October, it is almost impossible to withdraw money from bank accounts. And since March, the government has been unable to repay its government bonds. The country is insolvent. The electricity grid has collapsed. With-

in a few weeks, hyperinflation has shrunk the value of all salaries, savings accounts, pension reserves and life assurances by 85 percent. Prices have exploded. Unemployment is escalating.

Only a few days before the explosion, one of the largest local hospitals was obliged to sack half of its staff since it was unable to cover their costs. And in the midst of it all, the coronavirus pandemic! This is the third crisis: after initial success in the fight against the virus, Lebanon is now in the midst of a second wave. The infection rate reaches new record levels every day. Many Covid-19 patients were in the hospitals which have now been devastated by the detonation.

The fourth crisis is the tension-laden situation at the Israeli-Lebanese border. In the past several days, Israel has made several military strikes on Syrian territory against members and facilities belonging to the Lebanese Hezbollah militia outlawed in the West as a terrorist organisation. As a result, they now expect the Hezbollah to make counter-strikes against Israeli targets at any time.

In addition, other crises can be mentioned: the situation of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon who make up about a quarter of the population; the situation in the Palestinian refugee camps and many more... In short: it's too much for Lebanon to shoulder this catastrophe as well!

*Uwe Gräbe*

# AID FOR OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN LEBANON

**How do you carry on when the whole world around you has collapsed? This is the question many people in Beirut asked themselves after the explosion on 4 August.**

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain," quotes Habib Badr, Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut (NECB), from Psalm 127. This small community has already had to rebuild their church in the city centre of Beirut once in the past. It was destroyed during the civil war (1975-1990). The last thing to be installed were the valuable coloured church windows in 2017. Now they lie shattered in the nave of the church.

EMS/Gräbe



Miraculously, the window above the altar of the NECB remained intact.

The people know they can expect nothing from their government. That's why once again they roll up their sleeves and tackle what needs to be done. First it was the young people from the community who started to clear away the debris and glass shards from the church and the community hall. Now the young people are organising food and preparing packets for people in the city who have lost everything.

But there is still so much to do! We therefore appeal to you for donations for our sisters and brothers in Beirut. We have agreed with our partners in Lebanon that the funds should be used not only for repair work but also for food packets for the needy in the city – no matter what their religion or denomination. Support for rebuilding badly damaged buildings should also go to churches of other confessions, for example the Greek Orthodox community.

The last thing to be repaired this time will probably be the coloured glass windows in the church. All those involved know it will take a long time before anyone can even think of replacing them. Nevertheless, the first worship services have been celebrated in the badly damaged church. At least a glimmer of hope!

## YOUR HELP FOR REBUILDING

Please help the people in Lebanon to overcome the crisis and rebuild.

Donation account:  
Evangelische Mission in Solidarität e.V.  
Evangelische Bank  
IBAN: DE85 5206 0410 0000 0001 24  
Purpose „Lebanon“

## WE BID FARWELL

**T**he Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) mourns the death of a long-time companion. At the end of May, Reverend Dr Hartmut Brenner died in Heidelberg at the age of 82. He became involved in Schneller work as a young student of theology. In 1957, he travelled to the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon to attend a work camp for several weeks. Just a year later, Hartmut Brenner returned to the school as a volunteer. When the sister institution in Jordan, the Theodor Schneller School in Amman, was looking for a new director in 1968, the recently graduated doctor of theology applied and remained there for over ten years. To this day, recordings still exist of sermons which Hartmut Brenner even delivered in Arabic. His knowledge of Arabic was outstanding.

In 1983, the EVS asked him to take over the directorship of the JLSS in war-torn Lebanon. It didn't take Hartmut Brenner long to think about this request. Despite the troubled situation he enthusiastically returned to the Middle East. However, three years later, he had to leave Lebanon since it was too dangerous for foreigners to remain there.

Hardly anybody was as familiar as Hartmut Brenner with the Middle East, its culture and the people in the region. As modest and unpretentious as he was, he never proclaimed his knowledge. When asked for his assessment or his advice, he was enthusiastic and generous in sharing his experience. He also related wonderful and amusing anecdotes on many aspects of living together with people of different origins, without embarrassing anybody.



Throughout his life, Hartmut Brenner kept contact with his former Schneller students. When he retired, he discovered the possibilities of keeping contact through social media. He continuously posted photos from old times, wrote short anecdotes and asked around the virtual group what had become of one or other student in the photos. It was not unusual that these questions led to new contacts to alumni. When his obituary appeared on Facebook, the dismay among his many international friends was enormous. Their farewell messages clearly show that Hartmut Brenner meant far more to them than just the former director of their school. For many he was a father, a friend and a mentor.

The Executive Committee of the Schneller Association, of which he was a committed member up until 2012, will honour his memory in gratitude and respect.

*By Katja Dorothea Buck  
on behalf of the EVS*



Contact with our readers is invaluable for us. We are delighted to receive all your letters, even if they are critical or represent a different opinion than that of the editors. We reserve the right to edit your letters for space reasons.

Thank you very much for sending me the latest issue of the Schneller Magazine. I would like to make one remark. On page 19 there is an article entitled "No income, high expenses". You quote Director Haddad: "Our common humanity and religious

beliefs do not know ethnic or racial distinction." [Translator's note: The German version uses the word "RASSEN" (races).] Since there are no races and this term should no longer be used, the choice of words was unfortunate.



Otherwise, I find the magazine full of information and I thank you for sending it and wish the Schneller schools all the best. Stay healthy in these special times.

*The name and address of the sender are known to the editors.*

Thank you for the issue 2/2020 of Schneller Magazine. It is a master piece and in fact a valuable documentary about people in the Middle East and their religions. I enjoyed every page of the issue.

On the other hand, it is alarming and sad to witness the ongoing troubles between the people of the Middle East. History records that a lot of suffering and kill-

ing occurred in the Middle East 100 years ago and it was repeated recently! Humans seem to be the number one enemies of humanity when it comes to love, peace and respect of each other. It is shocking to see that people and educational or other institutions in the Middle East and probably the world at large are in need of financial or other support while the governments concerned are ignoring those needs.

May God lead us all to righteousness and peace on earth. Thank you and all the staff and participants in the Schneller Magazine for your outstanding dedication. May God bless you all and grant you continued success.

*Gaby Haddad, Amman (Jordan)*

Congratulations on Issue 2/2020! I find the choice of features very interesting and important. The articles are convincing. They pack a maximum of information in a minimum of space and reveal the enormous dilemma in the Middle East. Standing up for "forgotten peoples" or religious communities seems to me to be one of the most important duties of church and government work in the Middle East. As far as this goes, I fully agree!

I would have felt it very exciting to see the question of the Palestinian people presented in this context. But unfortunately, the article by Dr Reiner Bernstein falls outside the scope of the self-appointed topic: "Peoples without states". I feel it is a pity that Bernstein failed to concentrate on the Palestinians. His article hardly mentions the Palestinians on the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

He fails to discuss the question whether a Palestinian state is still realistic at all. As interesting as his observations about Is-



It would then have become obvious that the Palestinians constitute a completely different case from the group of peoples discussed.. But most important: once again, a superb issue! Congratulations!

*Reverend Hanna Lehming, Hamburg*

**The article to which the reader refers.**

raeli Palestinians may be, a presentation of their example could have shown that the Palestinian people today consists of at least three groups: Israel, the occupied territories and the diaspora.

Instead, I did not quite understand what was meant by the brief parenthesis about “double solidarity”. The argument that Bernstein offers for “special attention” has at least nothing to do with the statement by the Evangelical church or the German state (cf. e.g. Israel-Palestine Policy of the EMOK).

In summary: what a pity. Here I would have expected to read an article which was just as informative as those about all the peoples which this issue deals with.

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THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION; WHOM SHALL I FEAR?  
THE LORD IS THE STRONGHOLD OF MY LIFE; OF WHOM SHALL I BE AFRAID? Psalm 27:1 (NRSV)



**EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools**

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<https://schneller-schulen.ems-online.org/en/>