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# SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



PRESERVING THE CREATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST



EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools

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Dear Reader,

the Middle East is associated with many crises but rarely with the climate crisis. Nevertheless, global warming has already had disastrous effects on the region. There is less and less rainfall. Summers are getting hotter. The Max Planck Institute predicts that by 2050, average temperatures in the region will rise by 4 degrees. There are already areas today which have suffered from drought for the past 20 years. The World Bank calculates that by 2025, an estimated 80 to 100 million people in the region will be directly affected by the lack of water. In addition, the number of torrential rainfalls are on the increase, sometimes accompanied by devastating floods. And the sea level in the Mediterranean will rise. In 2016, the World Bank declared the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) as one of the regions that will be most affected by rising sea levels.



The war in Syria shows the extent of potential conflict which climate changes harbour. The drought in the north east of the country which has been ongoing for many years brought people to the brink of despair, forcing them to leave – this is fertile ground for warmongers.

This issue of the Schneller Magazine examines the question of how difficult it is to preserve the Creation in times of crisis and war. Gabriele Conrad-Hamzé reports on an environmental project that was destroyed by the war in Syria. Silvan Eppinger explains the water problem in Jordan. And two former EMS volunteers reflect on the problem of waste in Jordan. A critical opinion comes from Paul Abi Rached in Lebanon. And finally Simon Awad reports on the Evangelical Environmental Education Center in Palestine.

There is positive news from the Schneller schools. And we are delighted that the Ambassador of Palestine in Berlin, Dr. Khouloud Daibes, has sent us an exclusive report on the successful restoration of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Hoping that you will find a lot of interesting articles in this issue, I extend to you heartfelt greetings on behalf of the entire editorial team.

Best regards

Katja Dorothea Buck

## NOT ONLY A POINT OF VIEW

Actually, Lebanon is a beautiful and diverse country – with high Lebanese Mountains that are snow-covered even into summer; the tree-covered hills of the Chouf; the green, fertile Bekaa Valley; the valleys and the grassy hills of the border areas in the south along the Litani River – and the vast expanse of the sea! I love to stand on a hill, overlooking the wide landscape bathing in bright sunshine, extending to the horizon that is bordered by the sea, and breathing in deeply the scent of nature. What a beautiful world this is!

But Lebanon is also a country that is one of the most densely populated on Earth and one of the greatest polluters in the world. It appears that every beautiful place with a view has to be topped by a villa or the concrete blocks of a church; where scrap rusts away along the coasts that are strewn with plastic rubbish; where I often have to close the windows straight away after attempting to air my house in the morning to keep out the stench and exhaust fumes of power generators and cars.

Once, on a parish outing, an elderly lady was so inspired that she exclaimed, “What a beautiful world this is!” But then with resignation she added: “Only the people are so bad!”

“Subdue the earth!” For centuries, people have been brought up in the fatal misunderstanding that the Earth must be regarded as an object over which I stand, which I own and master, with which I can do what I like, which I can exploit to keep house and keep myself occupied, and from which I can reap the highest profit. At

least it was never regarded as “wickedness” or a sin. Is this only a point of view?

But on the other hand, many people seem to forget the passage from the second account of the Creation: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” The Earth has been entrusted to us. It should receive our grateful respect, our care and support, perhaps like an elderly mother from whom we have received so much and continue to receive. Can we look at the Earth in this way?

**“Praised be You, my Lord,  
through Sister Mother  
Earth, who sustains us and  
governs us and who pro-  
duces varied fruits with  
coloured flowers and  
herbs.”**

*From the Canticle of the Sun  
by Saint Francis of Assisi*

When white settlers spread over the expanse of North America, they built solid houses, drove poles into the ground and raised fences – that was their way of looking at things! The Indians could not understand this at all: “But the Earth is our Mother,” they said, “how can you hurt your Mother so much and drive arrows into her heart?” That was their point of view. Is it only a point of view?



There is hardly a more beautiful place in Lebanon than the Qadisha valley.

Saint Francis, who knew nothing of the existence of the Indians or their view of nature, did not see the Earth as a possession but as our Mother, ... “who sustains us and governs us and who produces varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs”. This is the way Saint Francis rightly understood the Bible, which does not call the Earth a mother as such but describes her being and her purpose: “The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground”, he made them “spring up” and “grow”. One could even say instead, the Lord God caused the Earth to “bear fruit”. If we regarded the Earth as our Mother, we would treat her differently.

Once, St Francis spoke to a brother who was tending the garden and said he should not plant all the soil with edible herbs but leave part of the soil free to allow space for grass to grow so that Mother Earth could bear our sisters, the flowers, during all seasons of the year.

Actually, Lebanon is a beautiful country, a country with many problems but

also hope. More and more people go to the supermarket with their own shopping bags and are no longer ridiculed by packers when they refuse plastic bags and instead hand over their nets and textile bags. There are more and more people who join initiatives and have private firms or charitable recycling companies collect plastic, glass and paper. In this country, beakers made of recycled glass are now “in” with people who seemed to have re-learned that they cannot eat money and concrete.

“Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth, who sustains us and governs us and who produces varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.” May God always lead us to pray and sing his praises – and then to act!

*Jürgen Henning has been Pastor of the German-speaking Evangelical congregation in Beirut for the past year.*

## IMPOSSIBLE TO PRESERVE THE CREATION

### How the war in Syria destroys environmental protection

**Many people in Syria would love to do something for the environment and nature. But the war and the enormous rise in the cost of living rob them from any strength to counteract the terrible environmental desecration. Gabriele Conrad-Hamzé once had an environmental centre. Today, it acts as an improvised school for refugee children.**

I would have loved to write an article about the preservation of the Creation in times of war and crisis. But today, I find this very difficult. Before the war, the preservation of the Creation was a major concern for my husband and me. In the summer of 2007, we built a large building based on ecological principles and made of basalt rock and wood in Era, in the district of Soueida. We wanted to provide children and young adults with a place where they could examine environmental issues. Our environment club once had over 300 members. One biology teacher, a doctor, a pharmacist, an agricultural engineer, a vet and many other interested parties helped on a voluntary basis. We were an officially registered association.

The building had four rooms, a small library, a kitchen, toilets and a large hall. That's where we held classes. We invited people to attend public panel discussions, for example on the use of pesticides and their health risks. We organised games and theatre performance on environmental topics. We planted a large garden of 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> based on ecological principles.

At regular intervals, we conducted campaigns against environmental and air pollution, against wasting water, the use of pesticides and even against smoking. We appealed to the population to reforest neglected areas and along roads. And we



There are practically no photos of the environmental work in Era. Many photos were destroyed in the jihadist attack. The crocus flowers on the dead leaves represent the hope that Syria will one day flourish again.

also organised regular village clean-ups to collect waste with our own hands. It certainly left an impression. It became apparent that the children and young adults were explaining and teaching their parents on the needs of the environment. Impressed by our activities, the governor visited us several times and even the Minister of the Environment came from Damascus.

Today, it is difficult to get to Era, even from where we live, and our environmental work lies in tatters. We continued our work after the outbreak of war until the summer of 2013. But when dangerous incidents took place on the access roads to the club, we were unable to keep on bearing the responsibility for the people who came to us. So we shut down our environmental work temporarily – in the hope we could resume as soon as possible.

Sadly, our hopes were dashed. The people in our district were severely maltreated: attacks, break-ins, bloody massacres by the IS in summer 2018 when 300 people were killed, kidnappings, devastation, occasional missile attacks, to name but a few. All this deeply unsettled the people. Add to this the fact that the cost of living has risen to such an extent that even an average wage earner can hardly get by any more. This drives the people into apathy and depression; despair is spreading; poverty is on the increase. What was also unbearable was the shameless behaviour of war profiteers who amassed fortunes by smuggling heating oil, weapons or drugs, for example.

Even today, through, many people feel a great need to preserve the Creation. But their hands are tied. Lethal chemicals were used. None of the trees we planted exist

any more. They were either sold off as firewood, destroyed or just allowed to wither because there was nobody left to look after them. Over 10,000 trees in our plantation were brutally cut down, among them many old olive, pistachio and almond trees. Our large building was devastated and my husband was kidnapped. In the summer, large areas of corn fields were burnt. It was never discovered whether this was due to deliberate arson or negligence. A massive hailstorm destroyed the harvest belonging to the fruit farmers. Everywhere pollution has increased. It was impossible to preserve God's Creation. The people are tired and have lost hope.

In summer 2016, we re-opened the gates of our environment club again – however, this time it was to house refugee children from the north of Syria. They had never attended school due to the turmoils of war. Together with their families, they now live close by in a camp of squalid tents. About 80 to 100 children come to school every day. Success is slow in coming. But it does us good to find a new, wonderful and useful task again.

*Gabriele Conrad-Hamzé has lived in Soueida in Syria for many years.*

## LONG-TERM STRATEGIES TO COMBAT DROUGHT

### The water crisis and climate change in Jordan

The water crisis is becoming acute as a result of climate change. This requires a pro-active approach to dealing with water and setting new priorities for its use. But rethinking is difficult.

Jordan today is already one of the countries in the world where water is the most scarce. Predictions for the coming decades are pessimistic. Climate change is bringing a rise in temperature but at the same time, the amount of rainfall is diminishing. The water level of the Dead Sea shows how severe the water crisis is. 20 years ago, large hotels were built along the banks of the Jordan. At the beginning, bathers could enter the salty water directly from the hotel. Now, long stairways go down to the water. Since the hotel was built, the water level has sunk

by more than 20 metres. And every year the level keeps on falling.

This drop has many reasons. Large volumes of water have long been withdrawn from the Jordan and its tributaries. Only a tenth of the previous amount of water flows into the Dead Sea. The water is used for drinking water supply and also to irrigate fields in the Jordan valley where food is cultivated for the whole country. In the past few decades, Amman has grown considerably. To meet the needs of its inhabitants, the city draws water from the entire surrounding area.

Climate change now makes the water situation in Jordan even more serious. Scientists predict that by the end of the 21st century, up to 30 percent less rain will fall in the country compared to a century



Uwe Gräbe

The path from the hotel to the water is becoming longer and longer – the Dead Sea at Ein Bokek in Israel.



before. In addition, rainfall is more seldom as a result of climate change. Dry periods are followed by short, heavy showers that are not so easy to collect and use. Ground-water wells are also affected. The Theodor Schneller School has two of them. Less and less water is fed to the underground water resources.

The emerging water crisis and the consequences which climate change will have on the water situation have been known for some time. For several years, the Jordanian government has regarded water supply as an urgent problem. This situation would require a comprehensive strategy to protect resources and identify priorities for the future utilisation of water. The sectors that have so far consumed large volumes of water, such as agriculture and industry, would have to ration water in favour of supplying the population with drinking water.

Alone the implementation of such a strategy is proving difficult. Over the past decades, Jordan has accepted a large number of people who were forced to flee to neighbouring countries due to wars. At the same time, water is closely linked to the economic development that is urgently needed to offer people prospects for their future. In light of this tense internal and external political situation, it is proving difficult to preserve water resources and reaching a consensus on its sustainable use.

One major project that was discussed in previous years is the construction of a water pipeline from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. The pipeline would convey seawater to the Dead Sea where it would be desalinated and pumped to Amman for use as drinking water there. At the same

time, the canal would help refill the Dead Sea. However, the construction and operation of this project would be complicated and expensive. Critics also warn of the ecological risks.

A different mindset within society and sensitisation of inhabitants to the issue of water scarcity are needed to initiate changes. There is also a joint project by the Jordanian and German governments that breaks new ground. Part of the project would be to train women plumbers – this is a profession which women have done far rarely carried out, especially in Jordan. Women plumbers have an advantage over their male colleagues: In Jordan, it is unusual for artisans to call at an address unless there is at least one male resident present. On the other hand, women plumbers can only carry out repairs if the lady of the house is present alone. This competitive advantage means that after training, women plumbers would earn their own income and would help to complete repairs much faster – and this will perhaps also save a little water.

*Dr Silvan Eppinger is member of the board of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools and wrote his doctorate thesis on issues of water legislation in Jordan.*

## WHEN THERE ARE NO WASTE BINS FAR AND WIDE

### Observations of a young German in Jordan

**Only because rubbish is visible everywhere in Jordan does not mean by any means that Jordanians produce more rubbish than Germans. However, environmental awareness could be much greater in both countries, says Felix Thier who was volunteer at the Theodor Schneller School until this summer.**

**W**hen you walk along the streets in most towns in Jordan, you will immediately notice one thing. There is a lot of rubbish lying about – from plastic bags and bottles through to cartons, packaging and coffee beakers. People just drop nearly everything as soon as they see no more use for them. It's quite usual to simply throw rubbish away outside.

Not only do you notice rubbish on the streets in towns and villages but also in nature. Meadows and beaches are covered in plastic packaging and bottles. Plastic bags seem to just “grow” on trees. I've seen this in every possible place and after my trips through Jordan, I cannot say that this is an exception.

When I went shopping, everything was often packed in two or three plastic bags and the shop assistants simply could not understand when I refused their plastic bags. But in most cases, they packed my purchases in only one bag afterwards. Even packed items, such as packs of toilet paper, were again wrapped in plastic.

However, there are reasons which at least make this custom a little more understandable. Firstly, there are hardly any rub-

bish bins in many places in Jordan. Although there are a few in the centre of Amman, the modern districts of Amman cannot be compared to the rest of Jordan. Rubbish is not sorted either. Usually it is all swept up and burnt. So a possible and perhaps explanatory thought would be: “If my rubbish is just burnt anyway, what's the difference whether I throw my rubbish in the rubbish bin or on the ground?”

At the same time, as much as I can judge during my stay, there is hardly any awareness for clean waste disposal. In general, there is very little interest in the issue of the environment. Many Jordanian citizens also have other problems of a more essential nature to deal with as many of them are affected by extreme poverty and/or unemployment. In this kind of a situation there is little time to ask what should be done with rubbish.

From this viewpoint, it seems that waste production in Jordan is a much greater problem than here in Germany. But appearances are deceptive. Jordan has an annual volume of 2 to 3 million metric tonnes of municipal waste (figures for 2018). Compared to this, Germany has an annual volume of 51 million metric tonnes of municipal waste (referred to in 2012 as a rising “waste trend”). Of course, Germany has eight times the number of inhabitants as Jordan. But even if the calculation were based on a “Germany with 10 million inhabitants” (Jordan has a population of about 9.7 million inhabitants), the result would be an annual municipal waste volume that is more than double Jordan's. This is an interesting fact that

should make us rethink our own consumer behaviour, our domestic waste production and its disposal. Here I not only refer to domestic and municipal waste that constitutes a very small percentage of total waste production.

The fact that a lot of rubbish is noticeable does not mean that waste production is above average. Nevertheless, waste in Jordan has consequences for the environment and is just as toxic for humans as it is for animals. For this reason there are always new projects to combat the grow-

ing mountain of waste or attempt to create more awareness for sustainability and the environment.

Meanwhile, state refuse workers in Amman roam the streets collecting rubbish. And initiatives such as “One Dead Sea Is Enough” are intended to attract people’s attention to this problem. A small-scale “Fridays for Future” even took place in Amman and the Jordan volunteers, i.e. we, attended. Since demonstrations are rather frowned upon in Jordan, we joined the official refuse workers collecting rubbish. However, during the meal afterwards, everything was completely packed in plastic. This probably wiped out the “ecological balance” for the evening. But it shows all the more that greater awareness must be created for the environment.

*Felix Thier was ecumenical volunteer at the Theodor Schneller School in Amman in 2018/2019. He wrote this text for his internet blog.*



EMS/Waiblinger

**A boy at the Theodor Schneller School collects waste blowing in the wind.**

## I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE

### New initiatives to combat the waste problem in Jordan

**When you are new to a country, many things become clearer. During her time as volunteer in Irbid, Amelie Pflugfelder discovered that Jordanians are also bothered by all the rubbish lying everywhere in Jordan.**

There is a lot of rubbish lying about everywhere in Jordan. Really a lot – plastic bags on the side of the road, the large pile of rubbish next to our house or packaging hanging in the bushes. Several times a day, I also see people throwing their rubbish out of their car window or simply dropping it on the pavements. And that bothers me very much. Not only because Irbid loses its attractiveness for me but also because in the long term it damages nature in Jordan. It's nothing new that plastic and other rubbish are destabilising our ecosystem, polluting the oceans and seas and affecting our health.

But nevertheless there are enough and partly understandable reasons why so much rubbish is lying about here. There are hardly any public rubbish bins in Irbid, except for a few grey collection containers here and there on the roadside. I have never seen any private rubbish bins. Most of the time, domestic rubbish is simply placed on the roadside and collected at some time or other. Very often, rubbish is burnt in the middle of the town. I doubt very much whether there is any system such as the yellow bag as here in Germany.

At the same time, Jordan has experienced a drastic increase in population in recent years. Refugees from Iraq and Syria have swollen the population and this also

increases the amount of waste produced. A further factor is that nearly everything is packed in plastic bags. Fresh bread, purchases from the supermarket and even loose oranges are packed in bags immediately. When we go eating in a restaurant or are invited to a school function, water is packed in small beakers with aluminium lids – but this is easy to understand for practical and hygienic reasons.

However, I still doubt whether more rubbish is produced on average in Jordan than in Germany. I just see more of it here. But it's mainly because the system of waste management is not sufficiently developed here. And because rubbish is probably not exported to other countries (such as China, for example) so that it does not simply "disappear". All the rubbish I see makes me again aware how many throw-away products I consume myself.

Of course, it helps when we buy our vegetables and fruit in jute shopping bags instead of adding to the mountain of plastic bags. In Jordan, it is really easy to avoid rubbish. It's simple to take our own containers and fill them up with hummus. And now the baker automatically hands over fresh bread to us unpacked. But still, when I open our fridge or the kitchen cupboards, what I mainly see is disposable packaging. So in the end, I am just as much part of the overall problem despite my jute shopping bag.

The fact that I am not the only one who is bothered about all the rubbish is demonstrated by many projects and campaigns, many of them recent. For example, many young Jordanians organise a weekly cam-



**It is not only the children and young adults at the Theodor Schneller School who regularly collect rubbish from the school site. Meanwhile, there are many clean-up initiatives in Jordan.**

paign called “ECO Hikers”. Armed with rubbish bags, the volunteers meet and together they collect the rubbish along the selected hiking trail. There are also smaller NGOs that organise clean-ups. For example, the “Ahel al Balad” NGO which intends to sensitise the population by postings and statistics about the waste problem. The Jordan Green Building Council is also addressing the waste problem. It has opened recycling stations in Amman to promote waste sorting and recycling. It provides information about the importance of recycling in (online) brochures and at public events.

Germany is also investing in waste projects in Jordan. Syrian and Jordanian workers are paid to collect, sort and recycle waste. This not only preserves the environment, it also reduces health risks and prevents conflicts by working together. And of course, this encourages Syrian ref-

ugees to stay in Jordan and not to move on to Germany.

*Amelie Pflugfelder was an ecumenical volunteer at the integrated school for the blind in Irbid (Jordan) in 2017/2018. She wrote this text for her internet blog.*

## PERSONAL GAIN IS MORE IMPORTANT

### Environmental criminality and climate change in Lebanon

**Lebanon has a great history. The country is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. It is well known for its paradisaical splendour. However, since the civil war (1975 to 1989), it has lost a lot of its beauty. The reason why the destruction of the environment continues unabated today is the fault of politicians and church leaders for whom other things are more important than the preservation of the Creation, writes Paul Abi Rached.**

Lebanon was once regarded as the Switzerland of the Orient. Then came many years of conflicts with their direct consequences (bomb attacks, fires, deforestation) and their indirect consequences (sewage and waste problems). The destruction of this jewel of the Creation continues today. It is threatened by people, their ignorance, their greed, a lack of sense of responsibility and impunity for environmental criminality. Apparently, political and religious leaders lack the will and vision to promote the good development of the country. Lebanon experienced the pinnacle of environmental desecration when the waste problem that has existed since the civil war degenerated into a national crisis in 2015 and the population was literally forced to live in the waste that littered the streets and piled up in front of houses.

Now, when we should set the course for the future of Lebanon, we discover with regret that none of our political and religious leaders have understood what is at stake. Nor do they understand the relationships between global warming in the

south-east Mediterranean region or the mission to preserve this area which contains so many sites belonging to the UNESCO World Heritage. For over 25 years, the Lebanese civil society consisting of associations and scientists have been sensitising people to the enormous challenges we are faced with and which will become even greater, according to the international IPCC climate council as well as scientists from the Mediterranean region. We must expect that climate change will aggravate the water crisis in Lebanon.

We will be unable to stem climate change without a rapid change in awareness and the implementation of suitable measures. In 2010, Lebanon had 4.7 million inhabitants. In 2019, as a result of the Syrian crisis, the number had grown to over 6 million. And in 2030, it is estimated there will be 10 million. We must start now to preserve our natural resources. Unfortunately, many decisions go against the principles defined by the IPCC regarding a turnaround in energy policy in industry, to protect biodiversity or reduce water consumption.

We build new waste incineration plants that are intended to produce less air pollution and reduce the carbon footprint instead of considering how existing industrial plants could use waste to generate power. By burning reusable materials instead of recycling them, we are losing the opportunity to lower our raw material requirements.

When it comes to water, we also fail to tackle the root of the problem. In Beirut, we consume three times as much water as



Katja Bueck

**At least in one pile – rubbish on the beautiful Corniche in Beirut.**

the French metropolis of Lyon, which has the same number of inhabitants. A lot of water is lost because sewage pipes are old and cracked.

The dramatic pollution of the largest water reservoir in Lebanon also shows that the state is incapable of managing existing resources. The politicians responsible want to solve the water problem by building large dams that destroy whole valleys and valuable ecosystems, including some of the sites protected by UNESCO. For example, a dam will be built near Bisri. It will destroy a valley through which Jesus walked on his return from Sidon.

When it comes to the recommendations of the IPCC or the experts of the European Union concerning the priorities and aims to adapt to climate change, biodiversity or a water strategy, we cast all proposals for sustainable development to the winds. As an NGO we have appealed to religious leaders. Their word carries weight at political level. Unfortunately, the church shows more interest in finan-

cial earnings than in the preservation of the Creation. It provides its lands for rubbish dumps, dams or new residential estates.

The greed, the lack of responsibility and the absence of an overall vision among all our political and religious leaders expose our country to enormous health and environmental risks. In the end, this may lead to conflicts between groups of the population, as was the case in Syria. Before the war, climate impacts already resulted in an economic crisis.

*Reverend Paul Abi Rached is founder and president of the Lebanese non-governmental organisation Terre.*

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION UNDER OCCUPATION

### About the Evangelical Environmental Education Center in Beit Jala

The main objectives of the Evangelical Environmental Center in Beit Jala are to spread environmental awareness, especially among the younger generation. It is not only a matter of issues concerning the protection of the environment and nature, but also to provide children and youth with a positive identity to their Palestinian land.

**P**alestine receives a brunt of the effects of the changing global climate. Palestine is suffering environmental instability fueled by population growth, water shortages, drought, desertification, high food prices, and the loss of biodiversity and land. All this is then exacerbated by the present political situation.

The Environmental Education Center (EEC), a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and The Holy Land, is committed to alleviating the resulting devastation toward nature and people in this region. Their mission works to support the development of society in a way that reflects the church's mission to care for creation. The center's main objectives are to spread environmental awareness, educate the public, care for creation, and develop sustainable solutions for the future. The EEC also works to attain environmental justice and develop a collective identity to the land.

Much of the center's work focuses on targeted groups, commonly women, youth and children from all religious communities. When the voices and actions of



Young people plant a tree together.



these groups are empowered, they have the potential to create the widest and most sustainable changes. Youth intervention, starting as young as kindergarten, allows to shape the minds of the children around pride in their Palestinian identity and a connection for the land. Empowering women allows their work to extend further to families and households and eventually entire communities.

Jesus says in his Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the Meek, for they will inherit the earth." These words were spoken on this land to release the meek from the power of the Roman Empire. The Palestinian people are "samud". This is an all-encompassing Arabic term that indicates Palestinian steadfastness, hope, resilience, unity, and strength for accompanying each other in times of need and finding strength in times of despair. Empowering Palestinian children and teaching them about creation is a way for them to join their community, find their voice, and resist non-violently towards their oppressors.

Several aspects of Palestinian culture make the EEC's work easier. The culture of hospitality where the attitude of caring to help the neighbor before caring for the self is deeply ingrained in Palestinian society. With this philosophy in mind, the EEC utilizes the entire community to share knowledge and ideas about environmental concerns, facts, and sustainable ideas and actions. EEC workshops, trainings, conferences, festivals and field trips teach new life skills and encourage the sharing of information from participants with the rest of the community.

The EEC wants to create a greener Palestine. The EEC hosts several planting

campaigns each year. Through partners' support the EEC distributes over 5,000 native trees to be planted all around Palestine to farmers, students and community members. These native trees help to protect the area's biodiversity and also provide a valuable food source to the people. Planting campaigns are a way to physically connect to the land and create new life. These campaigns are often combined with workshops on healthy eating and Palestinian identity.

The religious significance of this land is immeasurable. This is the land in which the savior walked, and miracles happened. The Palestinian people are deeply rooted in the history and significance of this land, despite the challenges. A connection to the land here is not only connection to the environment, but to its history, culture, and faith.

*Simon Awad is head of the Evangelical Environmental Center in Beit Jala.*

## NEWS FROM THE SCHNELLER FOUNDATION

**Stuttgart (EVS).** In summer, the elections for the Board of Trustees of the *Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* took place. Dr Oliver Schneller (Düsseldorf) was elected Chair of the Board of Trustees. The composer and professor for composition is the son of Dr Martin Schneller who held this post for many years. Oliver Schneller is now the fifth generation of the Schneller family to engage in Schneller work. Johann Ludwig Schneller, founder of the Syrian Orphanage, is his great-great-grandfather.

Berthod Friess, President of the Baden-Wuerttemberg State Parliament, was elected Deputy Chair. The members of the new Board of Trustees are peace educator Musa Al-Munaizel (Berlin), member of the Executive Committee of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS), Bernd Apel, ecumenical pastor in Giessen and also member of the EVS Executive Committee, Steffen Bilger (Ludwigsburg/Berlin) Parliamentary State Secretary in the Ministry of Transport and member of the German Bundestag, Prof. Dr Jochen Cornelius-Bundschuh (Karlsruhe), Bishop of the Protestant Church in Baden, Prof. Dr Herta Däubler-Gmelin (Tübingen), Federal Minister of Justice ret., Dr Volker Jung (Wiesbaden), Church President of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau and Erwin Ritte (Kassel), Church Financial Officer ret. and ecumenical assistant to the administration of the Theodor Schneller School in 2017 and 2018.

The members of the Executive Committee of the Foundation are Kerstin Sommer (Karlsruhe), Regional Youth Coordinator in the Protestant Church of Baden

and Chair of the EVS, Reverend Andreas Maurer (Stuttgart), Managing Director of Winnenden Paulinenpflege and Church Council Member Klaus Rieth (Stuttgart), Head of the Department for Mission, Ecumenism and Development in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg.

## INTERFAITH FESTIVAL AT THE ALUMNI MEETING

**Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS).** What wonderful and unique fruits grow from Schneller work! This became obvious at an interfaith worship service at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School at the beginning of August. Many former Schneller students from all over the world met at their old school. And as at every Alumni Meeting, it started with a worship service. When Reverend George Haddad, Director of the School, was informed by the President of the Alumni Association shortly before that an Orthodox deacon and a Shiite Sheikh were among the alumni, Haddad spontaneously asked the two former students to lead an interfaith worship service with him. "The fact that they both immediately accepted my offer shows how fruitful and sustainable Schneller work is," writes Haddad in an email. Haddad is himself a former Schneller student.

In the end, three former Schneller students presided over the worship service together. Orthodox deacon Ibrahim Ibrahim read from the Bible, spoke a prayer and held a short speech on the marvellous heritage of the Schneller school. He was followed by Shiite Sheikh Fadi Sayyed who recited from the Qur'an, spoke a prayer and also talked about the success of the Schneller schools. The congregation sang two chorales and Reverend George Haddad

also read from the Gospel and held a short speech.

Afterwards, Haddad and Sheikh Fadi Sayyed discussed how the Schneller idea could be made accessible to others as a living example of interfaith dialogue. “We both agreed that interfaith dialogue had reached its limits if it remained only at a high theological level. On the other hand, the Schneller model is a form of interfaith dialogue between normal people and brings us another step forward in our mission to create peace between people,” writes Haddad.



Three former Schneller pupils: Deacon Ibrahim Ibrahim, at the organ Reverend George Haddad and at the lectern Sheikh Fadi Sayyed.

Many former students came from all over the world to the Alumni Meeting. They shared their travel costs so that everyone could attend. All who travelled from far away were allowed to stay at the school free of charge.

## NEW LOUDSPEAKERS AND A TRAINING KITCHEN

**Stuttgart (EVS).** The *Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* is supporting the Theodor Schneller School in Amman with up to 18,000 Euro to install a training kitchen in the school’s guest house. The new train-

ing course in tourism also requires trainees to learn the basics of catering. At the same time, the training kitchen will cater for guests.

In this context, the Johann Ludwig Schneller School received up to 7,000 Euro to purchase a keyboard, loudspeakers and an amplifier system for the assembly hall and the kitchen. The previous equipment was getting on in years and there have been frequent problems with sound reproduction.

## PRIZE MONEY DONATED TO THE SCHNELLER SCHOOLS

**Stuttgart (EVS).** Islamic scholar Berenike Metzler received a prestigious prize from Qatar for the translation part of her doctorate thesis “Understanding the Qur’an. The Kitāb Fahm al-Qur’an by Ḥarīṭ b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī (781-857)” (original, only in German). She shares the award money with the Schneller schools.

Berenike Metzler and her husband are former students of the Study Programme in the Middle East (SiMO) at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. Volker Metzler was later vicar in Beirut. Both of them are members of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools.

When Berenike Metzler’s thesis won a previous award, she also donated part of the award money to the Schneller schools. The money was used to purchase new equipment for the playground at the girls’ boarding home at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School.

# SECURING THE FUTURE

## MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO SECURING PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

The Schneller schools promote Christian peace education in the Middle East. For over 150 years, the name of Schneller is linked to untiring commitment to the education of children and young adults in tolerance and peace. The two Christian schools is open to all children, irrespective of their religious affiliations. They offer a haven of security and reliability. The *Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* was established in 2007 to safeguard this work in the long term and overcome economic downturns. Contrary to donations which are used immediately, an endowment has a long-term effect and becomes part of the Foundation's trust capital. Only the interest is used to fund the actual work of the Schneller schools.

Do you want to support the Schneller Foundation? Then just contact us! By the way, your endowment is tax-deductible. Should you wish to donate larger amounts, we advise you to consult a notary or tax consultant in advance. You can also make an endowment in the form of an inheritance or a legacy. An endowment is useful for you to preserve your personal life's work beyond your own lifetime or to honour the life's work of a relative.

The Schneller Foundation regularly informs its donors in a newsletter about what's happening at the two Schneller schools. We will be delighted to send you the latest Foundation newsletter which appears in September 2019.

Schneller students look back happily on their school days. With your help, children from broken families can receive sustainable prospects for their future lives through the Schneller schools – also in many years to come.

Your contacts  
at the Foundation:

**Kerstin Sommer**  
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[evs@ems-online.org](mailto:evs@ems-online.org)

**Rev. Dr Uwe Gräbe**  
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EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools

# SCHNELLER FESTIVAL 2019

## CORDIAL INVITATION

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) invites all members and friends to a Schneller Festival and to the EVS General Meeting

**in the Gaisburg Church, Faberstrasse 16, 70188 Stuttgart  
on Sunday, 3 November 2019.**

- 10:00           **Festival service** – with Bishop **Dr h.c. Frank Otfried July**, who will deliver the sermon, Reverend Wolfgang Marquardt and the EVS
- 11.00           Coffee break
- 11.20           Welcome by the EVS Chair
- 11.25           **News from the Schneller schools in the Middle East** – Presentation with the latest pictures
- 11.55           Talks at three topic tables:  
1. Theodor Schneller School (TSS), Jordan  
2. Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS), Lebanon  
3. Volunteer service at the Schneller schools Conversations with former volunteers
- 12.45           Lunch
- 13.30           **Keynote speech:**  
**Rev. George D. Haddad, Director of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon: “Education in an Increasingly Diverse Context: Challenges and Opportunities in Lebanon”**
- (in English; on request, we will provide whispered interpreting into German). Followed by discussion in plenary session
- 14.45           General Meeting
- 15.30           Conclusion and blessing for a safe journey home

EVS members will receive a written invitation in advance. The best way to register is by mail to [evs@ems-online.org](mailto:evs@ems-online.org); of course, you can also contact us by phone, post or fax.

## “SEEING AND HEARING WHAT MAKES THE SCHOOL DIFFERENT”

**EMS Mission Council convenes at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School**

**At the end of June, the international Mission Council of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) convened at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. For the 19 delegates from Africa, Asia and Europe, it was a unique opportunity to finally become acquainted with Lebanon and the partner institution that they have heard so much about.**

The air becomes clearer the higher you go. Out of the humid heat of Beirut with its jam-packed streets and high up into the barren peaks of the Lebanon mountains. From an altitude of about 2,500 metres, the land drops down to the Bekaa Valley, a green fertile landscape where fields of wheat alternate with vineyards and vegetable farms. The region could be called idyllic, were it not for the occasional checkpoints and the knowledge that Syria lies behind the next mountain range – and were it not for small groups of refugee tents with UNHCR tarpaulins and portable toilet cabins every few kilometres. There are very few large camps in this border region of the Bekaa Valley. Many farmers rent land to refugees where they can build their huts or pitch their tents. They then work off the rent in the fields or they earn their keep by doing poorly paid jobs.

Members of the EMS Mission Council – among them Reinhold Schaal from the Evangelical Association for the Schneller

Schools (EVS) – took exactly this route when they met for the summer meeting at the JLSS in Khirbet Kanafar in the southern part of the Bekaa Valley. For most delegates attending from Indonesia, Ghana, South Africa, India, South Korea and Germany, it was their first visit to Lebanon. George Haddad, Director of the school, gave them a guided tour of the school premises, the workshops, the entire work of the school and the boarding home.

For three days, the members of the Mission Council, which is the executive committee of the world-wide fellowship of 23 churches and five mission societies, discussed EMS finances, the current process of the organisation's development, the fundraising concept and expansion of the EMS-wide communication network which was started in 2017. The meeting also decided to advertise the vacant position of General Secretary.



**Members of the Mission Council visit refugee women in the camp.**



**The EMS Mission Council in front of the JLSS**

The body unanimously adopted a Code of Conduct to prevent sexual abuse. It lays down clear rules to raise awareness regarding sexual abuse. These rules are based on international standards and are intended to prevent abuse from happening in the first place. It also describes precise procedures for dealing with infringements. “We were in agreement beyond all borders and continents that the code of conduct sets a clear signal,” said Acting General Secretary Dr Kerstin Neumann, commenting on the adoption.

The EMS Mission Council reviewed the Syria projects and decided on extending the preschool project in Syria for another year on a smaller scale until the remaining 36 children can attend a state school. Ramia Dalal, head of the preschool, travelled specially to Lebanon to inform the Mission Council of the importance of this work. “34 children were able to change to state schools, but most of the remaining children are still too young. And at home they don’t even get one hot meal a day!” she said, describing the continued acuteness of the situation in Syria.

The JLSS itself will still accept Syrian refugee children at the school and the boarding home, probably until summer 2022. Single refugee mothers will continue to be trained as seamstresses. After the training course, many of them have found regular work to secure a livelihood for themselves and their children.

Members of the Mission Council met some of these women when they visited the Al-Marj refugee camp near the school. At the beginning of this year, the camp was flooded after torrential rainfall. Residents of Al-Marj received new sturdier tents, blankets, carpets and new mattresses from the JLSS management and these are now among their most prized possessions.

For the members of the Mission Council, the General Meeting at the JLSS was an eye-opening experience. “It is wonderful not only to see here on site what makes this school different, but to hear, smell and taste it as well,” said one guest. “Now we have a much better understanding what the work of the EVS means for the people here!”

*Regina Karasch-Böttcher*

# WE ARE STILL APPEALING FOR DONATIONS FOR SYRIA

“We can’t simply send these children home. I’ve visited them where their families live. They don’t even get one hot meal a day there!” This assessment by Ramia Dalal, head of the preschool project in Syria, sent a clear signal. In June, she travelled especially to inform the EMS Mission Council of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) in Lebanon where the highest decision-making body of the EMS had gathered at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. (see pages 20-21)

In actual fact, this event should have marked the official end of our engagement in Syria. In the meantime, the Syrian regime has actually managed more or less to school all the children in the region of the Wadi al-Nasara, the “Valley of the Christians”. We put on a big party at the preschool this summer to say goodbye to 34 children who had attended normal school after the holidays. “Mission accomplished”, one could say, and that’s exactly

what we reported in Schneller Magazine 3/2018 (page 9). I was present at the farewell visit in Syria in November 2018: in fact the final date was already set.

However, it was not possible for state schools to accept another 36 children from the project – mainly because they are still too young. And no, we can’t simply send them home where it is not only the school meals they will be missing but a lot more besides. As a result, the Mission Council decided to extend the project for an additional year at a reduced scale until the remaining children can attend regular school – provided we receive all the financial reports for the last phase.

Refugee work at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon will continue as scheduled anyway. Syrian refugee children are accepted at the school and the boarding home. Single refugee mothers will continue to be trained as seamstresses – as stated in the decision of our Mission Council: until summer 2022, provided we receive the needed donations.

However in the meantime, the prospects for Syrian refugees are far from rosy. Politicians as well as church leaders are continuously making very clear public statements that refugees should go back to Syria. Otherwise, there is the risk that the small country of Lebanon will collapse under the burden of over a million refugees. Those who have not already returned to Syria in the face of this situa-



EMS/Gräbe

**Ramia Dalal is delighted that work with preschool children can continue for another year.**





EMS/Karasch-Böttcher

Women at the refugee camp next to the Schneller school

tion are really unable to do so. In their homeland, they would probably face persecution or imprisonment or virtually nothing because everything that belonged to their lives before has been destroyed. This is the reason why the Syria projects of the EMS and the EVS will continue.

If you want to help us look after the remaining children with loving care and with healthy school meals at our pre-

school in Syria for another year or make sure that the Syrian children and their mothers in Lebanon continue to receive a good education until 2020, then please send your donation to our account with the key word "Aid for Syria".

**Thank you very sincerely  
for all your support!**

**Dr Uwe Gräbe**

**Donation account:**

Evangelische Bank eG

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BIC GENODEF1EK1

Keyword:

**"Aid for Syria"**



## THE WORLD HERITAGE IS NO LONGER AT RISK

### The restoration of the Church of the Nativity

**After more than 500 years, the Church of the Nativity has again been completely restored. And many wonderful surprises came to light.**

The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is a sacred place to over 2 billion people around the world and a source of national pride for Palestinians, who take the responsibility to protect this holy place very seriously. Dating back to the 4th century, the Church of the Nativity is one of the first Christian Churches, built in the place where Jesus Christ was born. Since medieval times the Church developed into a complex of religious buildings in an extraordinary ensemble under the shared custodianship of the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic churches. Over the course of time, the structure of the Church deteriorated with the roof being particularly at risk in recent years.

Therefore, in 2008 a presidential decree was issued – with the blessing of the three churches – to carry out a scientific restoration program of the Church. This would be the first major restoration since 1479. Funds were allocated from the state budget to conduct an assessment and establish the restoration program. An international bid was launched in August 2009, with the contract being awarded to a consortium of Italian Universities, research centers and international experts, all locally supported by the Palestinian Architectural Office. After receiving the final studies, including the conservation plan in February 2011, the Presidential Committee worked on securing necessary funds for the first phase which included the roof and windows. In 2012, the Church of the Nativity was listed as a World Heritage site and at the same time placed on the list of World Heritage in Danger due to the major damage to the roof.



The interior of the Church of the Nativity during restoration work.

The restoration works commenced officially in September 2013 and are still ongoing, having since been extended to include external stone walls, internal wall plastering, wall and floor mosaics, wooden architrave, columns and capitals. The restoration process has been necessarily long and complex, with great care being taken to make sure all work is carried out to the highest standards, in line with relevant international charters such as ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) and UNESCO.

There have been challenges along the way – coordinating the work among three different custodians, getting the right material and skilled labour, keeping church open for prayers and pilgrims, and fundraising, to name a few.

The overarching goal, however, has served as a clear guide at all stages of restoration: to respect the uniqueness and outstanding value of the Church as one of the oldest continuously used churches in the world to be preserved and transferred to future generations. And there have been some wonderful surprises too. Coming from an academic background in the preservation of cultural heritage, seeing these things unfold was a personal highlight for me. I remember clearly the day that the team uncovered the mosaic of an angel on one of the walls and on another occasion the discovery of an ancient baptismal font.

In addition to government budget, several organizations and a number of individuals from Palestine and the diaspora have made generous donations to this project, as well as governments, churches and organizations from all over the world. In July of this year the Church was formally

removed from the list of endangered sites, with credit being given to the high quality of the extensive restoration works. A final stage will include installation of fire-fighting and microclimate systems, consolidation against seismic action and most importantly the Grotto, the holiest place in the Church.

Today, 2 millennia after Christ was born, the Church of the Nativity remains a central hub of life and activity in Bethlehem and an expression of the deep ties that we have to our holy sites and cultural heritage. Christian Palestinians are sometimes referred to as ‘living stones’ – and one feels this immediately on a summer day in the nativity square – a place to gather, share stories, break bread, shop – Palestinians of all faiths, visitors, tourists and pilgrims from around the world. The restoration of this sacred site has been an achievement which belongs to so many and we are deeply grateful to all those who have contributed to this important project.

*Dr. Khoulood Daibes is the Ambassador of Palestine in Berlin. She studied architecture and monument preservation and is member of the Presidential Committee for the Restoration of the Church of the Nativity. From 2007 to 2012, she was Minister for Tourism and Antiquities and from 2007 to 2009 also Minister for Women's Affairs in Palestine.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We are delighted to receive feedback from our readers. However, we reserve the right to edit your letters for space reasons.

### Response to Schneller Magazine 1/2019

I very much welcome listening to voices from the Near and Middle East and so I always look forward to receiving the Schneller Magazine – and reading authentic, honest articles. Unfortunately, I found an inaccuracy in the report by Hanna Lehming. I quote from Issue 1/2019: “To this day, Zoroastrianism has devotees in Northern Iraq and in Iran, where they are brutally persecuted.” I have no information on Northern Iraq but this does not apply to Iran. As an ancient Persian religion, the Zoroastrians even have a touch of nationalism, which makes them well regarded. Several years ago, I was able to record the first ordination of women. Of course the religious regime does not tolerate any conversions which “take place” secretly. The Bahai are persecuted and forbidden because as Muslims they departed from the tradition. Iran is much more diverse than we often think – both for better or for worse.

*Katrin Virnich, Wolfschlugen*

### Response to Schneller Magazine 2/2019

What another excellent Schneller Magazine you produced again! It is a real treat reading it at Whitsun. The motto “Caught between

frustration and new beginnings” on dialogue with Islam is exactly what I am experiencing at present. What Lidya Tandirerung reports on the problem of Islamism on Sulawesi on the one hand, and the hope kindled by the document “A culture of dialogue” by Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb illustrate the polarities between which we now find ourselves. In Germany we have difficulty extricating ourselves from the dilemma in which the DITIB has fallen and the progressive institutes of Islamic theology. When I am asked, “What gives you hope?”, I generally answer: “What gives me the most hope are the young Muslim female students I know who are preparing their doctorate theses.” They are courageous, not only in their public contextual interpretation of the Qur’an but they also openly address the gender issue.

*Prof. Dr. theol. Johannes Lähnemann,  
Goslar*

The Schneller publications are excellent! I nearly always read them from cover to cover. However, I found the article by Rev. Solomon Benjamin in Issue 2/2019 very irritating. Should it not be a question of the dialogue between religions and the “search for human solidarity”? Apparently, this does not apply to Jews. In the list of attacks on believers, no mention is made of either Pittsburgh or Poway. Instead, the author lists “the perennial disharmony in Palestine”, which has absolutely nothing to do with his main theme. In the end, the beautiful words of reconciliation get stuck in one’s throat. I did not expect this from the EMS.

*Reverend Hanna Lehming, Hamburg*

# BECOME A MEMBER OF THE EVS!

The Evangelische Verein für die Schneller-Schulen e.V. (Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools, EVS) supports and accompanies the work of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon and the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan. Its special task is to offer poor children school education and professional training at the Schneller Schools.

The EVS publications and events provide information about churches and Christians in the Middle East. The **Schneller Magazine is published four times a year and subscription is free.** The EVS Secretariat can recommend speakers on topics regarding the work of the schools.

If you want to become a member of the EVS, we will be glad to send you an application for membership. The annual minimum fee for individuals is Euro 25 and Euro 50 for companies and organisations. By making a donation to the Schneller Schools, you are supporting the work of a recognised charitable welfare.

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**EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools**

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The Schneller Magazine is also available in German and can be read online

[www.ems-online.org/publikationenmedien/zeitschriften/schneller-magazin/](http://www.ems-online.org/publikationenmedien/zeitschriften/schneller-magazin/)

# SCHNELLER

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) is a member of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

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The Schneller Schools are dependent on your donations.

We look forward to your support for the work of the Schneller Schools.

Please visit us on the Internet at [www.evs-online.org](http://www.evs-online.org)

Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

Psalm 73, 25



**EVS Evangelical Association  
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