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# SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



**WHY WE NEED OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS –**  
**„LOVE LETTERS“ TO CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**



**EVS Evangelical Association**  
**for the Schneller Schools**

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Dear Readers,

A “love letter” to Christians in the Middle East? Maybe you will hesitate when you read the cover story of the new issue of the Schneller Magazine. Love letters are a rather rare species when it comes to church publications. In view of the dramatic developments in the Middle East we asked ourselves in the editorial office what it would be like if Christianity really died out in the Middle East? Luckily this is only a hypothetical question and we have absolutely no intention of joining the ranks of pessimists who are already prophesying a future without Christians in the region. No, they are still there, the Christians in the Middle East. Thank God!



All the same, they are dwindling in numbers and for those who remain, it is becoming more and more difficult to live their faith colourfully and authentically in the midst of the humanitarian tragedy. We cannot say what the future will bring. But we can think about what is at stake. What would we Christians in the West lose if the pessimists were proved to be right? We asked this question to German authors who are linked in various ways to Christians in the Middle East. What emerged was a collection of personal replies which express an incredibly high regard for Christianity in the Middle East. More or less “love letters”.

As always, the new Schneller Magazine also includes news from the Schneller schools and the EMS pre-school project in the Syrian “Valley of Christians”; EMS General Secretary Jürgen Reichel and EVS Managing Director Uwe Gräbe finally managed to visit the pre-school personally at the end of last year. Previously, several attempts at travelling to our partners in Syria always failed due to visa problems. There is also a positive report about the MECC, the Middle East Church Council.

On behalf of the editorial team, I hope you will enjoy reading the new issue. I would like to thank you for your solidarity with Schneller work.

Yours,

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

**Katja Dorothea Buck**

## AND WHAT IF I WAS KING...?

*Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil.*

*(1 Kings 3:9a)*

Can I ask one of your boys two questions?" I asked Elias, the educator. "I'm busy writing my first devotion." Elias asked them who would like to join in. And so there we were, all sitting in the lounge corner of the residential home group, about a dozen pairs of eyes looking expectantly at me. I don't think that their interest was really directed at my questions. The young men all aged between 16 and 19 were mainly curious about the new female head of the residential home who comes from Germany.

"What position of responsibility and influence would you like to have if you could choose any one? And if you were allowed one wish in this position, what would it be?" I asked. The watchword of the day is supposed to form the basis of my devotion and it's all about the young King Solomon. But at the start, I kept this to myself.

In the run-up to this incident, I had done a lot of thinking. Was it fair to ask this question to our Schneller pupils? Aren't they young people whom we are trying to teach that vocational education at the JLSS represents one of the few chances for them to find work and earn their own money? My interviewees are all hardworking, serious pupils. But there are also those who already come to my office on Monday afternoon "with a serious

illness". When this repeats itself every week and their physical well-being improves miraculously once they are out of my sight, I tend to hesitate to give them my permission to go home. I would have thought the fact that they are privileged to have one of the limited places in the residential home should motivate them to give their best.

But what if their previous lives were marked by loss, rejection and the feeling of personal failure? What is they have no role models among their family or relatives? And what if they have no basis for security and trust in life? To add to this, we live in a country where people ask about the "Now" rather than plan the future – for understandable reasons. Talking in Lebanon about perspectives often sounds so theoretical ... The young men next to me do not think in very complicated structures at all. It's fun for them to imagine being in leading positions, wielding power and responsibility. Many of the answers appear not to be taken quite so seriously, but they all contain something that touches on the actual topic.

"I would love to be a mayor. My wish would be to abolish all kinds of drugs and the whole town would be clean and beautiful," says one of them. Another would like to be the head of the residential home. Aha!? That surprises me, the other boys laugh when the young man continues: "Then I would wish to have absolute power to abolish upbringing and school education and instead introduce absolute freedom for all children and young people!" I join in the laughter. One boy would



**King Solomon, painted by the Armenian illustrator Malnazar**

like to be state president. “I wish I could be the most famous person in the whole world!” “I wish I could be the ‘Director of the World,’” says another. “The whole world would then respect and honour me.”

During the evening devotion a few days later, I read out a few of the statements. Then I talk about a young king, one of the most powerful men in his part of the world. Inexperienced, still without any of his own merits and spoilt by living in prosperity. These are circumstances which have nothing to do with our own lives. And what does this king do? He asks God for wisdom to face up to his responsibility.

I hope the 130 residential pupils who are sitting in front of me on the church pews understand what I want to say: it doesn’t only matter how you start out in life. Assuming responsibility is not only a question where it might perhaps never happen. At the Schneller school we convey a different message.

When it comes to living together, every person counts. And the motivation I put into each day makes an enormous difference.

Do I only think of my own advantage or do I ask God for wisdom and love for my fellow human beings?

The people in charge of the school and the co-workers do a lot to provide the children with role models for appreciation and justice. As Christians they call on the Bible and search for the language which does not exclude people of another faith. Of course we always eventually come up against our limits. But luckily there is still the wisdom of God – especially when Solomon was not too mighty to ask for it...

*Dorothee Beck*

## WE WOULD LOSE OUR HOPE IN A FREE MIDDLE EAST

Since 1975, the Middle East Christians have had a firm place in my thoughts, life and actions. When I was 20 years old, I visited a relative in Jerusalem and first came into contact with Orthodox Christians, for example the Rum Orthodox Bishop of Tiberias, who was a passionate icon painter. He was the first to introduce me to the world of icons. In his study there was also a large portrait of the King of Jordan. For him this was perfectly natural. He felt that the Israelis were illegal occupants and that the Jordanian King was more open to Christianity than the Israeli government. I started to learn in many ways.

In Jerusalem I celebrated Easter with Syrian Orthodox Christians in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. A monk from St. Mark's Syrian Orthodox Monastery had invited me. He looked after me with great devotion, invited me to tea and told me all about his church. For the first time, I listened to the then strange tones of a Syrian Orthodox liturgy. We also found a common spiritual understanding between the two of us. The monk came from Tur Abdin in south-east Turkey. I followed his advice and travelled there, even to the monastery where he came from: Mor Gabriel near the town of Midyat. I immediately started to learn the Syrian language.

Why do I recall my first experiences with Middle East Christians forty years ago? Because I have a bad feeling if I wrote as if the most important thing concerning the issue of the future of Christianity in

the Middle East was to show solidarity. I have always done that and will continue to do so. But I have also experienced what Rudolf Strothmann describes in his rather cynical comment about the massacres of believers of the Apostolic Assyrian Church of the East (the so-called Nestorians) back in the 1930s: sometimes ecumenical solidarity liked to use vociferous words; but very soon, the churches would return to everyday life and the victims would be forgotten.

Strothmann turned out to be right. Today, hardly anyone remembers what happened when the Assyrian Patriarch was deprived of his Iraqi nationality and one of the oldest churches in the world was definitively prevented from returning to its home in south-east Turkey (in the Hakkari mountains). Apparently, Realpolitik demanded more in favour of an arrangement with the new Iraqi state than to show compassion, give support and stand up for a population group that was unpopular in this Middle East country.

I got to know the disappointment and fears of Middle East Christians and their views of the West. But I also learnt about religious diversity in the Middle East, especially outside of Islam. This diversity is hardly perceivable any more today. Jews have all but disappeared from these countries; the Baha'is are forbidden, and Yezidis and Mandeans are repressed wherever they may be. But Christianity is still there, even if the number of Christians is dwindling. On my first visit to Tur Abdin, almost 150,000 Syrian Orthodox Chris-





Photo: Tamcke/Gernot Wiefßner

Many children were still baptised in Tur Abdin in the 1970s. Today, only about 2,000 Christians live in this region of south-east Turkey.

tians lived there. Today, there are only about 2,000 left.

It sounds discouraging when figures alone are the vital factor that determines whether it is worth committing ourselves to our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. But we have to see things from a different perspective. Christian tradition in the Middle East, which is thousands of years old, is still alive. It can still act as an opening for multi-religious diversity and it can be the mirror of Islam which is hardly ever reflected in this region. Such reflections are needed because they prevent blind spots. No academic discussion, however good it may be, could be a replacement for that. What is decisive about the

Christian presence in the Middle East is that Islam is not reflected from outside, from Europe for example, but from inside, from the cultural region which both religions cohabit.

If there were no more Christians in the Middle East, we would naturally lose the origins of our Christian religion. But what is even worse, we would also lose hope in a Middle East which can be different than it is today, which can protect minorities and promote the diversity of religions.

For me, Christians in the Middle East are sources of hope. Their very existence will go show what political change in this region will look like. For me, the demise of Christianity would be the end of my hopes in a free Middle East. I am dearly holding onto these hopes, despite all the prophecies of doom.

*Martin Tamcke is Professor for Ecumenical Theology and Middle East Church and Mission History at the Georg August University in Göttingen.*

## NO PLANT CAN SURVIVE WITHOUT ROOTS

The icon of the Arabian Mother of God follows me. Her gaze is calm, not really strict, but her dignity is still far removed from everyday life: the woman, the venerated, highly revered Mother. It isn't the comforting, familiar feminine aura of trust that attracts me to her, nor the warm touch of motherliness. Here is a woman whose look is one that knows Heaven and Earth and connects the two together. The background behind the Queen of Heaven is gold which radiates a warm glow.

The original icon hangs in the small chapel of the Rum Orthodox Monastery of Balamand, next to many other icons which originated from Aleppo in the 18th century. So does the icon of Simeon Stylites, a pillar saint. In those times, there was a marvellous eight-sided building all around his pillar, the Octagon, a large church with a cloister complex and baptistry situated to the north east of Aleppo. In the icon you can see a long queue of pilgrims on their way to visit Saint Simeon. Even Emperor Constantine's ambassadors are among them, asking for his intercession and advice.

Today, all you can see of the St. Simeon Monastery are the ruins. I have no idea what has happened to the complex since the start of the armed conflicts. It was a place where people from Aleppo liked to retreat for relaxation, to picnic and pluck flowers in the spring. When my parents lived in Aleppo, my mother used to drive there whenever the noise and dust of the city got too much for her. Do places exist where you can almost feel the wisdom, as if you could actually touch it with your hands?



Photo: Weltzien





Simeon, the hermit monk who tried to get closer to God and to Heaven by self-mortification and by living on top of a pillar, developed a spirit of openness and tolerance. In the Octagon there were eight archways leading to eight small chapels and over each arch was a different cross hewn in the stone – eight Christian churches known at that time united to build this church. But they must have differed in their symbolism, liturgy and doctrines. Was this perhaps the first World Council of Churches?

By the way, the Balamand Monastery had one of the most famous libraries in the Middle East and contained innumerable valuable manuscripts. When the Crusaders came from the West and went to war against the Byzantine Church, Balamand was invaded. Much of it was destroyed and the valuable library was set on fire.

Where should we look to, we Christians moulded in the West? Our traditions are so far distant from the origins, the beginnings and the roots of Christianity. The Oriental culture, the landscape and the habits of people in the Middle East have totally different relation-

ships to the images and stories contained in our Bible. If we could learn to see Jesus as he is described in our Gospels, he would be very strange to us here, whereas he would probably be hardly noticeable there. He would sit in on a neighbourhood chat in the evening, go from one house to the other and be welcomed everywhere. He would enter through open doors which were gladly opened to every stranger, even today, and would be invited in, not with a curt “Hello” but immediately with a “You are very welcome”. The way he would stand out, however, is in the radicalism of his message. Who would want to go with him along the path of non-violence in the Middle East today?

For me, the imagery of the Bible comes to life in the surroundings from which the stories come. The Arab Christians, in all their diversity, keep alive a heritage by which we can “orientate” ourselves. When I had to deliver a welcome address as the official representative of the Evangelical Church in Germany at the Synod of Arab Evangelical Churches in Cyprus a few years ago, I said with deep conviction that the future of our churches in the West depended on the future of the Arab churches and on the continuing existence of these churches. Because no plant can survive without roots.

*Friederike Weltzien is pastor near Stuttgart. Together with her husband she looked after the German-speaking community in Lebanon and Syria from 1999 to 2008.*

## WE NEED EACH OTHER

**I**t was a minor sensation and a sign of hope. In the North Iraqi town of Dohuk the first ecumenical worship service was to take place in the summer of 2014 together with all the churches resident in the town and our group of visiting Lutherans from Bavaria. We had come to assure refugees from Mosul of our support and to give the churches courage. The idea of celebrating a truly ecumenical worship service with us – which has never happened before in Iraq – came from the local churches. A few hours before the service started, our group was asked whether one of us could give the sermon. This caused some disquiet and uncertainty among our group and one of the Lutherans asked why nobody had asked us earlier. Now we had no time to prepare. One Iraqi immediately replied, it was early time enough – normally they clarified something like this in the vestry just before the service.

Indeed, Western Evangelical Christianity and Eastern Christianity are different. Such minor incidents highlight the differences more than any theological synopsis. But as a Lutheran who has worked together with Eastern Christians for many years and knows their countries, I would not miss an encounter with the faith of the East for the world. Hardly anywhere else has made it so clear to me – despite or rather because of the foreignness of the churches there - that the Body of Christ really consists of many parts. But all these parts belong together.

We need each other because we rely on the Holy Spirit in very different ways. This is exactly a sign of the unpredictability of the Spirit. For Lutherans, it is important

to study the scriptures. There they reckon with the actions of the Spirit. Eastern Christians see the Spirit at work at all times and in all places. The liturgical serenity and the great feeling of trust and community which then arise are always inviting and impressive.

We need each other since we proclaim the same gospel in very different contexts. God became man and spread His word into our world so that it would light up everyday reality. Eastern Christians are currently living from the Gospel in the direst persecution; they listen to the comfort of the Word of God as refugees and uprooted people. What they believe in and search for, what they proclaim and celebrate is without a doubt part of the living Body of Christ. I wish to have many young students from these life contexts at our Evangelical faculties – where the focus is sometimes placed too much on theological self-reflection and Western individualism, in my opinion.

We need each other because we organise our churches in very different ways, but still they are all churches. I have already had wonderful discussions with friends from the Middle East about the question of which instance is the guiding principle for me as a Christian. I always reply, the Bible and my conscience. The bishop, say the Eastern Christians. The discussions that then arise are always worthwhile and go deep into the different worlds. It is not always easy to accept each other because different cultural backgrounds clearly come out into the open. The habit of a Middle East bishop remains Evangelical but when you open yourself



Even if there are differences in theology and liturgy – it is the same Gospel which is proclaimed.

up a little and understand the meaning of this “role play” in the societies, you will soon come to understand one another.

In Dohuk it turned out to be a beautiful service, with a lot of singing and a wonderful, personal and inspiring sermon. Everything fell into place, as if the Holy Spirit had taken control: the young songs of the Assyrian and Syrian Orthodox churches, the archaic singing of the Armenians and a sermon about the watchword of the day by the Moravian Church. It was as if the various talents melded together to form a whole: refugee Christians from Mosul, resident Christians from Dohuk and Christians who had travelled from Bavaria became one. The finale was the prayer for protection from persecution and the survival of the Churches of the

East. Since that time, I carry it in my heart – they belong to the Body of Christ as I do, and “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.” (1 Cor 12:26)

*Thomas Prieto Peral is liaison officer for Ecumenism and World Responsibility to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria. Among other things he is responsible for Middle East work of the Bavarian Regional Church.*

## PRESERVING THE MELODY OF FAITH



Photo: Janina Zang

“Majestas Domini” by Janina Zang based on an original by the contemporary Russian icon painter, Archimandrit Zenon

**D**uring one of my visits to Gaza, Suhaila Tarazi said these words to me: “An Arab Christian can be a mediator between Jews and Muslims, and between the West and the Middle East. Christianity stands for love and peace for all people. But we are afraid that Jesus will

not find a single Christian left there when he returns. The churches of the West should help us local Christians as we are a good and important example of living Christianity. We are here to help. But where is the conscience of the true Christians in the world? It is very dark here! I see no hope! The situation has become so bad that I cannot start to describe it in words any more!”

An Orthodox Palestinian Christian Suhaila Tarazi heads the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, the only Christian hospital in Gaza. Suhaila and her workers embody living Christianity. Every day, they stand courageously for their conviction that it is important to be there for others especially when times are the most difficult and to look after all patients – no matter what their religious or political

background. Christ’s commandment apparently gives them unshakeable strength to persevere. Even when the last Gaza war had almost destroyed every hope, Suhaila stayed although her own life was at stake.

I often miss this courage and selflessness among us Christians in the West. We search for freedom and independence but we do not really see ourselves as a Christian community. Our faith is sometimes superficial, self-centred, split, easily influenced and swamped in convenience. Very often it fails in the face of difficult tasks such as the current refugee crisis. We are appalled at the suffering of children and families in Palestine, the Ukraine, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Egypt and other countries in the world – but all we can do is just sit and watch.

For Eastern Christians, being a Christian is an identity for which they are ready to take major risks. Their faith takes them above and beyond themselves and makes them act with humanity and selflessness. Their faith is self-confident and strong, even in the face of flight and expulsion. Christians in the Middle East are important mediators between Jews and Muslims and other religious communities. Without their mediating and reconciliatory role, crisis and war situations would often become even more serious. They run numerous educational, charitable, social and medical institutions which are open to people of all religions and especially to the poor and disadvantaged.

Many Eastern Christians are multilingual and belong to the academic upper or middle classes. As mentors and politicians they have helped many countries in the Middle East to introduce the first modern social structures. At the same time, they can look back on an uninterrupted tradition of 2000 years. The wonderful churches, frescoes and icons that emerged evoke what Pope Francis calls an “instinct of faith” in people’s hearts and awaken a yearning for God.

I grew up in the former GDR. I found my way to the Christian faith from the beauty and expressiveness of the icons of Eastern Churches. I have them to thank for my profession in iconography which I studied in Jerusalem. It pains me when icons are destroyed today in Syrian churches, for example, or the eyes and faces are chiselled out of the frescoes. If the Christians are expelled, their churches and Christian art which has grown up over centuries will disappear. Without the beauty of their liturgical art, our hearts will be lacking in inspiration. The inner melody of our faith will slowly fade away and our memory of paradise will become weaker and weaker.

If we allow Eastern Christians to be forced to leave their home countries and the Christian tradition to die in the Middle East, then we Christians in the West may well soon be faced with a similar fate. Not only will we lose the diversity of our Christian tradition, we will also lose our spiritual identity and home, our safety and ultimately our hope in peace for all mankind.

*Janina Zang is an icon painter and lives near Aschaffenburg. The artist found her Christian faith through icons of the Eastern Churches. ([www.janina-zang.de](http://www.janina-zang.de))*



## ONLY FOOLS FOR CHRIST CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

Gerhard Hauptmann lets his character Emanuel Quint, the Silesian carpenter in his novel “The Fool for Christ”, travel through Germany of the 19th century. It was the age of the industrial revolution with a firmly entrenched state church. Quint was enraptured by an irrepressible love for the Son of God and this love ultimately led him to believe he was Christ himself. His fellow human beings regarded him as a fool. But one thing can be said right from the start: Jesus Christ was also ridiculed and mocked as a fool. And in his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul spoke of Christian existence as a ‘foolishness’ (1 Cor. 1:23). To be a Christian is also to be a fool.

People in Syria and in Lebanon have often introduced themselves to me as Christians. “I am a Christian.” The first time I heard this, it irritated me. I come from Eastern Thuringia where only twelve per cent of the population feel they belong to a church. In the Middle East I have learnt that religion and a continuous discussion about one’s own personal faith is a fundamental part of your identity. For the people there, this identity in cases of doubt may even decide between life and death – especially when foolishness turns into fanaticism. The latest events show that the thin line between the two is not always easy to identify. Many Muslims are among the victims of the fanatical adherents of the Islamic State and other terror groups.

I have met many “fools for Christ” in the Middle East. By various ways and means, they have given meaning to the uncomfortable message of the Gospel:

through their traditions, their rich liturgy and their socio-political commitment. For example, the Maronite student speaks authentically about his faith. I discern a deep inner piety in him. Syrian Orthodox Christians fight to preserve their language traditions; and the perseverance of a young Evangelical colleague to build a school is untiring. In their way of bearing witness to their faith, they are unique for Christianity; but above all they give societies in the region an unmistakable face. Everyone knows that the Middle East would be totally different without Christians. The Christian faith is part of the region’s plurality. Confrontation with others is indispensable and questions religious fanaticism precisely for this reason. Even democratic uprisings against totalitarian regimes are not a query but a necessity. They express a fundamental conviction in the Gospel of Christ.

But let’s return to Emanuel Quint. His deep emotionality had become strange to the people around him; they didn’t understand him. They didn’t want to hear the radical message of the Gospel. He was probably the person that was found later on in the novel frozen in the snow above a mountain hut in the Swiss Alps, holding a sheet of paper in his hand on which was written: the secret of the Kingdom of God? The author dooms his novel character to failure. Had the naturalist Hauptmann lost his belief that the message of the Kingdom of God would ever find fertile soil?

Sceptics prophecy that the end of the Christian presence in the Middle East and the developments there appear to prove them right. In the terror-based Islamic



In Orthodox iconography, fools for Christ are always portrayed naked or dressed in rags – here Saint Andrew of Constantinople who is said to have spent his life on the street after his conversion to Christianity in the 10th century.

stop seeking answers. In the failure of the Cross of Christ lies the start of a hope: not death and the end, but life and the future. This places enormous demands on a religious community which is in the minority. It is an immense challenge to arrange uprisings against and with majorities. It requires critical self-reflection to overcome inner fears and intransigent attitudes. But it is precisely the existence of the fool for Christ that enables us not to despair when faced with the question mark. When we are supported by Christian hope and love, we can continue to give the societies in the East and the West an unmistakable face. Because only fools for Christ can change the world.

*Claudia Rammelt is Doctor of Theology and also works with the Executive Committee of SiMO.*

State, there is no more room for religious minorities to live and shape their fool's freedom. The despair is great. We hear about destroyed churches in Homs, of Christians fleeing before war-damaged Aleppo and the siege of Kessab.

But the Cross of Christ and Quint's note bearing its question about the Kingdom of God leave a legacy behind for us: we should not stop at the question mark without finding an answer; we should not

## THEY REMAIN THE FUTURE OF IRAQ

It was in Iraq or all places, or more precisely in Erbil in December 2014, that two young Christians explained to me, a European, where they saw the value of freedom of speech. Surprisingly they brought into play the anti-Islamic protests in Germany as an example. Apparently the population in the Middle East is following these developments in German society very closely from various perspectives and are thinking about democracy and the freedom of opinion.

Savina is 25 years old. She obtained her masters in economics and works for a large German group in Erbil. She also works as a volunteer, looking intensively after the many refugees who fled from the Nineveh plain before the barbarity of the Islamic State. Savina knows the feeling of fleeing and expulsion. Even if she only has scant recollections, she knows how her parents fled to a refugee camp in Iran near Urmiah during the Second Gulf War (1990/91) to evade Saddam's bombardment against the Kurdish population. Deprivation and despair were the hallmark of this period of her life. As a baby, she had poor health and her mother was in constant fear she would not survive the hardships. In the turmoils of war, many other small children lost their lives due to the lack of medical care. Her father was considered missing.

Nashwan is 23 years old and works as a designer. For him, fleeing and persecution are also a recurrent element in his family's history. His ancestors fled to present-day Iraq during the genocide of the



Christian population by the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1918. Nashwan grew up in Mosul but had to leave his home town a few years ago. "It was particularly bad in Mosul in the years 2007 and 2008," he said. A relentless witch-hunt was made on young Christians. "I myself was targeted by extremist forces who wanted to kidnap me." With all probability to behead him in front of rolling cameras – a perverse marketing strategy of Al-Qaida in Iraq, a precursor of the present-day IS, which successfully struck fear and panic among Christians even at that time. Most of them left Mosul straight away when they were sent video copies of these brutal perversions in which hooded figures shouting Allahu Akbar slowly sev-

Nashwan and Savina know why they want to stay in Iraq.



Photo: Simon Jacob

ered the head from the shoulders of a young person in cold blood. A Muslim friend warned him in good time. It's thanks to him that Nashwan was able to flee before it was too late.

Safina and Nashwan are both citizens of this country which is plagued by inner strife. Both of them cannot walk along the streets in Iraq without extreme caution. Danger lurks everywhere. Nonetheless, they are still interested in what is happening at the moment in Germany. I explained to them that the Pegida demonstrations are Islamophobic and are partly right-wing events which go against our understanding of a multiethnic system of values. Safina raised her eyebrows, thought for a moment and then asked: "Isn't it part of

the European system of values that people can demonstrate against something freely and without fear, even if parts of the society are not exactly sympathetic to that cause?"

Then it was my turn to think. Nashwan apparently read my thoughts and woke me up with a statement that democracy only starts when people can express themselves freely without running the risk of being tortured or killed. To lead an open discussion with a respectable attitude towards your fellow human beings is the only way to resolving conflicts peacefully.

As a religious person, I am no friend of satirical magazines which place Jesus in a shamefully ludicrous picture. But as citizen of a democracy I am obliged to endure this. But a free and democratic society also grants me the right to demonstrate peacefully against this picture, if I so wish.

Now I can better understand why a young generation of Christians who are well educated and anchored in their faith and tradition is determined to remain in Iraq. They want to anchor this right, which is so normal for us, in their own country in the hope that this will secure their future and the future of all minorities in Iraq.

*Simon Jacob is Chairman of the Central Council of Eastern Christians in Germany.*

## YOU CAN STILL WONDER AND BE AMAZED

Actually, it is unimaginable but still, in view of current developments in the Middle East, the logic must be thought through to the end. What would Christians in the West really lose if – as we repeatedly hear – the Christian tradition would one day actually end in the Middle East? Many people in Europe would probably not even realise the tragedy that this would represent for us all. The broad mass of the public regards the region as a part of the world where only Arab Muslims live anyway.

But the diversity of the peoples and cultures has shaped the Arabic region over thousands of years. If the society in the Middle East was actually composed of only Muslims, the sense for harmonious coexistence and for mutual enrichment would also be lost for ever. Christians would no longer help to shape the society, culture or politics of the Middle East. The memory that they dreamed the dream of a self-confident, Arab nationalism together with others, for example at the beginning of the 20th century, would totally fade away.

Without Middle East Christians the places where Christianity originated would only become museums. This is by no means inconceivable. It is already the case in Turkey. Places that shaped Christianity as a whole are only tombs of a spiritual past and museums devoid of people or life. The same thing would happen with the memory of the first settlers and monastic communities in the history of Christianity: we would forget how Christian monasticism originated in the deserts of Syria and Egypt.

And what would I personally miss when the last Christian flees from Lebanon and the doors of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Nativity Church in Bethlehem were closed for ever? That is totally inconceivable! But it has already happened in Mosul, in Basra, in Baghdad and almost in Homs, Aleppo and Damascus. I lived and worked for several years in Egypt and there I would miss so much if there were no more Christians on the Nile. I would miss the Coptic Orthodox Church with its deep piety which has such a strange effect on me. I could no longer heal myself as well on the self-consciousness of the martyrs of this 2,000 year old church. I would miss the human deep-rootedness which the Copts feel for the Nile, the country and the people. I can't bear to imagine that one day I would no longer be able to marvel together with Coptic believers at the Holy Tree in Zeitun, where the Holy Family performed miracles. I still want to be able to sit down on a folding chair next to the church in Assiut and start talking to people about what exactly Maria disclosed at the church tower.

I still want to go to parishes which are no larger than house churches and which persist in running a health centre for the poor and a fully built secondary school at which almost the majority of pupils are Muslims. Or visit the small church which completely relies on educating the young generation and will not give up, although the young people emigrate as soon as they can, once they have finished their education. I would even miss the tensions which understandably exist between the





Photo: Katja Burck

Diaspora and those who remain despite everything. I would still be able to marvel in humility at people who continuously live under a dictatorship and continue to take heart from the Gospel and support the community.

If Christianity were really to come to an end in the Middle East one day, I as a Western Christian would lose the difficult but so important confrontation with a tradition that is so strange to me on the one hand, but has such an authentic impact on me on the other. This confrontation forces me to ask the question how far I have moved away from this tradition and what I have lost on the way. Unconsciously, we like to assume in the West that our way of believing is the only one which is right. Middle East Christianity, which lives its faith so authentically and self-confidently, continually questions this inti-

**Keeping the memory of our historical roots alive – e.g. at the Monastery of Saint Bishoy (320-417 AD) at Wadi Natrun in Egypt**

mate self-perception in a salutary way. And that is what we need.

*Owe Boersma is Middle East and Africa Liaison Officer at the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW).*



Photo: EMS/Uwe Gräbe

Rev. Khalid Freij (right) together with EVS Chairman Rev. Klaus Schmid, Cathrin Kaufmann and Christine Grötzinger from the EMS.

## ON THE RIGHT PATH

**Amman (TSS/EVS).** “Who is going to run the Theodor Schneller School now>?!“ We have repeatedly asked friends this question over the past few months. In fact it was not easy to find the right person to head the school in Jordan. But now it seems the TSS is on the right track.

After Director Ghazi Musharbash left in December 2013, the local board of governors chaired by Archbishop Suheil Dawani first appointed a provisional management committee. It was composed of Khaled Freij, the school pastor, Ibrahim Shaddad, the financial expert on the board of governors and Qusei Haddad, the office assistant. In the meantime, this committee has carried out excellent work – in particular in their analysis of the difficult financial situation.

Over the past year, it slowly became apparent that the school pastor Khaled Freij had gained enormous reputation and

respect and had almost become the “face of the institution”. He does his job very well and therefore now runs the institution as director. As the Bishop cannot completely release him from his priestly duties in the parish of Zarka due to the acute shortage of pastors, Ibrahim Shaddad and Qusei Haddad will continue to stand by his side to manage the TSS. By the end of May 2015, two young theologians from the local church are scheduled to complete their training and could then be deployed in parish service. This step would give Freij the opportunity to devote himself completely to his duties as director from that time on. We would like to already send him our congratulations now on his appointment!

Khalid Freij has already made considerable progress. Together with his two colleagues on the Management Committee, he presented a detailed report to the meeting of the board of governors in Amman in December, which Klaus Schmid and

Uwe Gräbe also attended. The number of pupils rose dramatically last year. 194 pupils now attend the day school and 162 live in the residential home. With a total of 34 girls, girls now represent 21 per cent of residents at the home. The second building of the girls' home was renovated and repainted. The apprentices' home was also renovated and new beds and boilers were purchased for all residential buildings. In addition a whole range of additional activities have been started, from sports and environmental measures through to cultural events.

Particularly worthy of mention is the close co-operation of the director with the head of education Bishara Tannous and the head of the day school Khalida Mes-sarweh. For the first time, a parents-teacher association was set up to accompany all educational activities. New pupil committees now look after things such as the debating club or everyday problems between resident pupils and educators. Even the rope garden is now managed by the TSS again. For the coming year, it is planned to place more emphasis on the psychological welfare of pupils with their various problems; sport will also play a more important role, such as the restoration of the gymnasium and its equipment.

## CHAPEL FURNITURE FROM LEBANON

**Stuttgart/Khirkbet Kanafar (EVS/EMS).** The Secretariat of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) received a special Christmas present last December. After countless renovations over the previous months, the wish was expressed to set up a "real" chapel at the centre. What was needed was an inviting place which could

be used at lunchtime for prayer, for assemblies or for a dialogue with God. But where should the furniture be purchased?

The choice quickly fell on the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon. The two instructors at the woodworking shop together with their apprentices lovingly made the altar, the lectern, the hymn book shelves and the prayer stool from solid wood. They were then shipped to Germany by container. Now the chapel furniture from the JLSS stands below the forged iron cross which was made in the metal workshops of the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan many years ago – a visible sign of solidarity in the international EMS Fellowship.



Photo: JLSS/EMS

The new stools come from the workshops of the JLSS. Today, they can be found in the chapel of the EMS Secretariat in Stuttgart.



Photo: JLSS/EMS

By the way, the woodworking shop at the JLSS is delighted to accept other orders of this kind from Germany. The price for orders made there is reasonable in view of the high quality (solid wood). The only expensive item is the transportation from Lebanon to Germany which can only be done in full containers. The more a container is filled, the cheaper it is in the end. Obviously it is too expensive to send single items. But if a parish were interested in having their chapel fitted with furniture from Lebanon, then we would be delighted to bring you in contact with the JLSS.

## APPOINTMENT AS ARCHBISHOP

**Jerusalem (EVS).** The Synod of the Anglican Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East awarded the title of Archbishop to the Jerusalem Bishop Suheil Dawani for the duration of his term of office. The Church Province consists of four dioceses: "Iran", "Egypt and North Africa", "Cyprus and the Gulf States" and "Jerusalem" which consists of the countries of Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. So far, only the presiding bishop of the church province – currently the Bishop of Egypt and North Africa, Dr. Mouneer Hanna Anis – has borne the title of Archbishop. In order to acknowledge the importance of Jerusalem, the Synod of the Church Province has now bestowed Suheil Dawani with the title of Archbishop.

The Jerusalem Diocese is a member church of the EMS and sponsors the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan. We send our hearty congratulations to the Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, the Most Reverend Suheil Dawani, on this occasion.

## TRIP BY DONORS TO THE SCHOOLS

**Stuttgart (EVS).** The *Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* would like to give all donors the opportunity to see for themselves the work of the two Schneller schools. We are currently planning a trip for donors **from 21 to 30 November 2015** and hope that the situation in the Middle East will have calmed down by then to permit the journey to Lebanon and Jordan. If you are interested or need further details, please contact Ursula Feist on 0049 711 63678-39 or send an email to feist@ems-online.org. The final date for registration is 30 April 2015.

# TO ALL THOSE WHOSE HEART LIES WITH SYRIAN AID FROM THE EMS AND EVS

The plight of people in Syria, of refugee children and single mothers aroused your compassion. We are eternally grateful to you for this. In the past few weeks and months, I have met many people who have shown genuine humanitarian interest in the projects we are running together with our local partners in Syria and Lebanon. So many have prayed for these projects, so much was donated and still people ask me what they can do to help.

When we actually receive all the pledges of donations given by the various churches of the EMS Fellowship, then all the projects will be almost (!) financed through to 2016. There's not much left to go!

I am writing all this to point out something very particular.

**All the aid for refugee children and refugee mothers which we are now distributing in the Middle East with your support would not have been possible if we did not have the stability of the Schneller schools to distribute this aid.**

The team at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon is doing a great job in this respect and the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan is also on the best track to becoming more stable. The aim at both schools is to take in the weakest pupils. Both schools provide a loving home and good education to children who have often had traumatic experiences in the past.

The two schools continue to rely on our support.

So if you are wondering about the best way you can support children in the war-torn Middle East, then I would heartily request you quote the purpose „Schneller schools“ when you transfer your donation. In this way you give us the chance to use your donation where it is most needed at these schools. Today, it could be taking in refugee children – or tomorrow, it may be to improve work at the residential home for everybody.

Of course we also accept donations for special purposes, for example the Syrian refugee children and mothers in the Syrian „Valley of Christians“ and at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. This is because „almost financed“ does not mean „fully financed“. But you could make our work a lot easier if you could also place your trust in us as well as your donation: by this I mean we will use every donation in favour of the Schneller schools to the benefit of children in the Middle East whose need is the greatest.

On behalf of the children in our care, I express my heartfelt thanks to you for your trust.

Yours,



*Uwe Gräbe  
EVS Managing Director and  
EMS Middle East Liaison Secretary*



**EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools**



## WE CANNOT TURN AWAY CHILDREN IN NEED

### A visit to the pre-school project in the Syrian Valley of Christians

**At the beginning of December, Uwe Gräbe and EMS General Secretary Jürgen Reichel visited the new pre-school in Kafroun. There almost 50 children are taught and receive a warm meal every day thanks to financial support from the EMS Fellowship. All of them have been fleeing from the war with their families for years.**

Shortly before we arrived at the little town of Safita, we turned off right to the small village of Kafroun. The workers and children there gave us a very warm welcome. The pre-school had just moved from a large hotel to a small office and apartment building where the rent is cheaper. The partition walls which divided the large room into smaller rooms were lovingly painted. The rooms now function as a nursery group, a kindergarten group and a pre-school group.

Colourful plastic building bricks lay on the table in the kindergarten; some girls were just building a skittle alley. The pre-school children next door were busy learning English. They stood up when we entered the room. "Good morning! How are you?" they all shouted in chorus.

All the children are "internally displaced persons". Most of them come from Homs; others come from Hama, Aleppo and less well known places which the war has destroyed. Many children have lost family members. One worker told us about her six year old son. He often cries in his sleep at night, remembering the battles in Homs.

Almost all the workers in the pre-school are internally displaced persons. After they lost their home, they literally had nothing left. Now they can at least earn a little money again. Reverend Ma'an Bitar and his wife Ghaouf Hanna from Mhardi are actually the driving force behind the project. They regularly take on an exhausting journey from Mhardi to Kafroun. They obtain passes, discuss with soldiers at checkpoints and placate the local authorities. The authorities are very suspicious of a project like this in the middle of a civil war country.

Slowly we start to understand why Reverend Ma'an hired more staff than was originally planned. One educator has a university diploma in English literature, another studied economics. Only the third educator and the directress are trained teachers. But what the others lack in pedagogical training is more than balanced by their unbelievable commitment.

The cook previously worked in a luxury hotel in Aleppo. Now she prepares school meals in Kafroun. Of course she could do everything on her own. But Reverend Ma'an has given her an assistant who also keeps the building clean. In this way, another person is provided with a wage to provide her family with food from which they draw hope. The food at the school is excellent. This lunchtime, it's "kubbe", raviolis filled with minced meat served with yoghurt and lots of salad, and fruit for desert from the farm next door. The children come from refugee families where the hardship is so great that there is not even enough money to pay for one warm meal a day.



Photo: EMS/Uwe Gräbe

The pre-school is an oasis where everyone – both children and adults – can draw new hope.

The population in the Valley of Christians has quadrupled since the influx of internally displaced persons. And although the state schools teach in shifts, many children have no access to a school. Originally, the pre-school project in Kafroun was planned to take in thirty children. In the meantime, there are 45 or 46 children. Nothing of this appeared in the project proposal. But it is very difficult to turn away children who are in need.

There would be a solid case to expand the pre-school project even more. But the main thing first is to make sure the work stands on a firm organisational footing. The new young accountant intends to see to it that the use of donation money is accounted for transparently for the friends and supporters of the international EMS Fellowship. This is a great relief for Habib Badr. He is the Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Church of Beirut, a member church of the EMS which bears the brunt of the responsibility for the project.

The pre-school is an oasis where everyone – both children and adults – can draw new hope. But what will happen next in Syria? The children in the pre-school in the Valley of Christians are composed equally of Christians and Muslims. Alawites and Sunnis live and learn together with Christian children. When they waved us good-bye, we did not see them as members of different religious communities. We simply saw children and 45 or 46 happy faces.

*Uwe Gräbe*

## SOLIDARITY BEYOND OUR BORDERS

### Why the EMS looks after internally displaced persons in Syria

**There are many reasons why it is better not to start a long-term involvement in the insecure country of Syria which is desolated by civil war. Nonetheless, the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) are doing it anyway – for good reasons.**

**T**he Syrian refugee drama has been the concern of the EMS Fellowship for a long time although none of the 28 member churches or mission societies has its home in Syria. At the EMS Mission Council meeting in 2013, Dr. Habib Badr, Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, pointed out how closely interlinked the ties are between Syria and its neighbouring countries and how strongly the Syrian refugee drama affects Lebanon and Jordan where two EMS members are active. The Mission Council then commissioned the EMS Secretariat and the churches in the region to find ways of showing the solidarity of the international EMS Fellowship. Very soon the idea was born to set up a pre-school in the Syrian Valley of Christians.

There are certainly many reasons why it is better not to start a long-term involvement in Syria at the present time. Future prospects are too uncertain and the interests of the players involved in the fighting are too confusing. A well intentioned project could very quickly become a bone of contention and be caught up between the fronts. But the EMS together with the EVS heard the call for help. That is Christian and fulfils the programmatic name of

“Evangelical Mission in Solidarity”. Solidarity does not end at one’s own borders. Mission is something that shows the way where no roads are marked.



The school project in Kafroun has become part of the examination which tests the maturity of the new EMS. It brings members of the fellowship closer together than any other project in the EMS. Almost half the member churches and associations have donated money, substantial amounts in some cases. For example, the Evangelical Church in Japan declared the school as project of the year for its children’s worship service. The two Korean member churches handed over large cheques to the Chairman of the EMS Mission Council, the Reverend Marianne Wagner, when the Mission Council convened its meeting in South Korea in the

spring of 2014. And Indonesian churches transferred money to the Secretariat, as did the German member churches who assumed the lion's share of the financing.

The obvious thing to do next was to invite the General Secretary of the Evangelical Presbyterian Synod in Syria and Lebanon, Reverend Fadi Dagher, to the

is sowing the seeds of hope and may even be forced to pull out and restart due to external circumstances. Habib Badr regards the project as groundbreaking because it is based on the wish to stay and it is an interfaith project – children come from Alawite, Sunni, Druze and Christian families. It gives refugees work. And finally, it relies on education, the most important weapon against obstinate fundamentalism.

The mission of the EMS Fellowship in the Middle East distances itself from any kind of romantic notion of the Holy Land. It does what circumstances force it to do and keeps to the principle of sobriety engendered by the Schneller Association. It is planned over the long term and can be managed locally, in the estimation of the member churches. It passes on its voice, as shown by the example of the joint letter drafted by senior leaders of the German member churches and addressed to the German Chancellor in September 2014. In it, Jochen Cornelius-Bundschuh (Baden), Martin Hein (Kurhessen-Waldeck), Frank Otfried July (Württemberg), Christian Schad (Pfalz) and Frieder Vollprecht (Moravian Church) asked Angela Merkel to take note of the urgent call for help which the Evangelical churches in the Middle East sent out to the whole world in summer and “to employ every diplomatic and economic means to interrupt the flow of money and weapons to ISIS and other extremist groups in the region”. Mission in Solidarity for us also means becoming involved in politics.

*Reverend Jürgen Reichel,  
EMS General Secretary*



**The EMS Mission Council**

EMS Annual General Meeting in Arnoldsheim in November 2014 and ask him to deliver a report on the situation in Syria. One of the pastors at this church, Ma'an Bitar, manages the project together with his wife Ghaouth Hanna from their own parish in Mhardi, 70 km away, and from their school there. This report was therefore a spiritual event, as was the report given by Habib Badr 18 months before. It reflected how mental strength and presence of mind are needed to prevent shying away from the terror of war and blind terrorism. It explained why the EMS in Syria



## FOR A FUTURE AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

The Syria conferences in Loccum and Tutzing



The EMS project for the pre-school in the Valley of Christians offers prospects for the time after the civil war.

In the past few months, the Evangelical Academy has dealt several times with the human catastrophe which is currently happening before our very eyes in Syria and Iraq. The Middle East Liaison Desk of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) has also taken part several times in such meetings together with many other players.

At the beginning of November, a joint conference of the Evangelical Academy and the Foreign Office took place in Loccum. The idea was that a further attempt should be made to bring representatives of the Syrian civilian society and the democratic opposition together for talks with Middle East experts and representatives of German non-governmental organisations working in Syria in order to work out prospects for a future in

the country torn apart by civil war.

The main condition was a completely confidential and protected setting. All participants were personally invited to this closed event. Two journalists took part alone because they were experts on Syria – but not as reporters. This was totally acceptable – since the participants included both representatives of the established churches from parts of Syria controlled by the regime and members of the Syrian national coalition resident abroad.

Many discussions took place on the wording of a joint communiqué. Whereas some expressly demanded the setting up of a buffer zone for Christians in Syria, others countered with the argument: “If I as a Christian demand special protection from the West for myself – how can I one day coexist with Muslims for whom I did



not demand similar protection?”

But one point which the participants from Syria did agree on: that coexistence between Christians and Muslims was the basic condition for a possible peace solution. They also defended themselves energetically against some of the statements made by German Middle East experts who proposed that dividing Syria into cantons would be unavoidable.

On this issue, a bishop made an interesting statement: “We are not afraid of the future of Christians in Syria, but we are afraid of the future of Syria without Christians.” In order to prepare a state in which “confessionalism” is overcome, it is important now to develop civil strategies “which make the people who are guilty accountable without condemning them.”

A mere one and a half weeks later, the “Political Club” of the Evangelical Academy of Tutzing took a totally different road. Under the heading of “Israel, Syria, Ukraine. How is it possible to achieve stable peace?”, they attempted to invite as many participants as possible. With this in mind, the organisers, Dr. Günther Beckstein and Udo Hahn, brought several well known experts on board. Under the key word of human dignity as the starting point of all political considerations, the Development Minister Gerd Müller voted in favour of a “value-related development policy”. Syria should be regarded separately in all general considerations concerning the intake of refugees in Germany since the neighbouring countries of Syria have already shouldered the main burden despite their internal problems. On the other hand, Norbert Röttgen, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the German Bundestag, explained the strate-

gic interest of the world community in creating a separation in the Middle East between jihadist Sunnis and non-terrorist Sunnis. In fact, the “Islamic State” cannot be annihilated without an enormous involvement from Sunnis in the region. It was immensely touching to experience the positive attitude of many people at these conferences who praised the commitment of the EMS and EVS in the Middle East. This generates an enormous level of trust that is an obligation for us.

Uwe Gräbe

## INFO

*The Evangelical Academy is planning a conference together with the EMS Middle East Liaison Desk from 3 to 5 July 2015. The subject will be the relationship between the civilian society and the state. States disintegrate and others are prevented from coming into existence – what are the local, regional and international options for negotiation that result for the civilian society? Although Israel/Palestine and Syria are the geographic focal points of such considerations, the conference also intends to cover a wider range of topics covering all the countries of the Middle East where the problems and perspectives are often very similar. All those who are interested in these topics are invited to take part. More information at*

[www.ev-akademie-boll.de](http://www.ev-akademie-boll.de)

## ECUMENISM IS REVIVED

**The Middle East Church Council has the confidence of its backers again**

**Six years ago, the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) was declared dead. Due to continuous mismanagement all the main investors had withdrawn. For Western welfare organisations the Church Council now has introduced leaner structures and a new profile and has returned to credibility.**

Good news from the ecumenical movement in the Middle East is something of a rarity. If you know something about the brothers and sisters in the Middle East, you know how thin the ice of church co-operation can be. Ironically, the best example of this in the past few years was the MECC itself. For many years, the large member churches had treated the regional church council rather shabbily. Each member acted in its own interests and had maintained its own contacts in the region and abroad separately from the other regional churches. Another example of ecumenical disinterest was the membership contributions. Only three per cent of the total MECC budget came from Middle East churches. Most of the remainder was paid by Western partners.

When the MECC Secretariat in Beirut no longer presented transparent accounts and it turned out that the MECC had not paid any social insurance contributions for its part-time workers for years and had used specified allocations for other purposes, one partner after the other withdrew. By the end of 2009, the regional church council was insolvent and had to dismiss its 25 employees. It left behind a

mountain of debt totalling two million US dollars.

What remained were a few convinced fighters for Middle East Ecumenism, among them Habib Badr from the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, the sponsoring church of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. Together with some partners from the West, they pulled together at their own expense on a number of occasions over the past few years to define new, leaner structures, establish a realistic repayment plan and define clear management rules with appropriate control mechanisms. Apparently this reorganisation has been blessed with the fruits of success. Since the end of last year, the MECC has been receiving promises of financing from all over the world, among others from Brot für die Welt (Church Development Service). The German aid organisation recently approved 90,000 Euro for the church council for the double budget of 2014/2015. "We have linked funding to the condition that the council must press ahead with the consolidation process in management and show visible results. But we are confident that the new start will be successful," said Ilonka Boltze, who heads the liaison desk for the Middle East, South Caucasus and Central Asia at Brot für die Welt. "Our local adviser who also works on issues such as management and transparency for other partner organisations will support the MECC in this matter," said Boltze.

The next two years will be decisive for the MECC. The much smaller team must show that it can handle money in a

responsible way. In addition the church council must be transformed into a functional ecumenical platform which can bring all Middle East church leaderships to the negotiation table and search for common denominators.

Owe Boersma, Middle East Liaison Officer at the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW), also thinks the restructured MECC is sustainable. Boersma was one of the few Western representatives who accompanied the church council during its restructuring discussions over the past few years. "As a missionary society, our relationship to the churches in the Middle East is our prime objective. And we wanted to maintain this despite the miserable finances," he said. "It is gratifying to see that the 27 member churches now identify more strongly with the MECC than was the case before 2009." To pay off the debts,

the Middle East churches have already contributed a total of 800,000 US dollars. In future, they also want to make a greater contribution to MECC financing.

At the beginning of November 2014, an official letter of request from the World Council of Churches (ECC) in Geneva finally broke the ice between the MECC and the Western sponsors. The MECC had gone through an astounding and very promising restructuring process and had promised transparency, wrote ECC General Secretary Olav Fykse Tvei. "The churches in the Middle East are living through very difficult times at the moment. Never before was the MECC as important as it is now as a forum for Ecumenism and unity."

*Katja Dorothea Buck*



Photo: EMS/Luwe - Gräbe

The hopes of the MECC rest in his hands: the new General Secretary Michel Jalakh.



**Letters to the Editors:**

Contact with our readers is invaluable for our work. We are delighted to receive all your readers' 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.

*Schneller Magazine 4/2014*

Many special thanks for the current Schneller Magazine! "Mavericks in the Middle East" – an excellent title for alternative news! Even the article headings are an invitation to committed reading. The pearls of readers' letters under "No comment" show by their opposite views that you are definitely on the right track.

*Prof. Dr. Johannes Lähnemann, Goslar*

*About the article „No comment“,  
Schneller Magazine 4/2014, p29*

Thank you very much for printing the graffiti and the courage for printing extracts form the letters of cancellation. I hope the information in this cleverly compiled magazine will help people to think and act with more tolerance and support for life through more knowledge.

*Diethilde Lachmann, Bamberg*

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



God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Genesis 1, 31



**EVS** Evangelical Association  
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