

2/2015

# SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



**ARRIVAL IN GERMANY – ARAB CHRISTIANS IN OUR COUNTRY**  
A PARISH IN THURINGIA HELPS CHRISTIANS IN IRAQ



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Dear Readers,

Our last issue was a declaration of love to the remaining Christian communities in the Middle East – and it triggered many positive sometimes very personal reactions. Basically this issue is the opposite of the previous one. We take a look at Christians who come from the Middle East and who are meanwhile living among us here in Germany. We will also look at communities of migrants as well as touching individual fates. Several had to start on their journey to Europe because of the catastrophic and continually life-threatening situation that has been prevailed in the Middle East for several years. Others have been here longer and have become a permanent part of the cultural mosaic of our country. Whatever the case, they all

have their place in the open society for which especially Christians have always stood for since it corresponds to the message of reconciliation pronounced by Jesus Christ.

We are particularly grateful that the Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), Bishop Dr. Heinrich Bedford Strohm kindly agreed to write the Contemplation for this issue. In addition we are publishing two articles about people living among us who are committed to fighting for more justice in the Middle East. One article describes the dedicated work which the Evangelical parish in the Thuringian village of Rüdersdorf performed in the interests of internally displaced persons in Iraq; the other is a report about a person doing service as Ecumenical Accompanier in Hebron, Palestine. And of course we will also report on the Schneller schools which continue to carry out their service faithfully.

The German Evangelical Church Conference takes place in Stuttgart on 3 to 7 June. The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools with its “Café Salaam” will be located on the Markt der Möglichkeiten (Opportunity Bazaar) under the umbrella of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). In addition we are participating in numerous events and will be welcoming guests from the Middle East. Just come by and take a look! We look forward to seeing you.

On behalf of the editorial team I would like to thank you for your solidarity and wish you a pleasant and relaxing summer.

Yours,



Uwe Gräbe



## WHEN FOREIGNERS BECOME FRIENDS



Photo: Thomas Prieto Peral

Numerous refugees have found shelter in Ankawa, the Christian district of Erbil. They live in unfinished flats, tents or in parish rooms.

*For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,*  
(Matt 25:35)

Last year, I visited the Middle East for the first time. Iraq, Egypt, Israel and Palestine – I only knew about these countries from reports, literature and from the media. But of course it's a totally different thing to hear about the countries and the people who live there, to read about them or to follow discussions than to visit these countries personally, meet the people there and get an idea at first hand of the situation.

The encounters in Iraq with people who were driven out of their home towns in which their families had lived for centuries in some cases, who had lost everything, the talks with bishops, politicians, the council of leading Muslim teaching authorities in Kurdistan, with the

German Consul General in Erbil, my visit to the overcrowded camps – all of this deeply moved me. Christianity which has been resident in the region for more than 1,800 years is in danger of disappearing. The displaced Syrian Orthodox Archbishop Nikodemus of Mosul told us in a sad voice: it is the first time since the 3rd century AD that Christian worship service no longer take place in Mosul since these tumults of history.

### Hospitality and cordiality

Despite all the misery, all the distress and all the suffering we were received with unparalleled hospitality and cordiality by the residents of Erbil and other places in the region. The legendary Arab hospitality was demonstrated in every possible way. We were strangers to these people but we became close and trusted friends.

Since I experienced these encounters, it pains me all the more to see the many



Laughing despite the horror. Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm with refugee children in Northern Iraq.

## Enriching encounters

But there is an enormous opportunity precisely in encounters with strangers. Encounters with Christians from the Eastern churches enrich and change our view of the Christian faith. They show me that it is very far from selfevident that we

people who are fleeing from persecution and terror. Many of them do not manage to reach safety. Those who succeed in reaching Europe are safe from all danger to life and limb. But it is very often difficult for them to find their feet in a strange country or even find a new home. They have gone through traumatic experiences. Now they deserve people who meet them

with openness, curiosity, courage and without any hesitation. People who accept them with the same open mind and hospitality which we experienced in Iraq.

*For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,*

In the Parable of the Judgement of Nations, Jesus gives us the mission to meet strangers with openness and to provide them with what they need. We meet Jesus Christ himself in service to others. Very often we forget this. We look at strangers as a threat to ourselves, to our living standards, to our culture and our habits.

are able to publicly live our own religious convictions freely and without restrictions. It is a genuine privilege.

My wish is that from this we can learn to be more thankful for the freedom we have been granted. I also wish that with this freedom we can muster up the courage to approach foreigners who come to us, to give them openness and closeness and to help them find a new home here. So that foreigners can become close and trusted friends.

*Heinrich Bedford-Strohm is Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria and Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany.*



## “BUT CHURCH IS OUR IDENTITY”

**The Aramean Baker Al-Khoshaba is sacristan at a Catholic church**

**In Aramaic his surname means Sunday. His first name means early morning. One might be tempted to think it was his destiny to work as sacristan in a church. Baker Al-Khoshaba could also have done many other things – if the circumstances had been different.**

**B**aker Al-Khoshaba is actually an engineer. He studied at the University of Mosul. The man with the serious face is also known as an expert in the Aramaic language which is his mother tongue and which he can speak as fluently as Arabic. His grandfather was a teacher of classical Aramaic. Baker learnt many background details from him about this language which was spoken by Jesus and his apostles. It has remained the language of Christians in Northern Iraq to this day.

In 2002, he arrived in Germany as a young man with his wife and his first two of his three children after a tortuous journey. At that time, he would have preferred to start working straight away and make his contribution to the society which had taken him in. But this he was not allowed to do. The family spent five years in a small room in a home for people seeking asylum – without work permit and initially without any possibility to learn German. Lost years, he says. Until the Catholic priest of Stuttgart-Botnang visited him in 2007 and got to know Khoshaba. The parish was looking for a new sacristan at the time. The Catholic church offered him the post and supported his application. This paved the way for the family to receive permanent residence permits and finally German nationality.

“Meanwhile, the German authorities have finally realised that a person only needs to be a Christian to be pressurised and persecuted in Iraq,” says Khoshaba. He realised very early on that his family had no future any more in Karmless. His home village is situated only a few kilometres from Qaraqosh, not far from the town of Nimrod on the Plain of Niniveh. All these places were overrun by the so called “Islamic State (IS) in the summer of 2014 and the Christian inhabitants had to flee or they were abducted or murdered. “The IS originates from the Sunni population of my homeland,” says Khoshaba. “Until Saddam Hussein was deposed, these people showed hardly any interest in Islam. In my childhood, there were hardly any bad words said against us Christians. Then suddenly Qur’an schools and new mosques sprouted up everywhere and the Muslims started to radicalise.”

He understood these signs. He sold his house for very little money in 2002 and set off with his family on the road to Europe. He is still seeking his spiritual home. But one thing is certain, he feels at home in the Catholic parish which showed so much kindness in taking him in. In the same way as in the Chaldean parish. He has also made contacts with the Arab Evangelical Parish in Stuttgart. A good friend of his also became a member of a Brethren community. “Church is not just a place where people disperse and go home after Sunday mass,” he explains. “Church is something more,” – and here he searches for the right word – “hawwi-yatuna” – it is our identity. “People stay together and spread the joyful message of



Today, Baker Al-Khoshaba is sacristan at the church of St. Clemens in Stuttgart-Botnang.

Jesus every day. As Christians we have a mission. The presence of Jesus should be felt every day.”

It is no surprise to Khoshaba that the old Christian heartland in Syria and Iraq is gradually be depopulated of Christians. The Armenian genocide in 1915 not only affected the Armenians but also Arameans and Assyrians – simply because they were Christians. “Every hundred to a hundred and fifty years, there is a campaign of persecution against Christians. How can anything survive in the end?”

His doctor in Germany once asked him why he didn’t simply convert to Islam if that was the only way to save his life in his homeland. Khoshaba shook his head: this thought can only exist in a society which is indifferent to religion. “My ancestors have paid with their blood for

2,000 years – and then he comes and says I should simply convert?” But then suddenly a smile comes over the serious face. “God has totally different plans. Jesus is the one who plans my life.” Then he speaks the Lord’s prayer. In Aramaic of course.

*Uwe Gräbe*

## THE ARAB BODY OF CHRIST

### A parish is the mirror of regional conflicts and hardships

**The Arab Evangelical Parish of Stuttgart is like a burning lens. Whenever armed conflicts, revolutions or civil wars take place in the Middle East, they are reflected in the people who come to worship service. The parish has a dual bridge function – for Arab refugees trying to find their footing in German society and as a bridge between two worlds.**

In our parish the crescent not only stretches geographically from Morocco in the West to Iraq in the East, it also spans all confessions belonging to the Eastern churches and movements. This veritably Ecumenical diversity shows the richness of the “Arab Body of Christ”. On the other hand it demands a large amount of tolerance and spiritual openness from every individual. We want to preserve this openness. That is why each person remains of course a member of his church of origin.

But when there is a baptism, it is always Evangelical. The parish pastor, Dr. Hanna Josua from Lebanon, is Evangelical. In the first few years, baptisms took place in the Schlosskirche (Castle Church); but last year, they were celebrated in the Stiftskirche (Collegiate Church) for the first time. Many longstanding parishioners coming to worship service first had to get used to the whispering going on during such occasions – it stemmed from simultaneous interpreting for the baptised child. Many refugees from Iraq and Syria consciously choose the gospel of love and forgiveness in view of the atrocities they have experienced from the “Islamic State”.

During a baptism, Arab parish members from half a dozen countries sit as the “baptismal family” in the pews to the right of the altar – for them this is a strong signal of acceptance and appreciation.

The parish stills spiritual hunger and the need for fellowship and community with brothers and sisters in faith. But integral pastoral care also means giving support for asylum procedures and providing assistance to those who are trying to find their feet and settle down in a society that is so different from the one they know. One woman from Iraq said, “What happened to me in Iraq was terrible. But what was even worse were the first few months here in Germany.” Need does not automatically teach people to pray. To prevent traumatising and disillusionment from turning into bitterness, we always assume a bridge function and explain to people the concerns and ways of thinking of others.

Over a hundred people from the whole of Germany come to the annual Arab leisuretime festival. The four days are a welcome opportunity to take a breath of fresh air from the cramped conditions in shared accommodation. Every time, it is wonderful to see how people let go of their unrest, find peace and experience a little bit of healing. Even participants who are unable to make their own contribution are there – they need these days in particular. This is possible due to the Evangelical pastoral care which offers subsidies and godparents. This year’s leisuretime festival had the theme “Comfort from suffering” and dealt with the needs and traumas of many





Arabs, whether they experienced this suffering themselves or through their dependants.

But it is not only Arabs who come to worship service who need counselling but also the German society. It is vital to deal with reservations and fears, supply factual information and encourage Germans to meet refugees. Integration needs time, patience, imagination and counselling – on both sides. In parishes we try to raise awareness and provide information about the situation of Christians in the Middle East during parish evenings or in seminars. They should not be primarily seen as “victims” but accepted and appreciated as people with their own different religious beliefs. This information can also be wrapped in a creative package, for example in an “Oriental Passion Evening” or presentations or Arabic music.

Our Oriental Church Calendar in four languages with Christian motifs from the

Arabic world gives insights in the spiritual treasure trove of a Christian tradition which is 2,000 years old and is still alive today. The “Sign of God” exhibition with Arab Christian calligraphy whets the appetite to go on an unusual journey of discovery of Biblical texts. The accompanying programme and translated song texts for the “Ex oriente vox” concert with Arab singers is a special

spiritual experience and a meeting place for German and Arab speaking visitors. Our parish wants to be a bridge – for Arab refugees setting foot in German society and a bridge between worlds that are so different from each other.

*Heidi Josua is a religious education teacher and is married to Hanna Josua, pastor of the Arab Evangelical Parish of Stuttgart.*

## ARRIVAL IN GERMANY

### How a parish took in a young man from Syria

Sometimes it's so simple. A young man from Syria comes to Germany, meets the right people and within a few weeks, he has a circle of acquaintances which help him to find a footing in a foreign society. What is the key? A parish.

It all started with a short email. An acquaintance from Lebanon wrote that his grandnephew from Homs had obtained a visa for Germany and now wanted to learn German and then become a medical specialist. Where was the best place in Germany he could do this? The reply was as short as it was clear: in Tübingen of course. The Swabian town is small and manageable and thanks to the university it is cosmopolitan enough to accommodate the plans of a young doctor from Syria. Of course the advice contained quite a lot of local patriotism.

There was hardly three weeks left to find a suitable place to live. Although the small town on the River Neckar is quite beautiful, Tübingen is an expensive place to live. And if you come to Germany on a language visa, you can only live from your savings. A work permit is expressly prohibited. You don't have to be a clairvoyant to realise or guess that very few Syrians are able at present to set aside large sums of money. The civil war has pushed the costs of living to levels that are scarcely sustainable.

The question where the young man – let's call him Khaled – could live over the coming months proved to be a wonderful excursion into the realms of people's gen-



Photo: EMS/Katja Buck

eral readiness to help. The application came at much too short a notice for the local hostels. All rooms had long been allocated. But the main thing was the sincere regret of not being able to help a young man from Syria, especially a Christian. Every refusal was coupled with deep sympathy for the suffering of people in Syria. What a valuable experience!

The request went viral. Almost every evening, people rang and asked how they could help. But unfortunately there was no place to live yet. In the end, an acquaintance gave the tip to ask the woman pastor of a Tübingen parish for help. And so it came to be. After only five minutes she agreed to ask around her parish

Khaled didn't want to be photographed before Tübingen's river front. When you come from a country ravaged by civil war, you live in constant fear that people will draw the wrong conclusions.



– and then success came at last. A female student rang up. There was a spare room for the next three weeks at her students' home where the 28 year old could move into immediately free of charge.

In the middle of March, Khaled arrived by bus from Frankfurt at the bus station in Tübingen. He had left his homeland for the first time in his life. His new start in Germany was very strenuous for him. Besides finding a place where he could live permanently, there was also the question of where he could find the right German course for him. And he also had to learn about all the many minor and major things that are part of German everyday life: supermarkets, public transport, immi-

gration office, opening up bank account, etc.

On his first Sunday in Tübingen he was standing at the worship service in the parish church. The woman pastor was not there herself. But she had informed a number of parishioners about Khaled's problems. The fact that after the announcements he should go to the front to present himself was of course very unpleasant for him. But it was the start of a wave of willingness to help which has carried him along every since. After the worship service, many people came to him and offered him not only a room but also their company. An old man agreed to meet up with him now and again and talk German to him. A female student of Arabic asked him whether he wanted to enter into a language partnership with her. She would teach him German and he could speak Arabic to her. Two families wanted to invite him to a meal. And the manager of a Tübingen clinic promised his help as soon as he needed to find a place to study as a specialist medical trainee. In the end, Khaled had ten names and addresses in his hands. They even included five offers of a place for him to live. And all this just one week after his arrival in Tübingen.

In the meantime, Khaled is living with a young family in a lodger flat, he attends an intensive language course regularly and he regularly meets up with his new acquaintances in Tübingen. Although his homesickness for Syria and his worry for his family remain, the experience that there are people in Germany who really care how he is doing makes everything a little bit easier.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

## DISCOVERING THE SPIRITUAL TREASURES OF OTHERS

### Orthodox and Evangelical clergy seek dialogue

**Orthodoxy has actually only existed in Germany since the recent wave of immigration. Orthodox and Evangelical clergy in Wuerttemberg discovered that it is a very enriching experience to discuss in detail a different tradition at a day of encounter which took place recently.**

At the beginning of February, 16 pastors from the Evangelical Church of Wuerttemberg and eleven priests mainly from Greek communities in Baden-Württemberg met at the Greek Orthodox Church in Stuttgart-Feuerbach. The theme at the day of encounter was the meeting between Simon and the new born Jesus. It is the Biblical basis for the “Feast of the Presentation of the Lord” which is known in Germany as the “Lichtmess” (Candlemas). In the Orthodox tradition it is known as “Ypapanti” (meeting, encounter). “In the Orthodox church year, this day is also celebrated in the Western tradition on 2 February,” said Deacon ret. Klaus Schwarz, Chairman of the Regional Evangelical Working Group for Orthodox Churches in his sermon during the Orthodox morning service. While Candlemas in the West celebrates the end of the Christmas period, the day is one of the twelve main festivals in the Orthodox church year. “This is why we also find its icons in the festive series of the iconostasis”. Encounter and apparition are the central theme, said Schwarz

In the Evangelical tradition, Simon’s song of praise also has a fixed place in evening prayers (tradition of the liturgy of the hours), at the end of communion and

during funeral services. This is to remind the people praying of their mortality and give them comfort at the same time. Through “Yours in peace”, a person can give back the day or his life to the One from whose hands he received it. The Evangelical tradition comes alive by singing the “Nunc dimittis” together from the Alpirsbach Antiphonal and the fitting Lutheran song. Thomas Holm, the Evangelical school dean, said that Simon was a clear example of what it means to accept Christ into one’s life. It is the personal mission in the life of every Christian, although the church has no direct healing function. “Simon stands as a witness to how an individual can be brought to recognise Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and accept Him as Redeemer in his life.”

On the other hand, Archpriest Dr. Georgios Basioudis from Mannheim emphasised the “fullness of life” and “the human longing of no longer having to fear death”, which is what the story speaks of. “Simon’s meeting with Maria’s baby is a very special meeting. And it is an image for the encounter of each one of us with Christ, or in other words, an image for the encounter of our souls with Christ,” said Basioudis. “When we manage to liberate our souls from the captivity of our ego, we fall heads over heels in love with Christ since our soul has waited its whole life for this moment and this meeting.” During challenging moments in our lives, our soul turns to Christ to find fullness. The path there leads via commemoration of the Mother of Jesus and thoughts about countless people who have set examples



Photo: ElkWue/Zürn

**Orthodox and Evangelical clergy at the Day of Encounter in the Greek Orthodox Church in Stuttgart.**

of faith, people “who have existed in all possible contexts all over the world, at all times, in extremely difficult times, and who have kept their holy christening robe pure throughout their lives and through their courage and have remained in communion with God for ever”, he said.

On his part, Bishop Vasilios of Aristi evoked the idea of three pillars of church life. One pillar is for service to specific people. The task is to make fellow human beings experience the love of God. “Service also means finding the Face of God in the faces of fellow human beings.” The second pillar is fellowship centred on Jesus Christ. Loneliness is an enormous problem in our society. Thirdly Jesus Christ communicates with us as Evangelical and Orthodox Christians. The bishop underlined our common responsibility to interpret faith in such a way that the Gospel

and the churches become the “sustainable factor for life and society”. Our duty is to “keep together all the forces in our churches and to listen to each other.” The number of people who no longer belong to a church is steadily growing.

*Senta Zürn is prelatore pastor working in the Service for Mission, Ecumenism and Development at the Evangelical Church of Wuerttemberg.*



## NOT FOREIGNERS BUT BROTHERS AND SISTERS!

EKD paper on how to interact with parishes of different languages and origins

The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) needs to catch up – and it knows this very well. The EKD paper “We are all Evangelical!” was published in autumn 2014 and discusses missed opportunities in dealing with parishes of different languages and origins, among other things. For the EKD it is a matter of changing the mindset in Germany’s parishes.

The paper does not hold back on self-criticism. The Foreword says that in the past, the Evangelical churches in Germany have hardly taken any notice of the fact that more than two thirds of immigrants belong to a Christian community. For a long time, people with an immigrant background were only thought of as “foreigners who needed help”. But “cooperation between brothers and sisters with equal rights” covers many more aspects.

In many places cooperation with parishes of different languages and origins is limited to existing side by side. Although rooms in a parish hall are also used by a community with a different language and origin, there are rarely genuine encounters. This model is a “non-Christian coexistence of brothers and sisters”, as the paper states. In the so-called “sister church model”, the two communities are in regular contact with each other and regularly celebrate worship services together. Then finally in the “integration model”, communities of different languages and origins are member communities of an EKD member church with all rights and obligations. The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau has already taken this



Available as a download from [www.ekd.de/download/ekd\\_texte\\_119.pdf](http://www.ekd.de/download/ekd_texte_119.pdf)

step. For more than five years, a Korean and an Indonesian parish have been part of the regional church.

Experience with integration is actually nothing new for the EKD. For example, after World War II, many Evangelical Lutheran refugees arrived in the strict reformed Evangelical parishes on the left bank of the Lower Rhine. Meanwhile, many reformed and Lutheran parishes have developed uniated forms of worship service – a pragmatic solution. But with people of a different language or skin colour, it is obviously a more difficult task.

For this reason in 2011, the EKD Council called for a new theological paradigm and a genuine shift in mentality. For three years, the ad hoc committee dealt with the issue of how the theological concept of the “household of God” (Eph 2:19) needed to be further developed so that local and immigrant Christians can gain access to a genuine church community and become ecumenical brothers and sisters with equal rights. The EKD paper provides the answers.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*



# BECOME A MEMBER OF THE EVS.

The "Evangelischer 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 needy children a school education and vocational training at the Schneller Schools.

In its publications and events, the EVS provides information about churches and Christians in the Middle East. The Schneller Magazine is published four times a year and can be subscribed free of charge. Speakers for lectures on topics featuring the work of the schools can be booked from the EVS Secretariat.

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 and social organisation.

The Schneller schools are dependent on your donations to continue providing their service to needy people. The plight of refugees in the Middle East is enormous. In addition the need of children from difficult family backgrounds must not be forgotten. That is the original mission of the Schneller schools in Lebanon and Jordan and which they fulfil in a wonderful way as before. The children in the two schools are provided with the chance of a better future by good schooling and vocational training. The natural coexistence of Christians and Muslims at the schools expands their horizon beyond the religious faith of the individual – this is an experience which is more important today than even before.

**Please support the Schneller schools with your donation.**

**Donation account of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS)**

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**EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools**

## “HELPING ALL PEOPLE IN NEED”

### New course for single refugee mothers from Syria

**In the middle of April, a training course for single refugee mothers from Syria started at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS). Those who graduated from the course last year have more or less found work.**

**T**he women all live in refugee camps located in the vicinity of the school. Some of their husbands have stayed to fight the war and some of them have abandoned their families for whatever reasons. Now the mothers must look after their children on their own. Over the coming three months, they will undergo training at the JLSS in the field of tailoring or hairdressing. With the new knowledge they acquire they will be able to earn their own income later.

It was originally planned to accept eight women on the course. “We had to do some reorganisation so now we have twelve women on the course,” writes Reverend George Haddad, Director of the JLSS. “The need is so great that I couldn’t refuse.”

During this time, the women come to the JLSS with their children. Every day, a bus fetches them from the camp and brings them to the JLSS. During the courses, the mothers take turns looking after the children. Besides pocket money and heating oil, the women and their children receive a hot meal and can use the washrooms at the school for their personal hygiene. “Recently, the mothers were faced with another problem. They now have to pay a monthly rent of 50 US dol-

lars to the land owner on whose land they have set up their tents,” writes George Haddad. “I promised the women we would pay their rent for the duration of the course.”

Last year, the JLSS had already offered a sewing course for ten single refugee mothers. In the meantime, two of them have found fulltime jobs in a sewing workshop, reports Haddad. They are now able to earn enough money to support their families. Three other women are earning a small income with occasional sewing work in the refugee camp. “Unfortunately the other five women have not had the opportunity to use their newly acquired knowledge and competence.” Despite this Haddad rates the overall numbers as a major success. In general it is very difficult for Syrian refugee women to find work in Lebanon.

The project for single refugee mothers is a major challenge for the school. Besides the day-to-day business of running the residential home and the vocational training centre, the refugee women and their children have to be integrated in everyday life on the school grounds. All in all there is an atmosphere of tension in Lebanon against Syrian refugees. More than 1.2 million men and women from Syria have sought refuge in the small Mediterranean country since the outbreak of the civil war. With a total population of around four million inhabitants, this means an increase of over 25 percent. The impacts on the economy, education and the health system are clearly felt and resentment against the refugees is on the increase. The



Syrian women with their instructors from the Schneller school.

situation for men from Syria has become very difficult,” says George Haddad. A new law demands that every Syrian must prove he has a Lebanese sponsor. Whoever is unable to name one is regularly visited by the police and threatened with deportation. It is all the more important for the Schneller school to set an example in this situation with the refugee project. “I hope that people inside and outside the school learn to appreciate what we are doing,” says Haddad. “We are facing major challenges. But we will not let up in our mission to help everybody who is in need. That is what the Schneller school stands for.”

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

## VOLUNTEERS AGAIN AT THE TSS

**Amman (TSS/EMS).** Starting this autumn, three young people from Germany will again be sent as Ecumenical Volunteers to the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman. For political and internal reasons no volunteers have been sent to the TSS for the past two years.

The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) will also send two further volunteers to the Arab Episcopal School (AES), an inclusive school for blind and sighted children in Irbid. One volunteer will also go the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf in Salt, which is another project of the Anglican Church in Jerusalem and is supported by the EMS. As before, it is impossible to send Ecumenical Volunteers to the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon due to the security situation and visa problems.

The EMS Ecumenical Volunteer Programme (ÖFP) sends many young people to institutions of partner churches in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. For more information on the programme and the application procedure, visit

[www.ems-online.org/en/active-worldwide/ecumenical-youth-volunteers-programme/](http://www.ems-online.org/en/active-worldwide/ecumenical-youth-volunteers-programme/)

# EMS

## CIVIL SOCIETY IN LEBANON, SYRIA AND ISRAEL/PALESTINE

# INVITATION

**Bad Boll (EMS).** The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) has sent out invitations to a conference on the topic of Civil Society in the Middle East which will take place at the Protestant Academy Bad Boll **on 3 to 5 July 2015**. The aim is to sound out the opportunities and challenges facing civil society cooperation.

Besides the EMS the Germany-Israel-Palestine Forum, the Tübingen University Group PIVO (Politics in the Middle East) and the Alsharq Cooperation Partner Network will be attending this conference. Under the title **“The State of the States – Status and Opportunities of Civil Society Activities in the Middle East”**, discussion will centre around strategies to promote civil society, network actors from the region and the role which German actors can play.

The background is the overall situation in the Near and Middle East. The states in the region are currently undergoing a profound transformation. Public order is either being questioned, is disappearing or has already fallen apart. This has direct impacts on civil society actors. Sometimes they assume tasks which are no longer guaranteed by the state.

The conference will focus on Lebanon, Syria and Israel/Palestine. The starting situations are different. Israel and Palestine live with the fact that statehood fails to materialise. Syria is not a functioning state any more. And Lebanon is currently experiencing a statehood that is totally fragile. However, civil society actors everywhere are experiencing blind alleys when it comes to shaping the future.

So what opportunities are left for civil society actors? And what are the resulting possibilities of cooperation for German actors? These issues will be discussed by Hanan Ashrawi, Jörg Armbruster and Bodo Straub, among others. Guest speakers are Osama Felix Darra, Doreen Houry, Mohammed Matar, Doron Gilad and Samir Mansour.

*For more information, visit [www.ev-akademie-boll.de/tagung/430615.html](http://www.ev-akademie-boll.de/tagung/430615.html). Registration can be made on the Academy's website or by phoning Susanne Heinzmann +49 7164 79-217.*

## CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM DIALOGUE IN LEBANON

**Stuttgart (EMS).** The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) together with the Islamic representative of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg, Reverend Dr. Heinrich Georg Rothe, has sent out invitations to a lecture on the topic of **“Christian-Muslim dialogue in Lebanon today – Forms and challenges”** which will take place in the Hospitalhof in Stuttgart

**at 19.00 on 10 July 2015.**

The speaker is Dr. George Sabra, Dean of the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut. The lecture will be in German. The ensuing discussion will be conducted in German and English. Interpreters will be provided.

## SCHNELLER AT THE KIRCHENTAG

*The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) had a stand on the Market of Opportunities in the "Mission and One World" section at the 35th German Protestant Church Congress (Kirchentag) in Stuttgart. You will find us in Marquee 7 (stand number ZH7-D02) at 10.30 to 18.30 from 4 to 6 June 2015. As always, you will find refreshments in the form of Arabic coffee and sweetmeats in the "Café Salaam" where you will be able to exchange news and views with us about Schneller work and the Middle East. We look forward to meeting you there.*

*We would like to inform you about some of the events that will be taking place.*

Under the title **"When the lights go out in Bethlehem?"**, a panel discussion organised by the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW) will consider the question whether Christians in the Middle East still have a future and why this issue is important for us in Germany. The panel discussion will take place in **Theme Marquee 2 on the market square at 14.30 on Thursday, 4 June 2015**. The members on the panel include the Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church, Louis Raphaël I Sako from Baghdad (invited), Reverend Dr. Mitri Raheb from Bethlehem, Simon Jacob, Chairman of the Central Council of Oriental Christians in Germany and Professor Dr. Martin Tamcke from the University of Göttingen. The panel discussion will be moderated by Katja Dorothea Buck, freelance journalist and editor of the Schneller Magazine.

**On Thursday, 4 June 2015** at 21.00, the Stuttgart Kammerchor (Chamber Choir) will give a benefit concert in the Church of St. Elisabeth (Elisabethenstr. 21) in aid of two projects of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) in South Africa and South India. The choir will perform a cappella music from the Romantic era with texts from Roman, Russian and Reformed liturgy under the musical direction of Prof. Frieder Bernius. Admission will be part of the church conference.

**At Marktplatz 2 on Friday, 5 June 2015** at 14.30, the EVS invites guests to an event entitled **"Education – Recipe against extremism and radicalisation?"**. We have managed to obtain the participation of Reverend Dr. Habib Badr from the EVS, Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut, Reverend Dr. Khaled Freij, Director of the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan and Dorothee Beck, head of education at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon. The moderator will be Michael Landgraf, head of the Religious Education Centre of the Protestant Church of the Palatinate. German and English interpretation during the event will be provided by Reverend Dr. Uwe Gräbe, Managing Director of the EVS.

**Saturday, 6 June 2015** from 11.00 to 18.00 is a thematic day dedicated to the Arabic region. The project management, to which the EMS belongs among others, invites guests to attend a podium discussion in Marquee Hall 17 (former marshalling yard) from 11.00 to 13.00 with Prof. Dr. Tarek Mitri, former Lebanese Minister of Culture and US special ambassador and Yassin al-Haj Saleh, the Syrian author. Together with the Muslim scholar Shaykh Muhammad Al-Yaqoubi and Bishop Dr. Elias Toumeh (both from Syria), the two main speakers will talk on the topic of **"The example of Syria: Religious and social fault lines"**. The moderator for the audience will be Reverend Dr Uwe Gräbe.

The EMS invites guests to an international worship service **in the Memorial Church in Hölderlinstrasse 14 at 16.00 on Saturday, 6 June 2015**. The topic will be **"Nowhere are we amongst ourselves. How churches are living in a mixed up world"**. The sermon will be held by Prof. Dr. Jochen Cornelius Bundschuh, Bishop of Baden from Karlsruhe. The Ghanaian Choir from Stuttgart and the Indonesian Choir from Rhine-Main will provide the musical background.

## GERMANS IN THE HOLY LAND

**Exhibition shows many personal items of settlers and missionaries**

**German missionaries and settlers first came to the Holy Land with great plans and noble ideas after the middle of the 19th century. Very little is known of their long-lasting influence on the society there. Historian Jakob Eisler, honorary member of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools, has dedicated an extensive exhibition to this topic.**

One of the most well-known pioneers of these times was the teacher Johann Ludwig Schneller. In 1854, he set off with his wife Magdalena from a small village on the Swabian Alb to Jerusalem and founded the Syrian Orphanage there six years later. Its aim was to become the largest welfare and social institution in Palestine by the turn of the century. Most of the German settlers and missionaries who went in search of adventure and a new start in the Holy Land in the second half of the 19th century came from Wuerttemberg. Several years ago, Jakob Eisler dedicated an impressive exhibition to them.

The present exhibition is much larger and more extensive. Besides the work of the Syrian Orphanage and the Temple Society, more than a hundred panels also present the Auguste Victoria Foundation, the Protestant "Propstei", the Jerusalem Society, the Carmel Monastery and German Catholic institutions such as the Sisters of Mercy of St. Charles Borromeo, the St. Paul Hospice and the Dormitio.

In those days, the Holy Land must have been a pivotal point in the hearts and

minds of many Germans, in particular the Wuerttemberg Pietists. The exhibition also exhibits products, devotional items and books from Palestine in about 20 large showcases. Eisler obtained them on loan from many private persons whose ancestors went to Jerusalem as missionaries, settlers or pilgrims and brought home with them souvenirs such as cigar stands, pipes, letter openers, pen holders and of course crosses or goblets in every possible size. "For many these objects represented a chance to feel closer to the Holy Land," says Eisler who also had access to private diaries from the time. The Syrian Orphanage was well able to respond to the enormous demand from Germany with its carpentry workshop and the many apprentices and craftsmen. In 1890, all purchasable arts and crafts products were presented in "The Zion Messenger", the precursor to the Schneller Magazine. Souvenirs made of olive wood and later made of black Moses stone from the Dead Sea and mother-of-pearl items were a vital source of income to finance the Schneller work in Jerusalem.

Another impressive sight is a showcase full of historical games. "Kaiserfahrt nach Palästina" (From Kaiserfahrt to Palestine) was the name of a board game of the time, for example. Children and adults learnt important facts about the geography and special features of the Holy Land in a "Biblical game for four people" or a "Tour through the Holy Land in a question and answer game". "For people in those days, Palestine was part of their own lives. It wasn't only a matter of the stories from





Fotos: Jakob Eisler

Souvenirs gave the feeling of closeness to the Holy Land.

the Bible, this strip of land had a very special meaning for them,” says Eisler.

So it was not at all surprising why so many set off on their travels to the Holy Land. They brought technical advancements and knowledge from the industrialisation era in Europe. Their influence on urban planning, agriculture, transport and traffic, water supply and ultimately education in a premodern society must not be underestimated. Witness of their impact can still be found in Israel and Palestine today, even if the time of German settlers and missionaries ended almost 80 years ago.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

## INFORMATION

*“Germans in the Holy Land” is a touring exhibition. After Stuttgart it will be in Lauterbach (Vogelsberg) in June and July and then in Leipzig in autumn.*

*The catalogue of the exhibition “Germans in the Holy Land – The German Christian contribution to cultural change in Palestine” (ISBN 978-3-944051-07-9) can be ordered for 5 plus shipping from the Landeskirchliches Archiv (Regional Church Archive) in Stuttgart (Tel. +49 711 2149-212).*

*A book by Jakob Eisler and Annette Schwarzscheuls entitled “Andenken an das Heilige Land” (Souvenir of the Holy Land) appeared at the end of May. It contains numerous photos of souvenirs and small gifts from the Holy Land in the Series of Small Publications of the Verein für württembergische Kirchengeschichte (Association of Wuerttemberg Church History) No. 19 (ISBN 978-3-944051-08-6).*

## BRIDGE FROM EASTERN THURINGIA TO NORTHERN IRAQ

### How an aid project brings movement in an entire parish

Together with his parish in Rüdersdorf, a village in Eastern Thuringia, Reverend Christian Kurzke organised an aid shipment for refugees in Northern Iraq. "I've rarely seen so many happy people in our rectory," says Kurzke, who is member of the Executive Board of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools.

#### How did this aid project come about?

Our children's choir gave us the idea. Last autumn, we discussed the topic of war and peace with the children and ended up talking about Iraq and Syria. The children said something had to be done. We had to agree with them and we considered what exactly we in Rüdersdorf could do for people suffering in the Middle East.

#### What does your project look like in reality?

When my wife and I spent our SiMO academic year\* in Beirut, we became acquainted with a pastor. From him we knew he would shortly organise an aid project for a parish in the Syrian town of Homs and toiletries such as shampoo, shaving cream and washing powder would be donated. These are every day items but they are linked to a person's dignity.

#### It is almost impossible to organise an aid shipment on one's own. With whom did you work together?

From several sources we had already heard about Emanuel Youkhana, head of the Christian Aid Programme in Northern Iraq (Capni), so we contacted him. He found the idea of donating toiletries an excellent one. Together we worked out a list of prod-

ucts which a family of five would need for a month and came up with a goods value of 35 euros. We distributed project flyers with this product list to over 20 church parishes. Every person who wanted to could then go shopping and either buy a whole set or only single products. We also asked for donation money since transportation also had to be financed. In addition we collected well looked after clothing.

#### How did the parish react to the project?

It was unbelievable how many resources were liberated. We needed banana boxes to pack the clothing for shipment. A neighbour who works in a supermarket placed a couple of empty boxes by our front door every evening for several weeks. At one time, we had 600 banana boxes standing in the parish hall. When the clothing donations arrived, people spontaneously declared themselves willing to help with sorting and packing. When we then had to load the boxes containing clothes and toiletries on the lorry for shipment, a company from our village provid-

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*\*SiMO is the German abbreviation for Study in the Middle East, an Ecumenical scholarship programme for students of theology and religious studies at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut and the programme is accompanied by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). For more information visit [www.ems-online.org/en/active-worldwide/study-programmes](http://www.ems-online.org/en/active-worldwide/study-programmes)*

*Find out more about the donation project under the keyword "Spendenprojekt Nordirak" (Donation project Northern Iraq) on Facebook.*



Photo: Kurzke

Confirmees help load the lorry.

ed us with logistics materials such as packaging film and a lifting platform. During the regional confirmation day, all the confirmees from the surrounding parishes helped out and moved the boxes along a human chain from the house across the yard to the lorry. We also asked at the asylum seekers' centre in Gera whether anyone wanted to help and the

people there all responded with great enthusiasm. Meeting people who had actually been forced to flee from the turmoils of war was a very important experience and was very good for us all. Finally, the local baker catered for all the helpers on that day.

### What was the outcome of the project in the end?

Besides the 600 boxes, we sent several pallets. All in all the shipment weighed 20 tons. By the end of February, 25,000 euros had been transferred to the donation account. The money covered part of the shipment costs. The logistics company GAIN in Giessen paid for the actual transportation and customs clearance. We donated the larger part of the remaining donation money to two aid organisations in Dohuk (Capni) and in Erbil (Life and Agape).

### You then flew yourself to Northern Iraq. Weren't you a little concerned to travel to this region?

Of course I followed the news media very carefully. It's not exactly reassuring to fly to a region where Islamic State troops are only a few kilometres away. But I had discussed the route well with Emanuel Youkhana and I trusted him. It was important for me that the people who had worked on the project in Germany were informed that the donations had actually been received.



Photo: Kurzke

2,000 refugees live in unfinished flats in Dalal City without any protection from wind and cold.



Photo: Kurzke

The boxes from Rüdersdorf arrive for the people in Northern Iraq.

How would you describe the situation when you arrived in Iraq?

We have certainly all heard of the enormous refugee camps in Northern Iraq. And of course I went there with these pictures in my head. But what shocked me even more was the plight of the internally displaced persons who were not accommodated in camps. You cannot imagine the need you see everywhere in Northern Iraq. Anything that offers the slightest bit of shelter is used as housing: stables, shelters, unfinished houses. Once we travelled with Capni to an unfinished block of flats in Dalal City. 2,000 people lived there. There were no windows, doors or running water. They spent the winter there.

What impressed you the most during your visit to Northern Iraq?

It was the meetings and talks with the people there. Time and again I heard the urgent plea that we should not forget them – the Christians and also the Yazidis in Iraq – and that we should pray for them. The people also kept on asking me why Western reports concentrated mainly on military issues instead of writing much more about people who were trying to do something to ease the need and suffering. I heard the same sentence repeated over and over again, “Please take us with you to Germany.” Only very few refugees could imagine returning to their home villages. They even talked about incidents where they own neighbours suddenly pointed guns at them. Who would want to return if we had experienced the same thing?



Photo: Kurzke

### **In an official refugee camp in Northern Iraq**

#### **What would you advise parishes in Germany who want to do something for people in the Middle East?**

The classic village parish has marvellous opportunities to help. Either with donation projects or by integrating refugees here in our country. Personal encounters are then very important. We can listen to refugees telling their stories. Or organise German courses or a football tournament between confirmees and people seeking asylum. As a parish we can call on associations to join in the activities. On this topic we play a very important networking role which we must accept.

#### **Will your parish continue to support Northern Iraq?**

Meanwhile, there is hardly a worship service when we do not remember the people in Iraq and Syria. When I was in Erbil, I read on the web about massive resistance to setting up an initial reception centre for refugees in Gera. From my room I could see the many containers and tents on a church square in Erbil where 500 people were living. An icy chill ran down my spine. Since my return I have been to many parishes in the church district here. I use the opportunity to talk about my

impressions and try to make it clear to people what it means not to be able to go back.

#### **What is your personal conclusion?**

In view of the enormous need which prevails in Northern Iraq, our project was perhaps only a drop in the ocean. But for refugee work here in Germany it was very important and it set many things free. The people are proud of what they managed to achieve here and feel themselves closer to the people in the Middle East. I have rarely seen so many happy people come to the rectory as during the collection campaign. Together we made things move and in so doing we were moved ourselves.

*Interviewed by Katja Dorothea Buck.*



## AND FEAR IS A CONSTANT COMPANION

**Children in Hebron must be accompanied on their way to school**

Hebron is like a burning lens. Nowhere else is the conflict between Israel and Palestinians as obvious as here. The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) continues to send volunteers to the town in West Jordan so that they can accompany people in their difficult everyday life and document incidents.

Hebron is the only town in the occupied territories of West Jordan where ultranationalist Israeli settlers live in the middle of the old town. The settlement policy is illegal according to international law. But the Israeli government supports them and has therefore stationed 1,500 soldiers in Hebron to protect the settlers. In general they are positioned at around a hundred checkpoints in the town. Palestinians in Hebron are unable to lead a normal life. This is especially apparent in the part of the town administrated by the Israeli military and where the old town and Shuhada Road are located. Until the year 2000, it was the main road in Hebron. Today, only settlers are allowed to circulate here.

Shuhada Road is like a ghost town. Overnight, the military closed more than a thousand local business and declared the road a prohibited area. In the Tel Rumeida district Palestinians are only allowed to use a certain section of the road. They must pass through checkpoints to reach their houses. Soldiers are everywhere. Night raids, arrests and long queues at the checkpoints are part and parcel of everyday life for Palestinians in Tel Rumeida.



On the other hand settlers can live here without any restrictions.

There are frequent incidents between Palestinians and settlers. For this reason Shuhada Road is the main operation area in Hebron for Ecumenical accompaniers. The tasks include family visits, for example; they are also present during the olive harvest or they document incidents. For example, once we were called when a settler had just destroyed a fence put up on Palestinian soil. We were powerless to do anything to stop the destruction. The family could only stand and watch and we could only demonstrate our solidarity with them.

The most important tasks of Ecumenical Accompaniers is to accompany Pales-



A soldier inspects the schoolbags of Palestinian children.



tinian children on their way to school. The Cordoba School is located in Shuhada Road opposite the Israeli settlement of Beit Hadassah. In the past, the settlers had made repeated attacks. The school was on the verge of closure because there were hardly any children who dared to go to school there. Thanks to the international presence in the mornings and at midday, the children again feel safer on their way to school.

All in all the children are the greatest losers in this conflict. There is no “normal” childhood for Palestinian children in Hebron – or for settler children either. The large majority of Palestinian children are severely traumatised. From an early age, they grow up with the knowledge that they are helpless to do anything

against the soldiers and there is nobody who can protect them. Night raids during which their parents can be arrested are part of everyday life. In the mornings, their schoolbags are often searched at the checkpoints. Older schoolchildren are detained. There are many confrontations with the soldiers. The children throw stones and the soldiers reply with tear gas and arrests. It’s a vicious circle. The children vent their overpowering emotions by throwing stones.

Even the settler children did not choose to live in Hebron. They grow up in the belief that they are surrounded by enemies who only want to do them harm. They live in great fear of snipers who lurk everywhere and could kill them. Due to this situation children have no respect for anyone, not for Palestinians nor for us international foreigners.

It makes me very thoughtful and sad when I contemplate how many generations of children and young people have passed under the wheels of this conflict and of those generations that are still to come if the peace process shows no sign of progress.

*Simone Bareiss was in Hebron with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) from August to October 2014. The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) sent her on this mission.*

*For more information on EAPPI visit:  
[www.ems-online.org/en/active-worldwide/oekumenisches-begleitprogramm](http://www.ems-online.org/en/active-worldwide/oekumenisches-begleitprogramm)*

# SECURING THE FUTURE

## SUPPORT THE SCHNELLER SCHOOLS IN THE LONG TERM WITH AN ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTION.

The Schneller schools support Christian Peace Education in the Middle East. For more than 150 years, the name of Schneller has stood for untiring commitment to the education of children and young people in tolerance and peace. The two Christian schools are open to all children, no matter what religion they belong to. They offer a place of security and dependability. The Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace was instituted in 2007 to ensure that this work can continue in the long term irrespective of economic downturns. An endowment contribution works in the longterm, as opposed to donations which are used immediately. Endowments become part of the foundation's assets. Only the interest is used directly for the work of the Schneller schools.

Do you want to support the Schneller Foundation? Then please contact us. By the way, the money you give the foundation is tax deductible. If you wish to make a large endowment payment we advise you to consult a notary or a tax consultant first. An endowment can be made in the form of a legacy or an inheritance. An endowment is ideal for preserving your own life's work beyond your lifetime or to honour the work of a relative.

Schneller pupils fondly remember their time at the schools. With your help children from broken homes will still be able to gain a sustained perspective for their future lives in many years to come as a result of the Schneller schools. Make your contribution to securing peace in the Middle East.

**Give children the gift of the future!**

Your contact for questions relating to the Foundation:

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

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EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools

**Letters to the Editors:**

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

Sincere thanks for Schneller Magazine 1/13. The articles are excellent and unique!

*Hanna Höness, Tübingen*

Make a clean break of supporting Moslems and I may renew my support for your magazine!

*G. P., Weingarten*

Thank you for the link to the current issue of the Schneller Magazine. It was encouraging to read the "Love letters to Christians in the Middle East". We appreciate this love, the prayers and the strong signal of support. May God continue to bless your service and may God preserve and protect all people in the Holy Land.

*Dr. Munib A. Younan,  
Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem*

**130th Year  
Issue 2, June 2015**

Publisher: Evangelical Association of the Schneller Schools within the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity - EMS

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Seat of the Association: Stuttgart

Layout: B|FACTOR GmbH

Printers: Buch- und Offsetdruckerei

Paul Schürle GmbH & Co KG, Plieningen

Circulation: 14.700

Contact address: Swiss Association for the  
Schneller Schools in the Middle East:

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PC Account 30-507790-7

CH05 8148 8000 0046 6023 2

[www.schnellerschulen.org](http://www.schnellerschulen.org)

The Schneller Magazine is published four times a year. The price is included in the EVS membership fee and in the SVS annual fee.

English Schneller Magazine online:

[www.ems-online.org/en/schneller-magazine](http://www.ems-online.org/en/schneller-magazine)

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Many thanks!

# SCHNELLER

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

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



Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?

Job 2:10



**EVS Evangelical Association**  
for the Schneller Schools