

# SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



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## Awakenings and Catastrophes

2011-2021: A historic decade for the Middle East

## AWAKENINGS AND CATASTROPHES

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**Dear Reader,**

It is now ten years ago that a short-lived political spring broke out in the Arab world. As you well know, it did not last very long. Today, Syria lies in ruins, Lebanon is in the deepest crisis in its history, in Egypt the military rules with an iron fist and Iraq is trying hard to get back on its feet. For this issue, however, we did not ask what has generally remained from the spirit of optimism of that time. Instead, we asked our authors to tell us how they personally look back on the past historic ten years. What did they gain, what did they lose?



The articles in this issue are personal, sometimes harrowing accounts from Al-Hassakeh in Syria, from Beirut in Lebanon, from Erbil in Iraq, and from Egypt, Palestine, Israel and Germany. Even though the authors speak only for themselves, the articles show how battered, divided and desperate the societies in the Middle East are and the immense challenges the people in the region are facing.

We thank all those who have given us such a revealing insight into their lives and allowed us to share their concerns, but also the things which they draw hope from. We join in their hopes that the Middle East will be allowed to find peace one day.

There is also a lot to report from the Schneller schools this time. It is amazing that the people in charge keep on going despite all the frustrating circumstances. Our sincere thanks go to them!

We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to you, dear reader, for supporting us in our work with our partners in the Middle East.

On behalf of the editorial team, I thank you for your interest.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katja Dorothea Buck". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katja Dorothea Buck

## “Your labor in the Lord is not in vain”

On the inside of my office door at the Near East School of Theology is a piece of yellow paper, cut out in the shape of a bunch of bananas. Scrawled across this, in large letters, is the single word, “Faithfulness.” It was one of many such pieces of paper representing apples, oranges, grapes, etc., each bearing one of the “fruit of the Spirit” listed in Galatians 5:22–23. They were prepared by the Spiritual Life Committee for our annual Fall Retreat many years ago, to serve as reminders of God’s call to each of us to do our part in enhancing the Christian community at NEST.

I specifically chose this “fruit” to represent the essence of my teaching ministry here, and I taped it to my door at eye level

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love,  
joy, peace, forbearance, kindness,  
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness  
and self-control. Against  
such things there is no law.  
(Gal. 5:22-23)*

so that I could see it, and be reminded of its message, whenever I go out to hold a class, attend a faculty meeting, or simply mingle with the students.

During my nine years (so far) of teaching Islamic Studies at NEST, dozens of stu-

dents have taken my courses. I have sought to help them better understand Islam, but also to enable them to engage with their Muslim neighbors in a humble and respectful manner, to live out the love of Christ in word and deed. Have I succeeded? It’s...hard to say.

Sure, some of them appreciate our visits to mosques or encounters with Muslim leaders. Others are glad for our animated discussions after watching a documentary on the life of Muhammad, or the modern impact of the Crusades. A few even thank me for the quality of the reading materials that I require!

But what happens when they leave NEST and get caught up in the ups and downs of parish ministry? Do they find time and opportunity to help their congregation build bridges of Christian friendship with their local Muslim community? Such things might happen, but rarely do I hear of them.

The apostle Paul must have wondered about his own “success” among struggling new Christians, like those in Corinth. They failed to follow through on much of what he had taught them, and in First Corinthians he had to admonish their selfishness and remind them of how the gospel must transform their character. Yet near the end of his letter, he offered a strong word of encouragement: “Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:58) I suspect that he was reassuring himself as much as his readers!

*Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

*(1 Cor. 15:58)*

We may never know, this side of heaven, the impact our ministry might have on another person's spiritual growth. Yet God sometimes surprises us. A few weeks ago, I received an email from someone whose name seemed vaguely familiar. In it I found a message from a fellow student during my first year of university – 49 years ago! He lived on the same dormitory floor as me, where I was the only Christian amidst a sea of young men who surely represented all the vanity and immorality of first-century Corinth. But Joe was different; he was searching for the real meaning of life, and was wondering if some kind of philosophy or spirituality might be the answer.

We spent many hours discussing God, the Bible, and the way of salvation; yet nothing seemed to convince him. Following that year, we lost touch – until decades later when he Googled my name, found my address, and sent me that email. In it, he described how I had been one of the most important people in his decision to follow Christ, and how he embarked on a career of Christian ministry with other university students. My seemingly fruitless perseverance made an impact that I was completely unaware of, until now.

How many others have been touched by God's grace through my ministry over the years – despite my many mistakes – through my simple teaching, listening, or serving in small ways? God alone knows. Someday, when all the saints gather around the throne of Christ, I hope to find out.

This call to faithfulness in the midst of countless challenges is highlighted in the famous seventeenth-century hymn by Georg Neumark, "If Thou but Suffer God to Guide Thee." There, in the final verse, we read the following lines:

*Sing, pray, and keep His ways unswerving;  
in all thy labor faithful be;  
and trust His Word; though undeserving,  
thou yet shalt find it true for thee.  
God never yet forsook at need  
the soul that trusted Him indeed.*

When we're wondering if our ministry is really accomplishing anything, may such words remind us that God is indeed at work behind the scenes – even through us.

*Peter Ford teaches Islamic Studies at the  
Near East School of Theology in Beirut,  
Lebanon.*

## The hope of the survivors

The survival of people in Al-Hassakeh in North-East Syria

“I think that the most necessary quality for any person to have is imagination.” This is what Jean Webster wrote in her novel “Daddy-Long-Legs” in 1912. In the Middle East we just cannot imagine that life can be simple and peaceful anymore.

On my graduation service at Near East School of Theology in 2016, the President, Dr. George Sabra, said these words: “They say to you, it is time to leave the academic world, to leave books and pens behind you and go to the real world. But do you really think that this world is real? It is distorted, it is nothing like the world that God created. And your duty as ministers is to go and preach, teach and live compassion to the people who are paralyzed by different circumstances.”

Can the Middle East live a future that is not paralyzed? If one day this happened, it would be a miracle, a miracle of reconciliation, of reconciliation with the past with the present, and a learning that shedding the blood of brothers and sisters and neighbors is nothing more than living under the power of sin. We say that we cannot control the past but we can control the future. I still do not think that this will work in the Middle East and especially in Syria.

The Syrian crisis started on the 15th of March 2011. At that time, I was a student living in Aleppo studying English. Living away from my parents made it really scary to hear that the war bells announced the beginning of a new era for Syria, and at such a moment, dreams may shatter or

Having faith in the face of chaos, suffering and injustice: women praying in the Protestant church in Al-Hassakeh.



new ones will arise. That’s when my dream of a peaceful ministry was lost, and I understood that God’s call for me is to serve during a traumatic time. I do not lie, it is not easy.

And after finishing my major in English Literature, I applied to the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL), to which my mother church in Al-Hassakeh belongs, and started my theological studies. It was never on my mind to become a pastor, or let me say a female Presbyterian pastor in an orthodox community. A pastor for a minor minority. I thought that I would serve a church as



Kurdish troops occupy the northern part of the Al-Hassakeh governorate. The city of the same name lies on the southern edge of the contested region.



an assistant, and sometimes I thought of continuing my studies, but that was when I heard that my mother church was left without a pastor. This time, I understood the call of God as the “call of duty”.

I came back to Al-Hassakeh in July 2016 to find out that our entire community had emigrated and the people I knew had become refugees somewhere around the globe. I found out that the people who remained behind were mourning about what had happened to the Christian community, and that the elderly had been left alone. People cannot live under such circumstances, i.e., social, economic, and mainly political. For this reason, I call those left behind “survivors”.

Al-Hassakeh is an agricultural governorate and it used to be good to live there. Its people were known for their generosity and hospitality. In 2011, the Syrian crisis started and many people started leaving the city. From 2012 to 2015 there were many kidnappings, Christians mainly, and the kidnappers asked for a ransom. Many others were killed. Later on, ISIS tried to get into the city and reached a neighborhood very near to the church. Many packed their bags and left. Since 2012, Al-Hassakeh lives without electricity. The people here buy their electricity

at a very high price from those who have electrical generators.

Al-Hassakeh and the North-East of Syria was divided when the Syrian Democratic Forces (Kurdish) took control of the infrastructure of the city and made a government inside a government. The young people must serve in the military service for the Kurdish forces and the Syrian Government. If they work with the cross-border NGOs on the Kurdish side, they may earn a good salary but this makes them traitors in the eyes of the Syrian government.

**Eight days with no drinking water, no bread or food**

3rd of July 2016 I will never forget this date. It was the day I started my ministry at the church. It was also the evening that the clash took place between the Syrian government and the Kurdish forces. That night an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) hit the room I was in with my family. I can still hear its ear-splitting blast and the chaos it caused.

The fighting went on and at some point, it never stopped. It was August 2016: That fight made me and my family hide in our bathroom for eight days. We ran out of

water and food. I had my two little cousins with me and I still remember reading a book to them – “The Iliad” by Homer – and playing board games to distract them.

After such a time, people either decide to flee, or to stay stubborn and survive. After that event, I understood that this is where I have to be and that these people need a church that can be for them a hope center and a center for community relief. The church needed to save what was left of these damaged, broken, and lonely survivors. Paul writes: “For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.” (2 Cor. 4:1-12)

Since then, the situation has continuously deteriorated. People’s daily life cannot be described, it is tearful. The normal salary in Syria became less than US\$25 while the need of any family of four people to live on is at least US\$400 a month. Since the SDF controls the north-east of the country, we are living under a siege. Not even medication can reach the city. We have no drinking water, no washing water, no electricity, no good schools. The people have not enough money to buy healthy food and not enough money to get clothing for the children or to pay their tuition fees.

Therefore, I think now you know why I said that even the imagination of a hopeful future has been taken from the people. I know that after reading this, you will have a sad face, just like the faces of my people here, but I want you to smile



**When church becomes a center of hope and mutual support for the people: A women’s group of the congregation in Al-Hassakeh.**

because only by smiling at the challenge makes it possible for you to win.

My family gave me a German name, “Mathilde” and it means “battle strength”. I pray for this strength and I believe that our Lord gives strength through love, and I do love here. I love my church, I love my memories here before 2011, and my memories now are nothing but to see the church winning over the survivors and not forsaking them.

**It is a blessing to be a small community with a wide and open heart**

Let me share our church ministry with you so I can leave you with a big smile. We are a church of 10 Protestant families; we were always rejected by the orthodox Christian community for many different reasons. But for the last 5 years, I can boldly say that our church is experiencing a great





Sabbagh

opens its doors to almost 1000 students, most of them coming from poor backgrounds. And with the help of NESSL, the church helps them to have a decent schooling. This Protestant school is a pioneer in the North-East of Syria when it comes to education, learning system, caring, and following up with the students and their families.

It is a blessing to be a very small congregation with a wide and open heart and welcoming people on all levels. We pray that our Lord may use us as instruments for His Kingdom to reach different sides and reconcile what needs love and compassion.

ecumenical movement. The church ministry covers many different groups and I could mention them with numbers, but the point is that they are all success stories of real individuals who live under the above-mentioned turmoil but still believe.

We minister to 275 children and to over 100 teenagers and young adults of university age, and our ministry for women welcomes almost 70 ladies per week. That is all in addition to bible studies, trainings for the church co-workers, online trainings and many meetings, and the Sunday worship service. In addition, we are called to care for the people's basic living needs. Then with the aid of NESSL, the church supports by distributing food parcels and paying for medication and drinking water and money to buy fuel and electricity.

And finally, there is our school, the Arab Renaissance Private School, which

You may ask yourself why I minister here? Do I not plan a better future for my family? My answer is simple: My father was an elder at the church and he passed away in 2012. He left us at Sunday service while he was sitting in the pew. He is the one who built the church and he is the one who worked as its principal to reach the place where it is now. And he is also the one who kept saying to me to not study theology to see if I would really fight for it.

I cannot but serve the place he loved the most; we used to feel that the church and the school were members of our family. I cannot but be here, I cannot but step in his footprints and feel the peace that this paralyzed world is stealing from many. This church is my Joy, Peace, Love and Hope.

*Mathilde Sabbagh is pastor of the National Presbyterian Church in Al-Hassakeh (North-East Syria). She is married with two daughters.*

## You worry more if you can only phone

The privileges and burdens of living abroad

**It is difficult to look back at the last ten years. Too much has changed in the Middle East. But it's even more difficult to look at your homeland from afar, says Sally Azar who comes from Jerusalem, studied theology in Beirut and Göttingen and is now doing her vicariate in Berlin.**

As a small child in Palestine, it was not easy to understand what was actually going on around us, why we had to cross borders so often and constantly show our identity papers. I grew up in Jerusalem where you are surrounded by borders, soldiers and police. My school, the Schmidt School, is located at the Damascus Gate in East Jerusalem. We often had to stay longer at school because there were demonstrations or brawls in front of our school. Of course, you learn a lot about your own history at school. But you also find out a lot about yourself. And with time, I was able to understand the political implications better.

It's not easy not really belonging anywhere. I am not a citizen of Israel, nor of Palestine, nor of Jordan. I only have a so-called laissez-passer, a travel permit that allows me to fly from Tel Aviv. A Jordanian passport helps me when I want to travel anywhere. But that doesn't make me a Jordanian.

As a result, it was difficult for me to get a visa for Lebanon so that I could study there. Before I flew to Lebanon, I was told I should pretend to be Jordanian when I got there. Due to the political situation, I should not mention Israel under any

circumstances. But this is unavoidable among students. I was constantly asked where I came from.

In Lebanon, I met so many wonderful people and learned a lot about Syria and Lebanon. It's a strange thing: Geographically, our countries are so very close to each other, but we don't know very much about each other. It wouldn't even take five hours to get from Jerusalem to Beirut by car if it weren't for all the closed borders. I always had to fly via Jordan.

In Beirut I felt very comfortable and much freer. There were no borders, no soldiers, you could just go anywhere. Lebanon is a fascinating country. Whether you're on the beach, in the mountains or in the snow, everywhere is enchantingly beautiful. It was even more beautiful with the people I spent my time with. We came from different countries, from Lebanon, Syria, Armenia, Palestine, the USA and Germany. It's hard for me to think about those times, simply because it was such a beautiful time.

Today, I can no longer meet my friends so easily. But on the phone, they tell me how Lebanon is slowly collapsing and how much Syria is still suffering from the war and its consequences. It breaks my heart when I see photos of destroyed, empty buildings. These buildings once had a history; these places were once places where people enjoyed gathering together. Now they are all just memories.

I know I am privileged to be able to study and live in Lebanon and Germany.



Sally Azar (centre) with fellow students at the graduation ceremony at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut; on her right in a white dress is Mathilde Sabbagh who wrote the article on pages 4-7.

But after four years of not being able to be with my friends, it makes me sad and angry to be so far away. So much has happened in the last year: Lebanon's economic crisis, the explosion in the port....

The step from Beirut to Germany was a very big one, even though I grew up bilingual and had been to Germany many times before. Suddenly I was no longer in an Arab country. I found it strange how openly people talked about politics. Here in the Middle East, you can only talk openly with people you know. But in Germany it is not easy to talk about the situation in Israel and Palestine either, because of German history. People often ask me and then I tell them about my experiences.

Looking at Palestine from a distance is difficult for me. Because of the settlement policy and the many arrests, the situation has become very complicated. In the last few years in Germany, I have only been able to watch the news. My fear for my

friends and family is greater than if I were with them and experiencing the situation myself.

When I talk about the situation in Palestine, many people can't understand why I want to go back at all. But it is my country and they are my friends and family that I belong to and want to stand by. That's what I want to do when I'm a pastor. And until then, I will not give up hope that one day something can change for the better in the Middle East.

*Sally Azar*

# Only a miracle would save us from this hell

In Lebanon, hope for a better future is vanishing



Rashid Khreiss/unsplash

The explosion catastrophe of 4 August 2020 in the port of Beirut is a symbol for the collapse of the state. Over 8,000 buildings within a radius of 20 kilometers were destroyed or damaged.

**The people of Lebanon are experiencing suffering and bloodshed. They know what war and civil war mean. But what they are going through now is worse than anything before, says the Anglican Archdeacon Imad Zoroob from Beirut and his words speak from the heart of many Lebanese.**

All that I remember from my childhood is the crowded so-called shelter, a prayer by candle light, and the screams of the children at every incoming bomb. At the end of the war, I left the shelter and left behind all my teenage years, but I was glad that we got through alive and thought that the best is surely yet to come... obviously I was kidding myself... obviously I was wrong.

From that day onward, lots of things happened, and that bright day which I promised myself has not yet come to this day. Lots of things have happened in my lifetime and nearly on daily basis. But surely the worst thing is that hope of a brighter future for Lebanon or even for our region was just a dream that will never come true. Did we lose hope? In our God, surely not, but in our leaders, that is for sure and only a miracle would save us from this hell.

Today, I'm supposed to reflect on the previous ten years and its impact on the church or even on St. Luke's Center for children with special needs. Surely, it is expected from me to say how devastating it was on every level; nevertheless, it was

bliss, heaven on earth in comparison to what we're living through today. Surely, we have suffered a lot during those years since 2011: We had ISIS and their fanatic brutality, affecting the whole region, especially Syria which was devastated and demolished.

No doubt, ISIS was the climate of the agony back then when we were deprived from visiting our All Saints Church members in Syria for more than five years. And the worst is the enormous number of refugees who came to the already wounded Lebanon in their thousands, reaching a million in numbers, causing a much more serious economic crisis. When ISIS was put to an end, we thought that things would become better, but again the worst was yet to come. Despite all of this, yes it was bliss.

Now talking about the last three years, to make the story short, a foreign online news (Deutsche Welle) wrote on 11 March 2021: "Lebanon: Insecurity and desperation as crisis worsens. People in Lebanon are increasingly desperate amid the political deadlock, the financial meltdown, rising poverty and COVID-19". When that article was published, the US dollar was equivalent to 10,500 Lebanese pounds (LL) which had lost 90% of its currency value compared to the fall of 2019. At the time I am writing this article, i.e., in summer 2021, it is equivalent to 17,700LL.

Moreover, no medicine is available and no fuel, no insurance works, the banks have deprived us of our money, especially in dollars. Above all, let us not forget the

cherry on the top of all this: the devastation of the port blast on the 4th of August 2020.

It's been more than a year that St Luke's center has remained closed because of Covid-19. All the money that was reserved for emergencies has been nearly spent, and the government is still not subsidizing the center. Now our biggest fear is how to reopen the center at all, because it would be impossible to buy food for our children, to fill up the tanks of our buses to fetch the children from their homes and bring them to us. We could not cover the expenses of the center. Despite all the agony, some government representatives keep saying us: "We are still scratching the surface, and the worst is yet to come."

But we are Christians and we believe in the Almighty and will never stop saying: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Rom. 8:37)

*Imad Zoroob is Rector of the Anglican All Saints Church and Director of the St. Luke's Center for children with special needs in Beirut.*

## “... there are still ripples, spreading far and wide”

### The ups and downs of working with refugees

**The effects of catastrophes and upheavals in the Middle East have always left their mark on the Oriental communities in Germany. What is known as the Arab Spring is no exception. But nothing is left of the initial euphoria. Instead, the realisation is gaining ground that only rational and constructive approaches will be able to overcome the many challenges in the long term.**

On 25 January 2011, I watched on TV as thousands and thousands of people protested in Cairo’s Tahrir Square. After two breathless weeks, the unimaginable happened: For the first time in Egypt’s many thousands of years of history, a „pharaoh“, Hosni Mubarak, was overthrown by the people. People’s euphoria was boundless, including my own and that of our Arab community here in Germany. I was sure of one thing: The spirit of submission had been released from the bottle and would never be forced back again. But what would that mean for Christians?

Overcome with joy, I sat in front of the television again one evening in November 2011. In the Cave Church in Cairo, 70,000 Christians of all denominations in Egypt had gathered for a night of collective prayer. Hope was growing among Christians in the Orient: It would finally mean equal civil rights for all; no one would have to flee to the West any more.

But then the newly elected President Mohammed Mursi, a Muslim Brother,

took a repressive, anti-Christian stance. It slowly dawned on all of us that things would not turn out as we had hoped. But no one could yet imagine that vast regions would soon be engulfed in terror, war and atrocities.

None of this directly affected the Arabic-speaking diaspora scene in Germany, which consists mainly of foreign-language communities, labour migrants and asylum seekers. A tsunami of hope swept across the Arab world and the stones thrown into the water in Tunisia, Egypt, Iraq and Syria were and still are making waves. They are even spilling over into Germany. This tsunami has swept people along like flotsam and washed them across many borders all the way here in Germany.

Refugee and oriental community work has always been a mirror of the political conditions in the Middle East, of civil wars, religious shifts and radicalisation. Now the effects of the so-called Arab Spring have reached us.

However, we did not receive demonstrators drunk on freedom. Instead, we were confronted with exhausted refugees who encountered a helpless state and soon the harsh reality set in: the difficulty of the German language, long training courses... For many, the arduous journey became too long. I see people for whom there is no spring, no blossoming, but rather people withering, roots dying, cut off from their own history and family. There are those



A group of happy women. At a retreat organised by the Arab community, they can get away from everyday life and all its worries.

whose personalities are wasting away and who retreat into the shell of the past.

On the other hand, I also see people who, after the initial shock, pick themselves up and who, freed from the shackles of former dictatorships and old family hierarchies, start living new lives. Among them are many women whose strengths now come to the fore and who are often more flexible. This sometimes leads to problems in marriages when the woman takes off and masters challenges better than the man.

Many Muslims have also come to our Arab communities since 2015, repelled by an excess of violence and with a desire for peace; others are curious about what was previously forbidden; and quite a few had dreams of Jesus. There were baptism classes and baptisms. There was a feeling of new beginnings. But here, too, disillusionment followed; after one or two years, most stayed away again.

At the same time, oriental Christians who had been living here for many years were struggling. When they came here, there were no integration courses or language courses. And then Syrian newcom-

ers, who had previously been part of a repressive society, were getting everything without any effort, including residence permits.

The refugee workers who had previously given all they had become increasingly exhausted; some were burnt out, disillusioned and frustrated. From their point of view, they only saw very limited progress. They experienced people who did not want to do any training but only wanted to continue their old lives, only in another country.

What is left after ten years? The realisation that neither euphoria nor frustration helps. And the experience that the integration of oriental Christians and converts into the local congregations can only be furthered in a rational, calm and constructive way. Whether both sides are ready for this must be seen on a case-by-case basis.

*The religious educator and Orientalist Heidi Josua works as a consultant for the Evangelical Salam Centre. She also works as a cultural and language mediator in refugee work in her home town of Weissach im Tal.*

## Love and betrayal

Why an Assyrian woman returned to Iraq

**Suzan Younan is unable to say exactly when her passion for her country began. Her love for a homeland where she was not born has been with her all her life. Today, she calls the country her parents left her home.**

I learned about the majesty of Mesopotamia through history teachers in America who told me that Assyria and its people no longer exist. I learned about the ancient city of Babylon through my parents who spoke about a country that the world no longer remembers. These teachings infuriated me as an Assyrian, and that angry spark lit the fire that would forever consume my adulthood and every decision I made.

In the early 80s my parents and two older sisters were living middle-class ordinary lives in Basra. My father was a successful oil geologist, and my mother was a respected high school geography teacher. During a history lesson on Iraq, my mother proudly told her students about the Assyrians and how much our culture had contributed to modern technology, laws, inventions, irrigation, astrology and so on, and then pointed out that she was Assyrian and how proud she was of our shared history as Iraqis and descendants of Hammurabi, King Sennacherib, King Ashurbanipal and Queen Shamiram. If she only knew that her history lesson would change the course of her life forever.

On that same day, an inspector from the Ministry of Education was observing classes and happened to hear what my mother told her students. After class,

the inspector pulled her to one side, questioned her motives and then reprimanded her for mentioning that Assyrians existed. The inspector said that from that moment on my mother must identify as an Arab and teach her students the truth about the history of Iraq. That was the day my mother knew that there was no place for her in Iraq and no hope for democracy to raise her children.

It took six months for my parents to leave Iraq for good, not knowing where they would end up, or how they would survive, but they believed that anything was better than being told you do not exist in your own country. Due to this type of systemic erasure, ongoing genocide, and daily denial in our ancestral lands, Assyrians are one of the most widely scattered indigenous peoples today.

In 1981 my parents emigrated to Athens where I was born. During my mother's pregnancy with me, she bid farewell to her parents, brothers, relatives, and friends many of whom she would never see again. I truly believe that the pain and anguish my mother endured during those months took a toll on my creation.

We were eventually granted a visa for Canada where we spent the next 8 years learning a new language, culture, and country. However, my parents knew that ultimately, they wanted to live in the United States where there were large communities of Assyrians. My father was insistent in his desire to raise my sisters and me with our own people, so we would not forget our language, customs, and history. After





Dressed in festive costumes, the Assyrian community gathers in Dohuk to celebrate the Assyrian New Year. The young woman in battle dress bears the Assyrian flag on her upper arm.

multiple attempts, my father was finally able to move us to America in 1989.

We arrived in California when I was 8 years old, so I do not remember the struggles and hardships that my parents and sisters once again endured. However, those emotions and fervor make up most of who I am today. I grew up in a very nationalistic household. My father was always involved with Iraqi politics and was a supporter and member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement – Zowaa, and my mother was a passionate humanitarian who constantly fundraised and worked for the vulnerable communities in Iraq, especially the

Assyrians. Therefore, it was natural for me to step into the roles of a political advocate and a humanitarian activist. It has been in my DNA from the very beginning of my life. I became heavily involved in Assyrian activism which led me to engage with other marginalized communities in Iraq such as the Yazidis, Mandeans, Turkomans and Shabbaks who all also share the same fate of being ignored by the United Nations, international governments, and the world in general.

In 2008 I decided to visit my homeland of Iraq for the first time ever, with much objection from my family. I went with 5

colleagues of mine to attend our AKITU Assyrian New Year that takes place in Dohuk from late March to mid-April. That first trip ignited the flame of pride in my heritage and my history. I took that flame and ignited the fire within other young

cleansing, genocide, oppression, and racism in our ancestral lands. We continue to be collateral damage between the Arabs and the Kurds for a war that is not ours, but on the land that is.



Younan

It's hard to explain all that my country has meant to me, and now, living daily among my people, I know I made the right decision. To date we have a total of 18 young Assyrians born and raised in the West who have returned to Occupied Assyria. I know it is a very small number, however, for our nation it is huge. I hope that this number will increase in the years to come, and I pray that the country I love will eventually learn to love me back.

*Suzan Younan is regional representative for Iraq and Lebanon for the Church of Sweden in the worldwide church relief organization ACT Alliance. She lives in Erbil, Iraq.*

Suzan Younan wants future generations to be proud of their Assyrian heritage.

adults living in diaspora, creating an organization, GISHRU, with a mission to take young Assyrians to our homeland annually. In ten years, we have brought over 300 young diaspora born Assyrians back to tour our native lands and walk in the footsteps of our ancestors in our tribal villages.

But it wasn't enough for me. Four years ago, I decided to move back full-time. I chose to go back and create a home in the homeland my parents had fled, to support the Assyrian community and our birthrights. Throughout Assyrian history all we have witnessed is ethnic and religious

## »The Last Plight«

From the USA where Suzan Younan lived for most of her life, she spearheaded efforts to raise the profile of the Assyrians, Yezidis and other ethnic people in Iraq. In autumn 2014, she and two colleagues returned to Iraq to assist in humanitarian aid, and to also film and document the atrocities committed against the indigenous and vulnerable people of Iraq. This resulted in the 10-minute short film "The Last Plight" that was screened in front of the United Nations and the European Parliament and won several film festivals. <https://vimeo.com/112613760>

# Bitter infighting

The Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt is facing a severe crisis

Ten years ago, Egypt was one of the hotspots of the so-called Arab Spring. There has been much discussion about political developments on the Nile, including the role that the Coptic Church has played or could have played. Outside Egypt, few people know that they themselves face immense challenges. Yet the internal infighting has already led to the murder of an abbot.

The Coptic Orthodox church has been facing a severe crisis since the passing of the powerful Pope Shenouda III in 2012 due to deeply intellectual differences between the clergy on educational, administrative and doctrinal issues for the oldest religious institution in Egypt, to which 90% of the approximately ten million

Coptic Christians in Egypt belong. This poisoned atmosphere led Bishop Daniah, Secretary of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Church, to say that there are some parties inside the church that have personal interests which threaten the peace and stability of church.

Since 2017 at the latest, there has been no hiding the fact that the Coptic Church is in crisis. In April of that year, the current Pope Tawadros II signed a religious agreement on the mutual recognition of baptism between the Coptic Orthodox and the Catholic Church. Since then, when transferring from one church to the other, the sacrament of baptism does not have to be repeated, as was previously the case. A group of Coptic bishops publicly

Katja Buck



The fact that Pope Tawadros II has an open ear for ecumenism was already evident shortly after he took office in November 2012. Here, an ecumenical group under the leadership of the Egyptian Council of Churches with Owe Boersma (2nd from left), the then Middle East Officer of the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW), and representatives of the Anglican and Protestant churches in Egypt.

accused their leader of wanting to subordinate himself to the Catholic Church.

The sad climax of the differences was the murder of Bishop Epiphanius, head of the Monastery St. Maqarius in Wadi Natrun, in summer 2018. *(Editor's note: The criminal court convicted two monks of killing him and sentenced them to death. One sentence was carried out in July this year. The other sentence was commuted to life imprisonment).*

With the Covid pandemic, the crisis has worsened, as is evident from the different ways of dealing with it. Some religious scholars consider the pandemic as God's punishment for mankind's sins. There is also a heated debate on how the way Holy Communion is distributed can be changed as a precautionary measure to combat the virus.

There are two ideological currents inside the Coptic church: the first is a conservative, traditional and populist, which is led by Pope Shenouda's followers and was very dominant and influential during his tenure. They tend to monopolize religious opinions and they place the canonical tradition and sayings of the saints on the same level as biblical texts. They are intolerant towards those who disagree with them, towards non-Orthodox churches in Egypt and all forms of ecumenical cooperation with international churches.

The second current is more enlightened and less extreme, and the murdered Bish-

Katja Buck



op Epiphanius belonged to this current. Pope Tawadros II is also closer to this side. He speaks about wanting to put internal order within the house and has taken steps towards administrative reform, including, for example, excluding the most extreme leaders from the circle of decision-makers, attempting to solve thorny issues such as personal status (*editor's note: for example, divorce and marriage law*), and improving ecumenical relations with churches inside and outside of Egypt.

In spite of the efforts of Pope Tawadros, progress in implementing these promises has been slower and is only taking place in minor areas. The opposition of some clergy is very strong and they use their opportunities to oppose the Pope's decisions and criticize his vision, accusing of heresy those who think differently and who do not agree with their opinion.



Monastic cells at the Monastery St. Makarius, whose abbot Bishop Epiphanius was stabbed to death by two monks in summer 2018.

The Coptic Church has a lot to lose if monasticism, educational issues and diaconal work can continue to be attacked like this and allow this cancer to continue to spread in the body of the Church. Rapid, surgical intervention is needed. The Church today needs a radical cure, a reform, to correct the relations between clergy and lay members. The balance needs to be redressed.

Within the Coptic Church, the concept of religious reform has long been linked to a historical trauma related to what happened in Europe (*ed.: Reformation, Enlightenment and secularization*). The destruction of the Orthodox faith and religious heritage is feared. But the context is completely different. One must remember that the Coptic Church was a church of the majority in its first centuries but, in the course of time, it became the church of

a persecuted minority. And despite these fears, the history of the Coptic Church is rich in stories of popes who initiated a real renaissance. One of them is Pope Kyrillos IV. (1816-1861), who was also called the Father of Reform because he cared about education, established girls' schools, introduced printing and was tolerant of other churches and religions.

Reform today must include the revival of the Laity Council, which assists the clergy in managing the affairs of the church and its activities. The Council should have strong powers and clear responsibilities to monitor decisions. After all, the church's role today is not only religious and spiritual, it is also active in social welfare, education, and economic activities which all need more control from church members.

Reform also requires a critical examination of the church's discourse and a clear demarcation between a claimed national role and a political one. Copts have long criticized the political role played by Islamic groups. They should not make the same mistake. For involvement in political tasks makes the clergy vulnerable to political blackmail and pressure, and this in turn harms the independence of the institution.

*Ishak Ibrahim is a journalist and works for the Egyptian NGO Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.*

## When cooperation is inevitable

Personal reflection on a decade of politics in Israel

This is such an interesting moment to reflect on the past decade, writes Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman. Most of the past few years have been marked by a strong sense of resignation. Today, however, there is a cautious hope that something could change politically after all. Perhaps the Covid pandemic is also responsible for this.

A sense of political paralysis pervaded the past decade and was exacerbated by the “Groundhog Day” nightmare of the reoccurring elections. Four elections in two years brought the same deadlocked results. Neither of the two camps was able to obtain a majority. It seemed impossible to get Netanyahu out of office, despite widespread disgust at the corruption and arrogance displayed by the Prime Minister. But somehow Yair Lapid, whom ten years ago, I and many others, dismissed as an opportunistic but charismatic windbag, displayed maturity and wisdom, cobbling together a most unlikely coalition that finally succeeded in evicting Netanyahu from the Prime Minister’s residence.

He did this by demonstrating an attribute almost unknown in Israeli politics – humility. Putting his ego aside he “anointed” Naftali Bennet as Prime Minister to achieve the greater good. (*Lapid and Bennet agreed that Bennet would be Prime Minister for the first two years. Lapid would then take over in 2023; editor’s note*). Lapid

brought in parties from the right and left, and for the first time in Israeli history, included an Arab party as an active partner in the coalition. It is impossible to predict how long this unlikely coalition will last. But it has demonstrated that leaders with wildly different agendas can come together to address challenges.

I suspect that none of this would have happened without Covid. Who saw that coming? A global pandemic that demanded cooperation on the local, national and



Up to 500,000 people demonstrated for more social justice in Israel in November 2011.

international level. That the pandemic hit us during the nightmare of nationalism and xenophobia unleashed by Trump and Brexit and many other nasty players (like Netanyahu and his partners) seems to me like a bit of Divine intervention – but at what cost!

It is impossible for me to reflect on the past ten years from a purely historical perspective. I am also acutely aware of the personal and professional changes that I have experienced as well. These all seem very intertwined.

First the big picture. In 2011 President Katsav of Israel was convicted of rape and

other misconduct. It felt like the rule of law triumphed. No one was immune from being prosecuted for bad behavior. There was also a wave of social protests, that brought tens of thousands of, mostly young, Israelis to the streets. The repetitive chant was simply “The people demand social justice”. It felt like the politicians had no choice but to listen and to respond.

It was also the year that all Jewish (and some non-Jewish) Israelis came together demanding that the government deal with Hamas and attain the release of a young soldier, Gilad Shalit, who had been held in captivity in Gaza since 2006.

Alas, all of these turned out to be ephemeral, temporary movements of little political significance. Politicians continued to be corrupt with few political consequences. The rule of law, it turned out, certainly didn’t apply to Palestinians on the West Bank. Israeli Arabs continued to be treated as second-class citizens in so many ways.

The struggle for human rights in Israel and on the West Bank and Gaza is still met with tremendous resistance among the general Israeli populace that is unable to overcome existential fears of security when it relates to the suffering of Palestinians. Sadly, the Palestinian leadership has not demonstrated the ability to respond to these fears, which Hamas cleverly manipulates. And so, the vicious cycle of violence and hatred tragically continues.

The leaders of the social protests were quickly absorbed into mainstream political parties. Gilad Shalit was released but Israeli society is more fractured and polarized than ever. I want to believe that the



Uwe Gräbe



itzuvit/wikimedia commons

One of many reasons for the wave of protests was skyrocketing rental prices. Here on Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv, protesters set up a tent village in July 2011.

new government hints that it is possible to do things differently but it is too soon to tell.

Professionally, a lot has changed for me and for my congregation in Jerusalem. I founded Congregation Kol HaNeshama in 1985 and was blessed to oversee its growth and growing influence over the decades. We became part of the fabric of Jerusalem and a national symbol for liberal, pluralistic Judaism in a country dominated by religious extremism. We were also a magnet attracting Jews and non-Jews from all over the world to experience our joyful worship and commitment to inclusiveness.

Covid has changed all that. When Covid disrupted international travel, visiting groups became a thing of the past. At local level, attending services seems quaint and unnecessary when you can turn on your computer and join a Zoom service as

you prepare the Shabbat dinner. How do we maintain a sense of community in this new reality? It will take time to understand how all this will play out.

My role in the congregation changed dramatically when I retired. After thirty-three years of leading a community, it was clear to me that it was time for new, younger leadership. This was not a simple process. It was especially challenging for me to hand over the life’s work to someone else. It was complicated for the congregation as well. I am happy to report that I am thrilled with the young rabbi who is now leading the congregation. He has been especially creative in his response to the challenges of Covid.

What will the next ten years bring us? Covid has taught us that the unimaginable worse-case scenario is possible. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav said, “If you believe that you can mess things up, you must believe that you can fix things as well”. I pray that the next ten years will be filled with learning from each other and rebuilding our fractured communities and our ailing world. With God’s help, this is possible.

*Levi Weiman-Kelman is the founding rabbi of Congregation Kol HaNeshama in Jerusalem and the President of Rabbis for Human Rights.*



## Offspring of the Schneller Owls

**Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS).** The pair of owls in the steeple of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) has had plenty of offspring this summer. Five owl chicks have hatched from the original seven eggs.

A staff member discovered them in their nest on one of the upper steps when he went to check on the church clock.

Two of the chicks had fallen out of the nest out of fear. Because they could not yet fly, he carefully lifted them back into their nest.

Director George Haddad attributes the fact that there are so many owls this year to the fact that farmers can no longer use pesticides on the fields around the school for financial reasons, which has a very positive effect on the bird populations. The fact that many Lebanese can no longer afford the cartridges for their rifles, with which they used to enjoy hunting birds, also plays a good role here. The Bekaa Valley, where the JLSS is located, is considered one of the most important resting and breeding areas for migratory birds between Europe and Africa.

For the JLSS, the owls are a blessing. For years, the school has had no more problems with mice. The pair of owls themselves have long since become accustomed to the proximity to humans and also to the fact that the bells ring from time to time next to their young ones.



## New child protection policy at JLSS

**Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS/EMS).** The Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) has summarized its long-standing rules on child protection in an official policy document. On the one hand, it is about protecting children from injuries caused by external sources of danger, but on the other hand, it is also about the relationship between teachers and students inside and outside of school. For example, teachers and instructors are not allowed to take students they have in class in their own cars or give them private lessons. Different rules apply to children they do not have in class.

The policy also states that the school should not be influenced by outside forces in its decisions, whether in hiring staff, business relationships, or performance reviews of its students. Everyone at JLSS has



Children and young adults should be able to grow up self-determined and unscathed at the JLSS.

the right to equal treatment, regardless of gender, ethnic or religious background.

In addition, the child protection policy stipulates that no one may exert political influence on the children and young people or on colleagues. Politics may not be discussed on the entire school campus. What sounds like a very harsh restriction to German ears must be seen against the background of the political tensions in Lebanon in general, where discussions between supporters of different political parties quickly spiral into violent confrontations.

Furthermore, it deals with topics such as bullying, sexual abuse, but also how to deal with homosexuality, which is a very sensitive and taboo subject in Lebanon. The policy stipulates that this issue is dealt neutrally and discreetly at the school and that homosexual young people must not suffer any disadvantage.

The policy also decisively addresses the issue of gender equality, which is a high value at JLSS. Boys and girls should be familiarized with this topic at an early age so that they can later advocate for gender justice in their contexts as adults.

Similarly, the policy is very progressive on the issue of children from divorced families. It is postulated that children need a mother and a father, regardless of what the respective confessional courts, which pass judgements in family law in Lebanon, have decreed in the individual case. The school commits itself that it will seek talks with parents who deny the other parent access to their own children on the basis of such a ruling, in order to find a solution in the best interests of the child.

Within the entire fellowship of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity, the issue of child protection is very high on the agenda. For example, the Anglican diocese in Jerusalem, to which the Theodor Schneller School in Amman belongs, has also developed a new child protection policy. Some institutions within the diocese are already implementing it. EMS partner churches in Indonesia and southern India are also working on a new child protection policy for their institutions. The EMS is currently building a platform for all those interested in this topic as part of its “Child Friendly Church” (CFC) concept.

## More space for the carpenters

**Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS).** With the start of the new school year, the carpentry workshop of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) will move into a large hangar that has been completed in recent months. The building that previously housed the carpentry training had to be closed unexpectedly because settlement cracks had affected the statics.

Until the end of the last school year, the workshop for the carpentry trainees had been temporarily housed in the school auditorium. The new hall was built with funds from the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) and the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) on a site between the school and the former farm.

## Costs finally covered

**Amman (TSS).** The Theodor Schneller School (TSS) has finally acquired a new sewage system. This became necessary



The foundations of the new hall already show how large the new carpentry building will eventually be.

because the Mutakamilah bus company, which had leased part of the large premises from the TSS ten years ago, damaged the existing sewage pipes during earthworks. Shortly afterwards, the company went bankrupt. For a long time, the question was who would pay for the new system. Now Mutakamilah has taken over the costs for laying a new sewage system for the TSS. However, the necessary permits are still needed to finally connect it to the municipal sewer under the main road in front of the school.

## Good start to the new school year

**Amman (TSS).** The Theodor Schneller School (TSS) has taken several measures to ensure that pupils have a good start to the new school year after a difficult time during Covid. The children and young people in the boarding homes will receive remedial coaching in certain subjects such as Arabic, English or mathematics. There will also be group programs on motivation, anger management, emotional and social intelligence, self-confidence and dealing with negative thinking. The children will also receive social and psycho-

logical counselling through creative activities. And finally, the educators want to increasingly seek contact with the parents or guardians of the children and young adults in order to sound out the children's needs by organizing meetings with parents or guardians to find the best possibilities and ways for the children.

In the field of vocational training, the TSS plans to contact large car manufacturers, such as Toyota, Isuzu and Kia, as well as catering businesses, such as posh restaurants and five-star hotels, so that apprentices at the TSS can eventually do internships there. Both the quality of vocational training and the number of apprentices is to be increased in all sectors. The TSS wants to closely monitor trends and new opportunities on the labor market in order to possibly set up new programs or improve existing apprenticeship programs.

## Support for the Ahli Arab Hospital

Donations amounting to 8,113 Euro have been raised by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) for the Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza. The money was provided to this institution of the Anglican partner church of the EMS for the treatment of people who were wounded during the recent conflict in May this year.

**Stuttgart/Jerusalem (EMS).** The clashes, which were the heaviest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in years, lasted eleven days. Air strikes killed more than 260 people on both sides, with several thousand injured. In addition, the infrastructure in the Gaza Strip suffered severe damage.

Reconstruction will take many years, but the economy and quality of life will continue to suffer for a long time to come, writes Archbishop Hosam Naoum in a letter of thanks to the EMS. Fortunately, the buildings of the Ahli Arab hospital were not badly hit, but all the window panes on the premises were smashed by blasts in the surrounding area. The financial pressure on the facility was immense, however, mainly because additional bandages and medicine had to be procured for the many wounded, the generators to produce electricity for the med-

ical equipment were in almost constant use and the entire staff was on continuous duty and had accumulated overtime.

“Your donation will help us minimize the financial deficit. It will help our doctors, nurses, and all staff at the hospital to cope with the crushing influx of patients,” writes Naoum (the Theodor Schneller School in Amman also belongs to his church).



The Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza cared for many injured people during the recent conflict.

EMS/Maurer

## Foundation earnings earmarked for language lab and monitors

**Stuttgart (EVS).** This year, the Executive Committee of the *Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* decided to donate €14,500 from the foundation's earnings to equip the language laboratory at the Theodor Schneller School. The Johann Ludwig Schneller School is to receive €5,800 to purchase monitors for the classrooms on the upper floor of the new carpentry workshop.



**SCHNELLER STIFTUNG –  
ERZIEHUNG ZUM FRIEDEN**

From the funds set aside by the Foundation for “contingencies”, a maximum of €2,000 is to be made available on a one-off basis for an exhaust gas measurement system for the heating system at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. The two Directors of the schools were connected online to the meeting so that they could report on the situation in their countries and at the schools.

## Short video on the Schneller schools

**Stuttgart (EVS).** The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) produced a video for this year's regional mission festival, presenting the work of

EMSBuck



The children's joy in their learning at the Schneller schools is also evident in the YouTube film.

the two schools in an appealing way. The four-minute video features a former volunteer who talks about her service at the Theodor Schneller School and about life at the school itself.

The two Directors, Reverend Khaled Freij from Amman and Reverend George

Haddad from Khirbet Kanafar, explain why peace education is so important in their countries and how this is implemented at the schools. This film is highly recommended to all those who would like to introduce their friends and acquaintances to the special nature of Schneller's work. The video can be viewed online at <https://tinyurl.com/Schneller-Schulen>

## SiMO cancelled again

**Stuttgart (EMS).** In mid-August, after lengthy consultations, the Executive Committee of the Study in the Middle East (SiMO) programme decided not to send any students to the Near East School for Theology (NEST) in Beirut in the autumn. This is the second time in a row that an important project in the cooperation with partners in the Middle East cannot take place. Whereas last year the Corona pandemic was the main reason for the cancellation, this time it is the devastating situation in Lebanon.

By mid-August, it had become clear that the country had no foreign currency at all

## Cordial invitation!

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) invites all its members and friends of the Schneller work to the annual General Meeting on



Unfortunately, this year's general meeting can only take place online. The forecasts regarding the development of the pandemic in the autumn are too uncertain.

The Schneller Association would have liked to invite everyone to an in-presence meeting again. The Luther Church in Fellbach had already offered to host the meeting. The wife of Theodor Schneller, Johanna née Allmendinger, came from Fellbach. The two were married by Theodor's brother, Ludwig Schneller, at the Luther Church in Fellbach. The Schneller Association is now considering whether the joint service with the Fellbach congregation can be streamed so that anyone interested can participate online.

All members will receive an official invitation by post at the beginning of October with further details.

to import fuel. Fuel is not only needed to transport goods but also to generate electricity. As a result, both communication and medical care have suffered massive disruptions.

It is particularly tragic that the international community has already promised Lebanon considerable amounts of aid. A conference of international donors had pledged over €310 million in early August. However, these funds cannot be disbursed until there is a functioning government in Lebanon to ensure that the aid reaches the people. But so far, all attempts at forming a government have ended in failure.

## Christmas postcard from Amman

**Stuttgart (EVS).** The postcard with the Christmas motif of the glass windows at the Theodor Schneller School in Amman will no longer be reissued. This is why the sales office of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity is offering the remaining stock at a very reasonable price.

A pack of one hundred postcards costs €10 plus shipping. It goes without saying that you are free to make larger donations as you wish. The postcards can be ordered by email at [vertrieb@ems-online.org](mailto:vertrieb@ems-online.org)



# “Trust the new ways!”

## Alumni reminisce

Anselm Kreh together with his wife Susanne and their three children, was head of training and technical director of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) from 2003 to 2006. Today, the 53-year-old works at the Waiblingen vocational training centre and as a lecturer at the Ludwig-Schlaich-Akademie. For many years he has been active on the Executive Committee of the Schneller Association, organises trips to Lebanon and is also a synod member in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg.

*What experience will you never forget from your time at the JLSS?*

The great hospitality towards our family! At the end, one of my co-workers handed me the key to his flat and said: “Beit

poor heating system. One tragic incident was the death of a student who had gone hunting with a friend at the weekend and a gun accidentally went off. The problem for the school was that a Muslim student had shot a Christian student. The director at the time, Riad Kassis, had to spend a year negotiating between the two families to avoid a vendetta. It was very touching when the mother of the dead pupil later gave birth to a son again.

*Who would you like to meet again from that time?*

Due to the many trips to the school over the past 14 years, I have been able to meet former and new staff members again and again. The time we spent together with Director Riad Kassis and his family was something special. Our two daughters were like sisters. Their friendship is still going strong today.

*What is so special about the Schneller work?*

You cannot praise the transparency of the work, its interfaith and progressive approach highly enough. This is also evident now during the pandemic and in the situation of uncertainty in Lebanon. What is being done at the school deserves the highest respect.

*What would you advise someone going to the JLSS not to do under any circumstances?*

Beware of thinking that you can judge and evaluate the situation in Lebanon. One can only admire how the people there are coping with a situation that is so difficult and inhuman. My advice: “Trust the new ways.” That was also our song when we left for Lebanon.



Kreh

The Kreh family still has a good friendship with the family of the director at the time, Riad Kassis.

beitak”. In other words, “My house is your house”. I also remember when our neighbour, a Syrian farm worker who lived in a tent behind our house, brought us woolen blankets. She knew that we were always so cold in winter because of our

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Editors: Katja Dorothea Buck (executive),  
Dr. Uwe Gräbe, Felix Weiß

Translations to English: Chris Blowers

Vogelsangstraße 62 | 70197 Stuttgart  
Tel.: +49 (0) 711 636 78-39 | Fax: +49 (0) 711 636 78-45  
E-Mail: [evs@ems-online.org](mailto:evs@ems-online.org) | [www.evs-online.org](http://www.evs-online.org)  
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Contact address of Swiss Association for  
Schneller Schools in the Middle East (SVS):

Pfr. Ursus Waldmeier, Rüt mattstrasse 13, CH-5004 Aarau  
PC-Konto: 40-11277-8

IBAN: CH05 8148 8000 0046 6023 2

[info@schnellerschulen.org](mailto:info@schnellerschulen.org) | [www.schnellerschulen.org](http://www.schnellerschulen.org)

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*Let us consider how we can stir up one another to love. Let us help one another to do good works.*

Hebrews 10,24



**EVS** Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools

Vogelsangstr. 62 | 70197 Stuttgart | Tel. (0711) 636 78-39



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