

SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools

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The distant war, so close

Putin's war in Ukraine: Middle-East perspectives

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Dear Reader,

Sometimes things get a little complicated. The Editorial Team was planning a feature that seemed interesting to us for the Schneller magazine. We considered which authors we should ask for contributions and usually we get a quick response. But this time it was different. The Ukraine war, Europe and the Middle East are important topics – and we are not the only ones who think so. But then we received an unusually large number of refusals in response to our requests. Maybe this was because of the Christmas break. But we have often asked authors before Christmas if they could write an article on a certain topic for us after Christmas. Up until now, there have been no major problems.



Or was it perhaps the topic? We would have liked to know from various people in the Middle East how they see us in Germany and Europe in the face of the Ukraine war, what they wish for us and what they would advise us. We also wanted to know how the Orthodox Churches in the Middle East view the war-mongering sister church in Russia. But we did not find anyone who wanted to answer these questions.

So, this time we have fewer pages for the main feature than usual but on the other hand, there is all the more to report on about the Schneller schools. This issue features a portrait of the Jordanian singer Qamar Badwan who is passionate about teaching music at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS). We asked Dieter Heidtmann, General Secretary of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity, about his first visit to the TSS.

There is a worrying report about the renewed destruction of the Schneller tombstone at the Zionsberg cemetery in Jerusalem, but also an encouraging article on the ordination of Sally Azar, the first female pastor in Palestine. And finally, we report on a commemorative event held by Oriental Christians in Germany. It focuses on the collective trauma caused by the genocides that took place during the Ottoman Empire and which continues to affect people today. All in all, there are again many topics we hope will interest you.

Many greetings from the Editorial Team.

Best regards,

Katja Dorothea Buck

“... being able to stop in order to start again”

At the start of a year, spiritual reflections usually speak about new beginnings. The year is fresh and we are still filled with the hopes of Christmas. We make new resolutions, make plans and reorient ourselves in our professional and private lives. Whereas thoughts of quitting unwanted habits or attitudes are relegated to the time of Lent and the memory of Jesus' suffering and death, the value of quitting as a basic necessity for a new beginning is seldom considered at the start of the year. And perhaps because of the distinction between quitting and starting again, we also fail to innovate and break new ground in some church work.

We already feel overwhelmed and exhausted at the beginning of our new venture because we could not or did not want to clarify what we have to give up for it. In the wake of the Jubilee Year of the Reformation and the experience gained from the many successful new formats of how communicating the Gospel in the 21st century can be relevant to people today, our Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover proclaimed the Year of Letting Go in 2019 and encouraged us to contemplate about liberating and letting go in our church in order to gain a new perspective on what is essential. We have tried out many things and allowed ourselves to become inspired. However, I can safely say with a pinch of self-criticism that we have not really succeeded yet.

It is also difficult to ask critical questions in our regional church office about whether we really still want to do this in the future. Not only is it inconceivable for

some staff members to stop doing things as they have always done in the past, others feel offended because they see their committed work as invalidated if things are done differently in the future. The story is the same in the congregations. The church choir in which I have been singing with great joy for 40 years is getting smaller and older. But no one is willing to think that after 40 years it could be the end of the choir and that something new and unforeseen will emerge to replace it.

The general conditions governing development cooperation with countries in the Global South are also in a state of flux. For example, we have to change our ways we have grown so fond of in our partnership work with the churches. The corporate world has created the technical term of exnovation for this concept and explains it as discontinuing things that prove to be no longer suitable. This is the only way we can maintain enough strength to open our minds to something new. It implies that we must take the time to mourn and to say goodbye with gratitude and realise that there is a time for everything.

After its consultation in January last year, the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) agreed on its priorities and orientation. Particularly in view of the existential experiences of recent years with the coronavirus pandemic, war and injustice in the world and the need for the church to radically embark on a transformation process in the face of changing conditions, the Council has set itself the overarching theme of the finite.



When everything else has died, the crocus reappears and blooms again.

The Council's motto is "Stimulating and supporting Christian life from the force field of irritation and promise – being able to stop in order to start anew". The Council intends to pursue two directions with its work: internally to achieve successful church development and externally to send out the message to all the world that the finite need not be frightening because it lays the foundation for all new beginnings and because Jesus Christ will surely accompany us from the beginning to the end and beyond. In listening to the Word of God, we can practise quitting in order to begin something new in a liberated way.

So, I can listen to the word of the Psalmist who reminds me that the perception of present fullness and the finite liberates our heart from fear:

"So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart." Psalm 90:12

And I can let Paul lift me above the vicissitudes of our present, trusting that glory is beyond time and what is visible:

"For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal."

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Dr Stephanie Springer is President of the Church Office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, member of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and Chair of the Protestant Commission on the Middle East (EMOK).

Different situations, different impacts

The Ukraine war and its impact on Europe and the Middle East

People in Europe say that the war in Ukraine marks a turning point in history. But what does this war mean for the Middle East? Both here in Germany and there, the impacts and perceptions are different.

The extent to which the Middle East is dependent on grain from Ukraine became apparent when the Russian war of aggression began.



The Christmas holidays in Jordan lasted a whole six weeks this year. Regardless of whether they were in public or private ownership, all schools remained closed for several weeks over the New Year, including the Theodor Schneller School in Amman. This time it was not a virus that was to blame. This time it was the Ukraine war or rather its impacts on the global energy sector. Faced with massive increases in the price of crude oil and natural gas, many countries had to think about how to get through the winter with less but more expensive fossil fuels.

In Jordan, the government decided that government schools would close for several weeks during the cold season and the missing class time would be made up in the summer when heating is not needed. It is true that most private schools, which are usually better off financially, could have borne the increased heating costs by themselves. But as the government considered it was important to have a uniform holiday schedule for the whole country, all schools were to have longer holidays in winter and shorter holidays in summer.

In Germany, we also know that people are pondering ways to save on heating costs.

We are also affected by rising prices for food and other daily necessities. But we barely notice the impacts that the war is having on the global grain market. According to the Federal Agency for Agriculture and Food, Germany is not dependent on imports for self-sufficiency in wheat and barley.

However, it is a totally different situation for all countries that cannot grow grain themselves or can only do so on a small scale. Egypt, for example. Before the Ukraine war, almost 70 percent of its wheat came from Russia and Ukraine. In Lebanon, more than half of the wheat came from Russia. And in Syria, which was considered the breadbasket of the Middle East before the war at home, the wheat harvest fell to a quarter of its pre-war level. The war and climate change are responsible for this. But so is Turkey which has built dams on the upper reaches of the Euphrates, leaving Syrian farmers with less water for irrigation. Syria now has to import large amounts of grain to cover its needs and the price has become drastically higher on the world market because of the Ukraine war.

When you compare Europe and the Middle East with respect to the economic



impact of the Ukraine war, there are more differences than similarities. Although the high inflation rate in Germany and in the entire European economic region must be considered historic – and it is certainly not yet clear what social upheavals there will be as a result – countries such as Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Jordan are much harder hit by the economic impacts of the Ukraine war on the world market than Europe.

The way they see things is also different. Whereas the Western world sees Russia as the sole culprit, the Middle East is reticent. Almost all Middle Eastern states – with the exception of Israel and Turkey – abstained from voting in favour of Russia's exclusion from the UN Human Rights Council at the UN General Assembly in April 2022. Syria, Iran and Algeria even voted against. Also, no state in the Middle East is currently participating in sanctions against Russia.

However, to explain this hesitant attitude solely in terms of economic dependence on Russia stops well short of the mark. There are also political reasons. Firstly, Russia is regarded as a possible – or, as in the case of Syria, an actual – partner in the region. Secondly, Europe had been

noticeably hesitant in the Syrian war. In Yemen and Palestine, too, it is keeping the lowest possible profile. There are reasons for this. But for many people in the Middle East, Europe has played a continually disappointing role politically in recent years. They would have liked to see more European support, especially the civil society.

Consequently, at the start of the Ukraine war, sardonic comments were made on social networks, even by friends and partners, to the effect that Europe was now also learning what war and crisis mean. There was a sense of bitterness when it was noted how much attention and energy was now flowing into the war in Ukraine, while Europe was happy to remain silent about the crises in the Middle East. When maintaining connections in the Middle East, no matter at what level, it is important to be aware of each other's perspectives and conditions so that they do not pour sand into the gears of cooperation, bringing everything to a halt.

Katja Dorothea Buck

If you can cry, you stay human

A plea from the Middle East on the war in Europe

During my last trip to Europe less than a month ago, I remember how my first reaction was to smile at the sight of some austerity measures – dark roads at night; I even smiled at impulsive buying at supermarkets, at some people panicking with winter approaching and talks about insufficient gas supply to warm their homes. I said to myself, “We have so much to teach them”, and I even had this arrogant thought that “they will finally feel and understand our hardships”.

And then came this item of information: “A quick survey that we recently conducted showed that people were lately crying on average three times a week.” ...This was how one of my NGO’s partners replied when I asked about the effect of the Ukrainian war on people in Europe. “People are under severe stress caused by a potential situation which they have never experienced before and hence don’t know how to deal with.” I was stricken by the fact that the survey actually accounted for their “crying times” as an indicator of distress.

When was the last time I cried? Images and memories rapidly unfurled, flashing from the current monetary crisis, people losing all of their life savings, unprecedented inflation, a huge majority who cannot afford basic goods and services, health-care system collapsing. I remembered the Beirut port blast in August 2020, attacks by the “Islamic State” on the border to Syria, the Syrian war and the resulting waves of displacement, the 2006 Israeli aggression, the civil war from 1975 to 1990, our house

that was destroyed, my school friends who were killed... but still I can remember crying. How can this be possible?

Many observers of the Lebanese case often summarise it with one word: “resilience”. This appears to be the only explanation for our country’s and people’s ability to cope, irrespective of the frequency or intensity of a crisis. However, when I measure this resilience against the “crying-three-times-a-week” indicator, I’m afraid it resonates more like “losing my humanity” rather than a sign of strength.

Looking at the Europeans’ reactions to the looming crisis, I realised that actually they shouldn’t learn from us. I realised that this capacity the Middle-Easterners have to “bounce back” and to survive is not this “resilience” that makes us proud but rather an unfortunate normalisation of the abnormal. We have lived so long in misery that it has become our new normal. We have tolerated so many grievances that it doesn’t make us cry any more.

Year after year, nations greater than ours have built on our cumulated numbness to pursue their interests by suffocating our dreams. We were put on opposing sides, like chess pieces, and we were taught to demonise whoever was on the other side although we never understood the rules of the game (where no-one has ever emerged as winner). Generations have been stuck in a vicious circle haunted by a past they were never given a chance to reconcile with, only to discover (very late) that people on both sides are actually the same, going through the same sufferings,



Kyiv: People and animals seek shelter from Russian missiles in underground stations.

experiencing the same losses, endlessly attempting to break the circle, re-humanising themselves and others to be able to live in peace and rebuild their future.

My plea to all of you reading my message from the other side of the Mediterranean and beyond: Always remember that a war is never the right choice or the only option. The price for it is always paid by people on both sides and never by the warlords or leaders. Don't allow war rhetoric to convince you to stop crying; don't wait to translate your tears and fears into an inner revolt against the course of events. Revolt and call for peace processes and restorative justice; revolt and make your voices heard. And trust that you can make a difference – as long as you don't normalise the abnormal.

Don't allow your humanity to be sacrificed – like ours at the altar of conflicts; save your sense of humanity, for in your tears and revolt we will recover parts of what we have lost. Immunise your hearts and minds against all narratives of war. Stay strong. We are hoping, praying and upholding our deep belief that with you and through you we shall always “be human together”.

Mireille El Hamouche is Deputy Director and Director of Programs at the Forum for Development Culture and Dialogue (FDCD) in Beirut.

When even man'ousheh is too expensive

Inflation and food shortages are affecting people in Lebanon

A third of the world's wheat exports come from Russia and Ukraine and the war is massively disrupting supply chains. All countries that depend on grain imports are suffering. But in Lebanon, whose economy has been in shambles for three years and whose national grain reserves were destroyed in the Beirut port explosion, the effects are devastating.

At first glance, André Atallah doesn't seem to have a care in the world as he bustles away in the bakery which he and his family have maintained for the last 30 years. His small shop is nestled between a church and a hospital in a quiet yet busy street in the Geitawi neighbourhood of Beirut, the heat from his oven mixing with the hot air of the constant traffic. He spends his days here baking the quintessential Lebanese breakfast food, the man'ousheh, a pita bread topped with spices, tomatoes or cheese.

But André, like almost everyone else in the capital, has had his fair share of tribulations in recent years. His business has survived Lebanon's crippling economic collapse of 2019, a revolving door of Corona lockdowns, and the deadly Beirut port explosion of 2020. Now his livelihood faces yet another challenge: the war in Ukraine.

"How did we get here?" he asks frustratedly, as his smile starts to fade. Everything's got more expensive here. A bag of bread – it's a staple for those who have families – you used to buy it for 2000 Lebanese lira (LBP), now it's become 23,000." And the

war hasn't helped. "Everything's got more expensive because of the war," he adds.

Lebanon has become synonymous with corruption and crisis in recent years. Following the economic crash of 2019, and the massive inflation that ensued, Lebanese banks implemented illegal capital control measures to stop depositors from withdrawing their own savings. As of today (January 2023), \$1 (worth 1500 LBP in 2019) is worth 45,000 LBP, and most people are still not able to withdraw their full deposits. Not only have people's life savings evaporated, but prices have reached extremes, particularly affecting essentials like wheat and fuel.

"Man'ousheh, for example, used to be 5000, now we're selling it for 30,000, because the flour got expensive, and the oil



Atallah's shop in Geitawi has survived the major crises of recent years. But the start of the Ukraine war has brought new uncertainties.

Rex Stretton (2)



André Atallah baking man'ousheh. The flour for it has recently become more and more expensive and scarcer.

got expensive – especially the oil,” explains André, pointing at a huge oil tank beside the oven. “We used to get a gallon of oil for 15,000, then 50,000, then 100,000, now it’s a million. A million lira, for a gallon (approx. 3.7 litres) of oil.”

Businesses like André’s which managed to survive the economic collapse were then hit with forced closure during the Covid lockdowns, and finally, the port explosion. At the centre of the port explosion were the country’s grain silos, and when they were destroyed Lebanon became dependent on quick wheat deliveries from Russia and Ukraine. As the Central Bank ran out of foreign currency, it reduced its wheat subsidies, and the country was left one supply chain disruption away from a disaster.

Lebanon is, of course, not the only country affected by the supply chain disruption caused by the war: a third of glob-

al wheat exports comes from Russia and Ukraine. Attacks on the port city of Odesa, as well as Ukrainian farmers leaving to join the fight, has meant many countries have had to adapt. But for a country already undergoing economic collapse and completely dependent on imports, the difference can be deadly. Before the crisis, the simple zaatar man'ousheh was known as aklit li-f'eer (‘the food of the poor’). For many, even that is now unaffordable.

After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, wheat prices steadily rose before reaching a peak in June 2020. During that time period, Lebanon saw regular bread lines outside bakeries, with some stocking up on bread to avoid a shortage and others simply going hungry. A black market sprang up to account for the scarcity. “When the war started in Ukraine, flour diminished a lot here in Lebanon. There started to be a fixed amount,” André explains. For example, we used to get a hun-



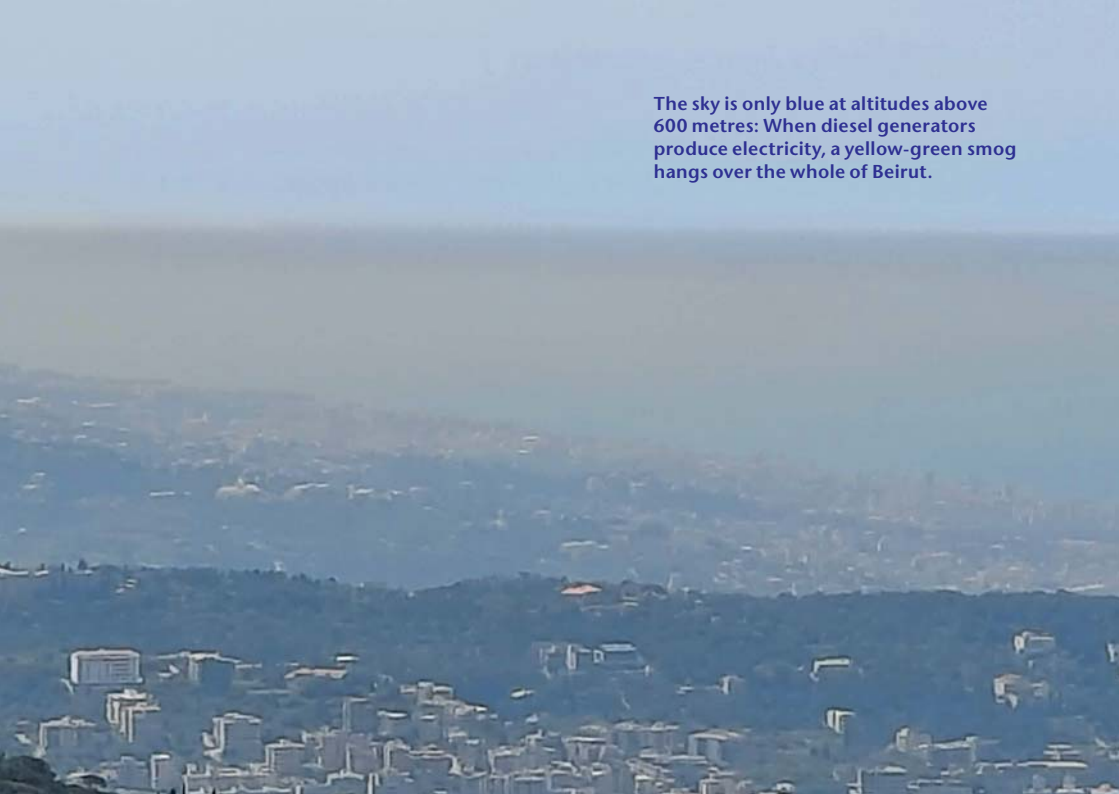
EMS/Gräbe

dred bags, then they gave us ten bags, a bit later we got to a point where there stopped even being ten bags, it was cut off completely and became a black market.” Even when grain became available from government providers again, prices remained high. “Flour became available at the government mill at the same price as on the black market.

Another significant effect of the Ukraine war, one which will be more familiar to European readers, is fuel scarcity. But while most in Europe are only recently having to confront this problem, in Lebanon it has defined daily life for decades. Anyone who has looked at Beirut’s skyline, curtained with constant smog from fuel generators, will be aware of this: The state’s inability to provide electricity for more than a few hours a day has left peo-

ple dependent on the ‘generator mafia’ who charge extortionate prices for private generators that provide an ever-changing number of hours of electricity. When fuel scarcity hits, the prices go up, and the hours go down. In the worst period of fuel scarcity, around August 2021, hospital patients starting dying as their life support machines turned off from lack of electricity.

It’s little surprise then that after the invasion of Ukraine and the global demand for gas, a panicked Lebanon looked for alternatives. The maritime border agreement with Israel, signed on October 27th, gives the green light to both countries to start exploring the Qana and Karish gas fields offshore. But Lebanon has had to make big concessions: While Israel will monopolise the Karish field, Lebanon will



The sky is only blue at altitudes above 600 metres: When diesel generators produce electricity, a yellow-green smog hangs over the whole of Beirut.

have to seek Israeli approval for its exploration and share 17% of its revenues from the Qana field with TotalEnergies (the French oil company).

For many Lebanese, especially those who remember the Israeli invasion of Lebanon as well as the sizeable population of Palestinian refugees in the country, the thought of normalisation with the Zionist state will sting, and the deal itself remains very fragile. In Lebanon, public opinion is always split, as every issue is deeply tangled in the web of socio-political sectarianism. But at the end of the day, any fuel is some fuel, and sectarian squabbles are ultimately less important to most people than heat and light. The main worry now is whether the revenue from the deal will reach the people who need it most, or be pocketed by Lebanon's political elite.

“For an electricity generator, I used to pay 250,000 in the shop, now I'm paying 12,500,000,” Andre explains. And everyone is in the same boat, including his clients. “Their salaries still haven't gone up... but the rent of their houses, they put that up, also the generator.”

It's difficult to say what the future holds for Lebanon. People here are sadly used to being unable to plan for a future when they are trapped between insecurity on all sides. I ask Andre what he thinks the future holds. “Hopefully someone comes to help us,” he says.

Rex Stretton is a British writer, teacher and journalist who has lived in Beirut since 2019.

Long standing conflict resolved by diplomacy

Israel and Lebanon reach agreement on maritime border

The Ukraine war is attracting a lot of attention in Europe. As a result, many things that are important to the Middle East are simply neglected. Israeli and Lebanese diplomats have resolved a long-standing dispute over the maritime border between the two countries in an unspectacular and pragmatic move. It is probably too early to hope for a general thaw in relations between the two states but at least a peaceful solution has been found on this issue.

The agreement, which was signed on 27 October 2022, means that Lebanon and Israel can now exploit natural gas fields in a previously disputed territory in the Mediterranean. Both sides had to relinquish their maximum demands to achieve this. The Lebanese side had to concede that the “line of buoys”, which Israel deployed to mark the first shorter part of the border after its withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, should no longer be moved. The agreement also states that the so-called Karish gas field, which the Lebanese Hezbollah militia had already claimed by means of drone overflights, lies entirely in Israeli waters.

Conversely, Israel had to accept that the northern Qana gas field, a small section of which is recognised as protruding into Israeli territory, may only be exploited by the Lebanese. The contract was awarded to an international consortium of French and Italian companies. Originally, there were also Russian companies in the con-

sortium but they are now replaced by Qatari companies. The consortium has to transfer a small part of the revenues from this field to Israel.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun, who left office only four days later, jubilantly declared that he had thus given the Lebanese people the “gift” of having become a natural gas-producing nation – even if it will probably be a long time before gas and revenues flow (regardless into whose pockets). On the other hand, the then Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid was delighted that Lebanon had de facto recognised the state of Israel by signing the treaty – something that was unthinkable in previous years and this was immediately denied by the Lebanese side.

In view of this unspectacular and pragmatic solution to a long-term conflict, the following question arises. Could this perhaps point to an imminent normalisation of relations – or even to peace between the two hostile states? There are still a number of arguments against this. Firstly, Lebanon continues to lay claim to the tiny territory of the Shebaa Farms, which Israel seized from Syria in 1967 and which are still occupied by Israel. Secondly, the idea of peace with the neighbouring state has become a moot point, especially for those Lebanese parties that were in a pact with Israel until 1983. This deadlock has been further exacerbated by the destruction wrought on Lebanese infrastructure by Israel in 2006 in the wake of the abduction of two of its soldiers.



Drilling ships like these will be used to tap the riches off Lebanon's coasts.

And then there is the question of the repatriation of several hundred thousand Palestinian refugees, an issue that has remained unanswered for generations. Lebanon has always deliberately resisted recognising the Palestinian refugees and integrating them into its own society and social system. On the one hand, from the Lebanese point of view, this would be the ultimate recognition of the State of Israel and the associated expulsion of the Palestinians. On the other hand, the integration of Palestinians, most of whom are Sunnites, would completely upend the social relations in the Lebanese model of society, which is based on confessional proportional representation. For then the Sunnis in Lebanon would suddenly represent a much larger proportion of the population and would then be entitled to more political influence at the expense of the Christians, Shiites and Druze.

But for Israel, too, the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees is simply out of the question. After all, this would also mean a demograph-

ic reorganisation for Israeli society, with incalculable political and social consequences.

And finally, there is the Shiite Hezbollah militia in Lebanon, the only militia that did not allow itself to be disarmed in 2005. Its very *raison d'être* is based on "resistance" against the "Zionist entity". It is simply inconceivable that this strongly ally of Iran would give itself up so easily.

Having said that, the Middle East has experienced other unexpected developments in the past. At least the Israeli-Lebanese border has been remarkably quiet for some time. And it is rumoured that religious representatives of the different sides are now holding confidential talks with each other on neutral territory. At any rate, it is to be hoped that at least in this one traditionally war-torn place the weapons will be permanently silent in the future.

Uwe Gräbe and Katja Dorothea Buck



EMS/Buck

The litter has to go: local authority employees before the clean-up.

Municipal campaign launched at the TSS

Amman (TSS). The Theodor Schneller School ceased to be a “German” school a long time ago and it is no longer regarded as such by the people around it. In fact, it is viewed at all levels as a highly respected Jordanian institution. This can be seen in the numerous visits by high-ranking dignitaries and politicians as well as in the campaigns that involve all establishments and institutions in the immediate vicinity.

For example, at the beginning of December 2022, the Theodor Schneller School was the starting point for the first initiative by the local authority to clean up the district. The campaign was started by the municipality of Russeifa where the TSS is located. Besides the municipal clean-up team, students from a neighbouring school and several teachers came to collect rubbish on the school grounds together with students from the TSS. The campaign lasted several days and later continued in other areas in Russeifa. The aim is to raise environmental awareness throughout the district.

New Executive Committee, new tasks

Stuttgart (EVS). The new Executive Committee of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) filled a number of new positions at its constitutional meeting that took place in the middle of January.

Christoph Hildebrandt-Ayasse is the new Deputy Chair of the EVS. Reinhold Schaal, who previously held this office, did not stand for re-election at the committee elections in September 2022. Lisa Schnotz becomes the EVS youth network representative of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

Kerstin Sommer was re-elected to the office of Chair of the EVS. Christian Kissling remains Treasurer of the Association. Silvan Eppinger was re-elected Secretary along with Hans-Joachim Jetter, who was newly elected to this post. In addition, Martina Waiblinger, who did not run in the last committee election, will nevertheless continue to represent the EVS in the EMS Women’s Network.

More fun learning languages

Amman (TSS/EVS). The Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman recently acquired a fully equipped language laboratory. This came from a donation from the Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace. All students at the TSS will benefit from this as they can now concentrate on their pronunciation and language skills in foreign language classes. English and German are taught at the TSS.

EMS/Buck



Test run in the language lab (from left to right): Dieter Heidtmann, EMS Secretary General, Kerstin Sommer, EVS Chair, Khalid Freij, TSS Director, and Uwe Gräbe, EVS Executive Secretary.

A new electrical workshop for the JLSS



Khirbet Kanafar (EVS). Another workshop building is currently under construction on the premises of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) to house the electrical workshop. It means that all the staff and apprentices will move there soon.

Just like the carpentry workshop a few years ago, the old electrical workshop also started to show massive settlement cracks. Apparently, this lies in the fact that the ground on which the JLSS work-

shops stand is constantly shifting. The new building with its spacious workshop and bright airy classrooms is being built right next to the new carpentry workshop and will open up new opportunities and scope for the training department.

The estimated cost will be €130,000 which the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools will finance from donations.

Officially entitled to vote

Amman/Jerusalem/Stuttgart (TSS/EVS). It was decided long ago and already implemented at the Executive Committee meeting of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) in September 2022. The only things missing were the last signatures so that the Director of the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman would officially have voting rights on the EVS Executive Committee.

Kerstin Sommer, Chair of the EVS, Dieter Heidtmann, General Secretary of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and Anglican Archbishop Hosam Naoum, the church to which the TSS belongs, finally appended their signatures in Jerusalem in December. They signed the amendment to the agreement that has governed representation between the EVS/EMS and the Anglican Church on cooperation at the TSS since 2014. Previously, the regional Executive Committee of the TSS had ap-



Dieter Heidtmann, Kerstin Sommer and Archbishop Hosam Naoum signing the amendment.

proved this amendment at its meeting in Amman. The EVS and the EMS are also entitled to vote there. A similar agreement already exists with the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon.

Joscha Quade introduces himself

Stuttgart (EVS/EMS). Joscha Quade has been responsible for the administration of the Middle East Liaison Desk of the EMS and has also been part of the management team of the EVS since the beginning of November 2022. He succeeds Felix Weiss, who has taken up a new position within the EMS.



EMS/Krueger

team. Born in Hildesheim, I was drawn to study Protestant theology in Göttingen, Berlin and finally in Beirut through the SiMO programme. During my stay in Lebanon from 2019 to 2020, I also visited the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in the Bekaa Valley.

I look forward very much to working for the EVS and the EMS and meeting the many dedicated members of the Association. It is a great pleasure in my job here to support the valuable work carried out by the Schneller Schools in Lebanon and Jordan. In my spare time, I continue working on my doctorate."

Joscha Quade writes: "I am so happy I can support the editorial team of the Schneller magazine and the administration in the EVS as the third northern light in the



Paying tribute to a person with donations

In life there are always occasions that are worth celebrating in a special way – a special birthday, a big family occasion, a christening, etc.

Sometimes they make us want to look at the outside world and think of people who not as fortunate as we are. A bereavement can also give rise to this desire.

Take, for example, Eugen Schweitzer who died in Kirchheim at the end of last year at the age of 84. Many mourners attending the funeral made donations in honour of his life and memory. They knew that the deceased was concerned about the disadvantaged in this world. His family asked his classmate and friend, Reverend Ulrich Kadelbach, which institution he would suggest should receive the donation of €1,500. The former EMS Middle East Liaison Secretary and EVS Executive Secretary is still closely connected to the Schneller work and so he suggested the two Schneller schools in Lebanon and Jordan.

We are very honoured to receive this kind of donation to the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) as they show a great deal of trust in the work of the two schools.



If you are thinking about making a donation to the Schneller Schools for a birthday, a family celebration or a bereavement, we would be delighted if you would inform us of your proposal.

If you want to inform your guests about the Schneller Schools, we would be delighted to send you information leaflets in the required number of copies.

Please contact:

Joscha Quade, Tel. +49 (0)711 636 78-39

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Hate crimes in the Holy City

Religiously motivated attacks in Jerusalem on the rise

Around the turn of the year, two young men damaged more than 30 graves at the Protestant Cemetery on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, some of them seriously, including the Schneller tomb. The increase in attacks on Christians in Jerusalem is worrying

For the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS), the year 2023 started off with unpleasant news from Jerusalem. Among the tombstones damaged on New Year's Day at the Protestant Cemetery on Zion Hill is the grave of Johann Ludwig and Magdalene Schneller, who founded the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem in 1860. Images from a surveillance camera show two young men in traditional Jewish dress smashing stone crosses. Israeli police arrested two Orthodox Talmud students (14 and 18 years old) as suspects a few days later.

Among the monuments destroyed is an elaborate marble relief on the tomb of Samuel Gobat, the second Protestant bishop of Jerusalem. During his tenure (1846-1879), Johann Ludwig Schneller also began his ministry in Jerusalem. The cemetery founded by Gobat is owned by the Anglican Church but is managed jointly with the Evangelical Congregation of the German Language in Jerusalem.

Archbishop Hosam Naoum, head of the Anglican EMS member church, clearly named the incident as a hate crime and appealed to the Israeli authorities to take appropriate action. At the same time, he asked the public and especially all those in positions of responsibility, to support "se-

curity, mutual respect and religious tolerance in this Holy City, which is revered by all three Abrahamic religions". His appeal was backed by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS).

The cemetery was last desecrated in 2013. Then the perpetrators were also Orthodox Talmud students. The costs for restoring the tombstones were covered by Israeli authorities at the time. Ten years ago, only the cross was torn from the Schneller gravestone, but this time the damage is more serious. The entire upper stone slab of the tombstone was thrown onto a neighbouring grave. It is not yet clear who will take over the costs for repairs this time.

Unfortunately, the damage to the Protestant cemetery is not an isolated incident. In the first weeks of this year, there were other attacks on Christians and Christian symbols in Jerusalem. At the end of January, a group of ultra-Orthodox youths attacked guests in an Armenian café in Jerusalem's Old City and smashed windows and furniture. A few days later, there was another attack on two young Armenians living in the Armenian quarter. Two ultra-Orthodox men insulted them and attacked them with tear gas. That same evening, a group of ultra-Orthodox men tried to climb onto the roof of the Armenian Patriarchate to tear down the flags of the Patriarchate and Armenia.

In early February, an American tourist broke into a church on the Via Dolorosa and tore a statue of Christ from its pedes-



The Schneller tombstone before desecration...



... and after two young men had vented their hatred on Christian symbols.

tal, apparently in a religious frenzy. Even if this attack can be explained by the Jerusalem Syndrome, the increasing number of attacks on Christians in Jerusalem is viewed with great concern both in Israel and internationally – and not only by Christian representatives. For example, the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations (JCJCR) invited people to visit the churches in Via Dolorosa in solidarity on the day after the incident took place. Israeli Jewish groups also met at the Zion Cemetery shortly after the desecration to express their solidarity with Christians in the Holy Land.

In an interview, the General Vicar of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, Wil-

liam Shomali, described this as a positive side effect. The faithful of the various Christian denominations were now moving closer together and Muslims were also showing their solidarity, he said. He went on to say that there were signs of a split within Israel's Jewish community. The offenders all came from a milieu close to the new, far-right government under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "This is a fear factor not only for Christians, but also for all Palestinians and secular or 'modern' non-practising Israelis," the General Vicar said.

Uwe Gräbe and Katja Dorothea Buck

Art knows no terror

The music teacher at the TSS about her work with children

Qamar Badwan is a singer, music and drama teacher. She has been teaching at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) for the past two years. She has received numerous awards from all over the Arab world. But she says her life's work is working with children simply because "Art teaches tolerance and creativity."

In Arabic, Qamar means "moon" and stands for beauty. The name really suits the singer since she has a warm voice and is so good with children. Qamar Badwan has already taken part in many projects, for example, a UN programme and a children's play in 1997 in honour of the late Jordanian King Hussein. She has received numerous awards from all over the Arab world. She has taken part in several theatre festivals in Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, and she has recorded songs for animated films. But her great joy is being a teacher.

Qamar's singing talent was discovered early on. Her father bought her a piano and sent her to a music institute. Later, she was accepted into the prestigious Arab Academy of Music. She never wanted to earn money by singing at weddings or other festivities. "I've always focused completely on music," says Qamar. At the age of 19, she became a teacher herself. "I love what I do and have learnt a lot from children. Their world is vast. It takes time to understand their way of thinking. And they love you only when you are honest with them," she says. Once she asked her students to suggest their own topics for songs. They came back with complaints

about heavy school bags, for example, or drug problems and violence in schools. "We tackled all these problems in musical pieces." Another topic was the different treatment of girls and boys. The play she wrote and directed about this won seven awards at the Childhood Creativity Festival in 2017.

Qamar has been writing her own songs for more than 25 years. However, she did not publish her works for a long time as they were only meant for teaching. "The first of my songs I published is Sing for Life in 2021. It is inspired by the Covid pandemic." Her next song was "Sawa", which she recorded with children from the TSS. It is their version of the EMS Jubilee Song "Together we are free". Qamar rewrote the song and gave it the title "Sawa", which means "Together" in Arabic. Jordanian musician Haitham Kawan gave the melody an Arabic touch. "The song is about how we are all different as individuals and come from different cultures and religions, but we can still understand and complement each other," she says. This is a message needed in every society and all over the world, she adds.

For the video of the song, Qamar used the school yard of the TSS as a backdrop for the students while they were dancing. She had no professional technical support. She also edited the video material and the vocal recordings with her own resources. She is happy about the many positive feedbacks. "The Germans appreciate my song very much. And one day I would like to sing with other artists from different cultures."



Qamar Badwan singing with children from the TSS to an enthusiastic audience at the school's St Nicholas festivity.

As a music teacher at different schools, she has always found that school directors and artists see things differently. “We need more time to get to know our students, their talents and their abilities. Another thing is, it’s very limiting if you can only teach one style of music.” But at the TSS, this is different. There she has met people who understand her. “I must express my gratitude to the headmistress Dr Khaleda Masarwa and Director Rev. Khalid Frej for this.”

In her work as a music and drama teacher, she has noticed that children from poorer backgrounds are often the more talented ones. That is why she hopes that one day music and drama will be taught in schools like any other subject. This sharpens the sensitivity of the children and young adults, she says. “Music helps stressed students. It gives them self-confidence in dealing with social problems.” And their performance at school improves.

“I dream of a world governed by artists. Life would be more peaceful then. Because art knows no violence and no terror. Art teaches tolerance and creativity.”

Fathia Mufti lives in Benghazi (Libya) and is a podcaster and cultural activist. In autumn she completed a three-month virtual internship at the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

“Swept away by joie de vivre”

EMS General Secretary's visit to partners in the Middle East

Dieter Heidtmann has been General Secretary of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity for the past three years. In this function, he travelled for the first time to Jordan and Israel-Palestine at the end of last year. He found the children at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman and in other EMS projects in Jordan very easy-going and cheerful.

What impressed you most during your visit to the TSS?

I was impressed by how much the children are the focus of work at the TSS. The staff and the director concentrate first and foremost on the children's well-being and on ensuring they receive a good education.

How do you notice this?

By the children's easy-going cheerfulness and the friendly way they treat each other. They don't seem at all frightened. I worked in a children's home for a year during a placement before studying and I know how difficult it is for children when they cannot grow up in their own family. So, it's all the more wonderful to see how easy-going the children at the TSS behave, even at a festival which the Archbishop from Jerusalem attended as well as our delegation from Germany. It shows they feel at home at the school and the boarding home.

You also visited residential groups. What was your impression?

Here, too, there was a great deal of cheerfulness and friendliness. I was particularly pleased to see how the two EMS volunteers at the TSS have settled in and

feel at home. They recently arrived to do their voluntary service there. They are naturally involved in all the work and will certainly gain many experiences that will shape them for life. This is exactly what our volunteer programme is for.

The EMS Fellowship is a union of 25 churches and five mission societies in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe with a total of 25 million believers. What is the influence of the Schneller work?

Children are also the focus in other projects organised by our members, just as they are at the two Schneller schools. And within our fellowship there are excellent opportunities to learn from each other. On the other hand, the two Schneller schools work in a special kind of environment which is mainly Muslim and they are also affected by the various crises in the region. For example, 90 per cent of students at the TSS come from the refugee camp next door. Providing them with a future goes hand in hand with working for peace and reconciliation in society as a whole. In Lebanon and Jordan, it is evi-



At the entrance to the TSS carpentry workshop: Dieter Heidtmann with Kerstin Sommer, EVS Chair, Khaled Freij, TSS Director, and Uwe Gräbe, EVS Executive Secretary.



Invited to dance: A deaf and blind boy spontaneously invites Dieter Heidtmann at the St Nicholas dance.

dent how much Christian institutions are places of hope in either region. For example, when a girl at the TSS is the first in her family to learn to read and write, it's an investment that has a ripple effect not only on her own future but on the future of her family and the whole of society.

What are your personal takeaways from your visit to the TSS?

We were there just before Christmas and, at year's end, people like to review what's happened during the past year. For me it's very satisfying to know that our work has made a positive contribution to children like this girl who has been given the chance to go to school. Or to know

that deaf and blind children are wonderfully cared for in another project, the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf sponsored by our Anglican member church. Or that in Irbid, visually impaired, blind and sighted children attend school together and all of them benefit.

What do you think we can learn from people at the Schneller schools and the other projects?

The situation in the Middle East is very complex. Wherever you look, whether it's Jordan, Lebanon, Israel or Palestine, co-existence is faced with major challenges. People are confronted with conflicts and experience physical and mental injury. But there are also extremely remarkable people who are working to bring about peace and heal injuries precisely in this environment, people who are shaped by their faith, whether they are Jews, Christians or Muslims. They live their faith and that is what gives us hope.

What was the most touching moment for you personally on this trip?

It was probably the St Nicholas dance when a deaf and blind boy in Salt spontaneously asked me to dance. Being deaf and blind is an extreme limitation. People can only use touch and smell to find their way around. To be swept away by the joie de vivre of a dance and by a boy who cannot see or hear was a very touching moment for me.

Katja Dorothea Buck conducted the interview.

An organ for Amman

Appeal for donations for a very unusual project

In Germany, churches are closing and organs are being dismantled. This raises the question whether organs that are no longer needed here can be used elsewhere. Yes, they can and they should, says the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools. When the Executive Committee discovered there was a „spare“ organ in Wendlingen am Neckar that had been dismantled and stored for two years, they decided in mid-January that the Theodor Schneller School in Amman should get the benefit of this organ.

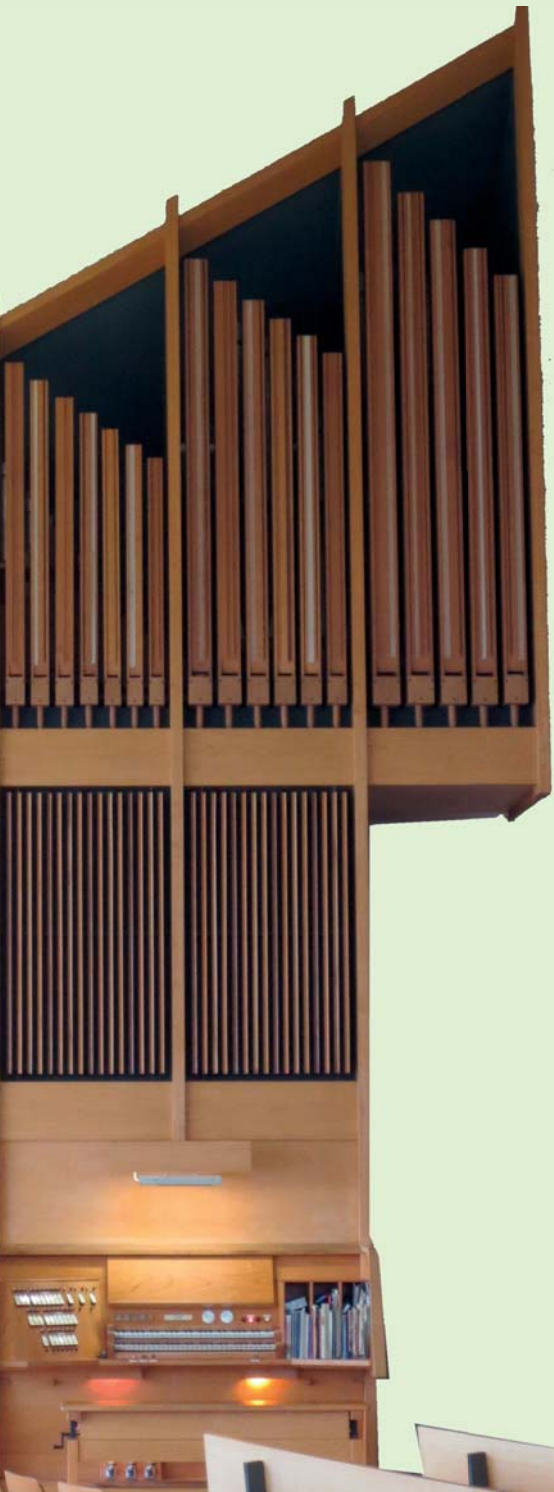
The organ had resounded in the St. John's Church in Wendlingen for more than fifty years before the church was demolished in March 2020. The organ was built in 1968 by Weigle in Echterdingen. It has 17 stops and represents the modern organ style in Württemberg at that time. The Wendlingen congregation was willing to give the organ away at no cost. But an organ cannot be transported like a large piece of furniture, and certainly not over large distances across the Mediterranean Sea. Even the relatively small organ in Wendlingen has more than a thousand pipes. Its asymmetrical organ case is more than seven metres high and a few parts have to be rebuilt (with the help of the carpentry workshop at the Theodor Schneller School). According to the Schneller Association's estimates, the cost of transportation by container, delivery to Amman and rebuilding, which will take several weeks, will be around €50,000.

The organ will continue the great tradition of the former "Syrian Orphanage" in Jerusa-

lem. The Syrian Orphanage was a Württemberg foundation and the largest educational institution in the Middle East around 1900. It had several schools, a number of different workshops and its own main church. Weigle, the organ builders in Echterdingen, built all the organs for the Syrian Orphanage in 1898, 1910 and 1931/38.



Mrs. Bichler



The organ of St John's Church in Wendlingen, Neckar, where it was an integral part of services for more than 50 years. In future, it will resound in the Christ Church on the grounds of the Theodor Schneller School in Amman.

In 1940, the Syrian Orphanage was closed down but after the war it was not possible to rebuild it anywhere in Israel. As a result, the Schneller schools were established in Lebanon and Jordan in the 1950s and 1960s. Hermann Schneller, grandson of the founder Johann Ludwig Schneller and last director at the Syrian Orphanage, tried unsuccessfully to install an organ in the churches of the two new schools. For him, the spiritual home of all his educational work were his roots in the Württemberg church with its church services, rich liturgy and music.

This legacy will now live on at the Theodor Schneller School in Amman. But that is not all. The organ will enrich the school and its entire surroundings. Very few churches in the Middle East have their own "queen of instruments" – as organs are often called.

We are appealing for donations to cover the cost of transporting and installing the organ from Wendlingen to Amman. Those who donate at least €250 will have their name immortalised on the side walls of the organ.

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A young woman writes church history

First ordination of a woman in Jerusalem

More international guests travelled to Jerusalem for the ordination of Sally Azar as pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) than for many an inauguration of archbishops and patriarchs. The 26-year-old is making history as the first woman to hold this office.

The 22nd January 2023 can be called a historic day. For the first time ever on the territory of the historical Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Israel, Palestine and Jordan), a woman was ordained to the ministry. More than a hundred ministers from all over the world – including some 20 female and male bishops – flocked to the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem for the occasion.

“I realise that my task will not be easy. And I cannot do it alone,” said the newly ordained pastor in her address. “Therefore, I ask for your trustworthy support in building a strong, loving and believing congregation. I also ask for your prayers as I will depend on God’s guidance and wisdom as I lead this church.”

The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) are connected to Sally Azar and her church in many ways – even though the ELCJHL is not formally an EMS member church. Numerous members of the founding generations of the Lutheran Church in the Holy Land grew up at the first Schneller School in Jerusalem, the Syrian Orphanage. The current bishop and father of Sally Azar, Sani Ibrahim Azar, was born at the Johann Ludwig Schneller

School in Lebanon. At the time, his father was working as an educator at the school.

Some alumni from “Studies in the Middle East (SiMO)” also travelled to Jerusalem for the ordination. The EMS regularly sends theology students to the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut through the study programme. Pastor Sally also studied there. The EMS and the EVS were represented at the ordination by Uwe Gräbe, Middle East Liaison Secretary of the EMS. He attended the festive liturgy and offered the young pastor a blessing. He knew her as a little girl from his time as Lutheran provost at the Church of the Redeemer.

The close ties between Lutherans and Anglicans in Jerusalem were very much in evidence at the ordination. It was with great naturalness and evident personal joy that Archbishop Hosam Naoum, head of the Anglican EMS member church in the Middle East, took part in the ordination liturgy alongside Bishop Azar.

Sally Azar is not the first woman minister in the Middle East. Since 2017, five women have already been ordained in Lebanon and Syria, which is also the territory of the historical Patriarchate of Antioch: Rola Sleiman (Tripoli), Najla Kassab (Beirut), Rima Nasrallah (Beirut), Mathilde Sabbagh (Hassakeh) and Linda Maktabi (Kufrshima). Sally Azar is a close friend with some of them. The fact that they could not be present at this great celebration is due to the impassable borders in the Middle East.



For the first time as an ordained minister, Sally Azar invites the congregation to communion.

Sally Azar brings with her a wide range of ecumenical experience. After her studies at the NEST in Beirut, she completed a master's degree in Intercultural Theology at the University of Göttingen and attended the University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology in Hermannsburg as of 2018. For several years she has been the Women's and Youth Representative for the Asia Region on the Council of the Lutheran World Federation. She completed her vicariate in a congregation in Berlin. As pastor in the ELCJHL, she will lead the English-speaking congregation at the Church of the Redeemer.

"Being ordained is an honour. And the chance to be ordained as a woman in my church is an additional honour," said Sally Azar shortly before her ordination. "I am excited to be a part of history and of gender equality in my church." She add-

ed that, while this was exciting, there was also a feeling of uncertainty. "I don't expect this to be an easy path."

To take some of the uncertainty away from her, her future colleagues in the ELCJHL had made a video in advance justifying why they think women's ordination is a necessary and important step for their own church. The first female pastor will be able to make good use of this male backing in an environment where the clergy consists only of men.

Uwe Gräbe and Katja Dorothea Buck

Bringing pain and anger out into the open

In commemoration of „The Trauma of Oriental Christians Then and Now“

On 19 November 2022, Oriental Christians from all over Germany met in Mainz for a commemorative event under the slogan “Remember the past – experience the healing”. As descendants of genocide survivors, they still suffer from collective trauma today. It was the first meeting of its kind in Europe.

Hundreds of thousands of Oriental Christians live in Germany. Among them are Aramaeans, Assyrians, Armenians, Tur-Abdin Christians and Pontos Greeks. They belong to different churches and come from different regions in the Middle East. What unites them is the trauma of their families who were the victims of genocides. Even though it all happened more than a hundred years ago, the cruel destiny of persecution, expulsion and death simply because of their faith cannot simply be eradicated from their collective memory. Especially when hostility still exists to this day. The fact that hardly anyone in the new homeland – namely Germany – knows anything about their history makes everything even more difficult.

Therefore, it was all the more important for the Central Council of Oriental Christians in Germany (ZOCD) in cooperation with the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Association of Christian Churches (ACK) to send out an open invitation to attend the commemorative event in Mainz. A number of eye-witnesses expressed their fears, sadness and anger. And non-oriental Christians listened. Minister from different churches placed the words

of the eye-witnesses into a biblical context so that pain and despair would not have the last word.

“In Germany, we were asked why we are so angry? We are so angry because those who threaten us keep telling us that they would do it again. Any time. And everywhere,” said Simon Jacob, chairperson of the ZOCD, who also pointed out the influence of hate speech and threats to the younger generation on social media channels. No space should be given to any form of hatred, Jacob said, despite the anger, the constant fear of something happening again, despite people exploiting this fear for their own interests to incite hatred towards others.

“We must listen to the accounts of what was experienced and understand the pain and fears of those whose faith is persecuted and despised,” said Wolfram Langpape of the EKD. Oriental Christian women then had their say. “The ghosts of genocide will return as long as the past is not dealt with and acknowledged,” said Ninve Ergeman of the Assyrian Apostolic Church. She said she could not look the other way when there were attacks on Christians in her old homeland again. “Of course, many of us grew up here and did not experience war. But the trauma of our parents and our grandparents has been passed on to us children. It is a part of us, whether we like it or not.”

Isabell Sardaryan of the Armenian Apostolic Church shared her primal fears as a child. She said the recent clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the countless



Eye-witnesses and clergy in St Quintin's Church in Mainz. The memorial stone from Mosul illuminated before them.

images of atrocities against Armenians on social media had brought up the old fear again. "My mother told me, Isabell, your fear as a child was more than just fear. You always knew something like this would happen again."

Linda Hadiko from the Syrian Orthodox community related how her uncle, who had lived in Germany for a long time, was the victim of a cruel attack along with five other Christians in 1993 during a visit to their old home in Tur Abdin. "The attackers were never caught or brought to justice. To this day, I don't know why my uncle and the others had to die," she said.

Finally, Simon Jacob of the ZOC presented the host, Father Michael Baunacke, with a memorial stone from the Saint Ephraim Cathedral in Mosul destroyed by the Islamic State in June 2014 and liberated by Iraqis, Muslims and Christians in January 2017. The inscription says that the

stone is intended to be an eternal reminder that what was destroyed can be rebuilt.

Unscheduled but all the more poignant, Nihat Demir stepped up to the microphone at the end. The police officer from Augsburg is of Muslim-Kurdish-Turkish descent. He related how as a child he heard about a murder of a so-called "infidel". "I knew that this was not right. My ancestors may have wronged your family," he said, addressing Simon Jacob. "Unfortunately, as a descendant, I cannot undo that and even you as a descendant cannot change the past. I am truly sorry for what happened back then. Therefore, please, let us create a better future together."

Katja Dorothea Buck

Friends moulded by their Schneller years

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools bids farewell to two people whose lives were significantly moulded by “Schneller”. Basil Rishmavi and Hanna “Johnny” Zacharia met as children at the so-called Schneller School in Bethlehem. Many of the former students of the Syrian Orphanage in Jeru-

salem were sent there after it was closed down in 1940. It was also there that Hermann Schneller, former director of the Syrian Orphanage, met up with “his” students again at the end of the 1940s.

Basil was half-orphaned and Johnny had lost his mother at an early age. His father died when he was twelve. For both of them, the Schneller School became a second family – and a springboard to a self-determined life. Basil went on to study medicine in Tübingen, stayed in Germany and worked as a doctor for many decades in Morsbach near Cologne. Hermann Schneller recognised a different talent in Johnny. At events at the school, he saw how charming, friendly, attentive and endearing he was with guests. He helped him to gain a scholarship at the hotel management school in Salzburg-Klessheim. This is how Johnny Zacharia went to Austria in 1966 and found a new home there.



Basil Rishmavi (right) with Johnny Zacharia (centre) and another friend from Schneller times, Emil Odeh (left) on a joint outing.

In the early 1950s, Schneller went with them to Lebanon and built the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Khirbet Kanafar starting in 1952. Two of these students were Basil Rishmavi and Johnny Zacharia.

The time they spent together as children and teenagers at the Schneller School left its life-long mark on both of them, even though they both repeatedly reported on the hardships they had to endure. The school education at that time was very strict. Nothing and no one could compensate for the fate of losing one’s biological parents. But Basil and Johnny learned something else at the Schneller School that was to shape their lives: tolerance and respect for others. “As an Orthodox Christian at the school, Johnny experienced that he could have a Muslim as a friend or attend Evangelical church services. Nevertheless, it was the chants of the Greek Orthodox Church that moved him to tears until the end,” writes his daughter Nadja about her father.

And Basil Rishmavi, the friendly and respected family doctor from the Rhineland, could justifiably be proud of the fact that as a Protestant Arab Christian in Catholic

Morsbach, he was once elected to be Carnival Prince.

In their early years in Germany and Austria respectively, Basil and Johnny met regularly with other former Schneller students who had also made their way to Europe. And of course, their wives and children were always there. Johnny's children still remember these meetings well. This is why they felt the need to reach out to the former friends of their father who died on 22 December 2022 and to inform them of the death of their old friend. They contacted the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools and asked for their support. They had just received the news that Basil Rishmavi had died on 8 January 2023. Basil had attended EVS General Meetings for many years together with his wife Eva and had actively supported the association at many church conventions.

It is touching that the two friends died so soon after each other. And even more touching that their families placed the same verse by Khalil Gibran above their respective obituaries.

“Let me sleep,
Cover not my breast
with weeping and sighing,
Speak not with sorrow
Of my going away,
but close thine eyes,
and you will see me among you,
now and always.”

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools holds Basil Rishmavi and Johnny Zacharia in grateful memory. Their life journeys are an incentive and encouragement for us not to relent in our concern for disadvantaged children in the crisis-ridden Middle East.

Katja Dorothea Buck

Letters to the Editor

SM 4-2022 Angels, organs and song

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the last issue of the Schneller Magazine. The content is really well balanced, interesting and instructive. It was

such a delight, I couldn't stop reading the whole magazine. Congratulations on a job well done.

Gaby T. Haddad, Amman

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*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet
of the messenger who announces peace.*

Isaiah 52:7



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