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SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



“YOU SEE ME” – THOUGHTS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST ABOUT THE KIRCHENTAG SLOGAN



**EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools**

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Dear Reader,

„You are the God who sees me.“ These words are spoken by Hagar the slave woman who bore Abraham’s first child after her previous life had ended in the desert. Nobody wanted to see her any more except God who found her exactly there, in the desert.

The Kirchentag (German Protestant Church Convention) chose this verse as its slogan in the year of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation at a time when the isolation of states as well as ethnic and religious groups all over the world is on the increase; a time when fascist-based groups literally want to chase millions of strangers and people seeking shelter into the desert where nobody will see them any more. Ruthless attention seekers in political office are misusing the flows of refugees as a tactical means to secure their own power. Or else they build walls so that those who are marginalised should no longer be seen: out of sight, out of mind.

But is it enough if we simply level accusations against political leaders? Are we in our churches really free from the tendency to close our eyes to those who we regard as disruptive? What about the Muslims in our midst who want to take an active part in society in their own way? What about the issue of Messianic Jews whose presence is felt as a disruptive factor in talks with traditional Judaism? What about people on the fringe of society, with or without handicaps and in whatever form of life they may be? And what about the often male-dominated countries in the Middle East where the Schneller schools are situated? Where are those who stand up for the rights of women and children?

This issue allows men and women to express their concerns and who speak up on behalf of those we often overlook. It does not matter whether we agree with their individual position or not. But one thing is certain: God sees these people. Who would we be with our traditional magazine of many voices if we also failed to cast our eyes upon them?

This year, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools will be attending the „Market of Possibilities“ at the Kirchentag (see page 22). You are most welcome to visit us there – you won’t be able to overlook !

Many greetings on behalf of the editorial team



Uwe Gräbe



“YOU ARE THE GOD WHO SEES ME” (GENESIS 16:13)

Where does the passage chosen as the slogan for the 2017 Kirchentag come from? What is the reference to the passage and at what time did this experience of God take place? The background is a dramatic family conflict. God promised a child to Abram and Sarai but they were still childless in their old age.

As a result Hagar, Sarai's personal slave girl, became a surrogate mother, a common practice at that time. At that time children could have several mothers – a biological mother and a social mother – and they grew up in a large patchwork family, larger than many would care to accept today. But many questions remain the same. Who belongs to such a family? Who would it include?

From developmental psychology we know that young children who are shown no attention or see no human face fall sick. Studies of mirror neurons show how even babies react to loving looks and can respond with their own resonance. In the same way the smile of toddlers is one of the greatest experiences of happiness for contact persons.

But let's return to the desert situation which took place in what is now Syria. Hagar is pregnant and feels her body growing. At the same time, in the eyes of her mistress, she loses her value and her respect. Values shift and rivalry grows rampant. Sarai feels humiliated – and humiliates Hagar who then flees into the desert:

The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?

A coloured slave, under other circumstances a refugee, is asked where she comes from! According to Hebrew tradition and laws a run-away slave had to be granted protection. Perhaps this was the source of Hagar's courage to confide to the unknown messenger without hesitation that she had run away from her mistress Sarai.

The angel of the Lord said to her, „Return to your mistress, and submit to her.“ But Hagar is silent.

The angel of the Lord said to her, „I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude.“ Hagar continued to be silent.

And the angel of the Lord said to her, „Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with his kin.“ Only then did Hagar respond. „You are El-roi, the God who sees. Have I already seen God and remained alive after seeing him?“

Jürgen Ebach reproduced the Biblical text taken from the first book of the Bible in this form. In his opinion the angel of the Lord receives the chance to reveal his message because of Hagar's silence. What else could she have said when her main concern at the time was only to survive?



Photo: Hochschul- und Landesbibliothek Fulda

“An angel speaks to the run-away Hagar” – Miniature by an anonymous master (produced between 1350 and 1375 for a copy of the Chronicle of the World by Rudolf von Ems)

Only after the third revelation did she realise what was actually happening here and she asked herself, am I not now looking at God who sees me? Genesis 16:13 is the first time in the Bible that a refugee, a coloured woman, puts her experience of God into words and gives God a name.

In my attempt to find a parallel between Hagar’s story and our context, one question repeatedly arose and stood fiercely in the way: who does this experience of God belong to? Are we entitled to hear it for ourselves? First of all it requires us to change our perspective on things. Most of us Schneller Magazine readers are not Hagar and other than those who are struggling for survival, we belong more to the elite like Sarai and Abram, and justifiably so. Despite many a concern for the future, we live on the sunny side of life when compared to world-wide standards. In 1993, Delores Williams realised a basic experience in black women who have been deprived of their rights in “Sisters in

the Wilderness” and developed her *womanist theology* we must first listen to their voices and respect them.

But we also know the longing for God to turn his attention to us, to hear that His blessing is directed at us – as spoken at the end of every worship service. But then it is also the benevolent eye of God which we long for and which pushes us to look at the world around us. “Where is your brother, where is your sister?” Part of this task is also to cast a critical eye on our entanglement in unjust situations and on our privileges. And that takes courage.

Gabriele Mayer, PhD, Women and Gender Desk and Intercultural Education Unit at the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity.

IN THE DESERT OF EXILE

Syrian refugee women in Lebanon

Recently, as I drove through Lebanon’s northerly Akkar region, I saw many Hagar: women by the side of the road; women working in the fields; women carrying young children; women washing clothes in front of their tents.

They are Syrians, uprooted from their homes. They live in very lowly circumstances and are dependent on other people’s help. They desperately try to find the little springs of life in the desert of their exile. These women are often not seen. There is a lack of face-to-face and eye-to-eye contact. The less eye-contact, the easier it is to block out the desperate need of refugee communities. It is alarming how our eyes get used to the sight of overpopulated, muddy camps. When I

tour visitors from Europe or North America, I am reminded of the anomaly of the burlap sheds, the open sewers and the unshod feet of the children.

By overlooking the women, people do not see that they can be agents of change. Hence, the investments in their lives in terms of formation, education and work are minimal. Meanwhile they are of course viewed as potential wives and mothers. As a result, there are thousands of teenage mothers in the camps and thousands of children who are born into this situation of exile and destitution, not unlike Ishmael in the Bible. The refugee population is rising at an alarming rate.

The media describe them as “Syrian refugees”. This may be the best description available, but it is a dangerous label. It



Two female students are talking about Hagar, the one of strong faith, during weekly prayers at Haigazian University.

turns human beings with a name into mere recipients of aid or, worse, into opportunistic intruders of my land who seek their own personal advantage. This is what Sarai did to Hagar. She consistently referred to her as ‘maidservant’ or ‘slave woman’. Labelling renders people interchangeable or even replaceable.

“You are the God who sees me,” said Hagar. These are tender and beautiful words but they also show me that God looks at the displaced women in a much different way than I do. God does not see “Syrian refugees”, God sees people he created in his image; people with a name, a personality and a destiny. God’s eyes are eyes that love indiscriminately. God loves rich and poor; people dressed in the latest fashion and people dressed in rags; people with a passport and people without one. God’s eyes rest especially on people who are in a strange land and in deep need.

I need to change the way I look; as it is, my eyes are covered by numerous filters. One of them is the filter of European self-righteousness which makes me ask uncompassionate questions. Are they not profiting from the system? Should they not go back to their own country? Was it necessary for them to flee in the first place?

When God sees, God acts. This is clear from Hagar’s story in Genesis. Hagar is visited by an angel who offers her advice and comfort. This shows me that I need to bear in mind that God also acts in the lives of the present-day Hagars. Even when the borders of the European Union are closing even when the silence of the Arab world is deafening; even when the aid begins to dry up; even when people are beginning to view refugee camps as something nor-

mal: God sees and God acts. I want to have open eyes for God’s acts of grace, and I want to be part of them.

As a Dutch Protestant pastor living and working in Lebanon, I feel it is my duty to help people look differently. I find this important in a world with so many Hagars and Ishmaels. In addition to that, I also feel called to share my Lebanese experiences with my Dutch home church and vice versa. It is, for example, amazing to see the ability of the Lebanese nation to absorb high numbers of Syrians. My Dutch compatriots can learn from that. It is equally amazing to hear how refugees in the Netherlands (and Germany) have been embraced and offered a starting capital for a new life. That is a learning point for the Lebanese.

I long to make Hagar visible. I wish for people to see refugees as people with a name, a personality and a destiny. For it is when people are seen that they feel empowered and become agents of change.

Reverend Wilbert van Saane comes from the Netherlands. He is currently working as chaplain at the Armenian Evangelical Haigazian University in Beirut.

GOD NEEDS MESSENGERS OF CARE

How Syrian children in Lebanon still manage to graduate from school

Hagar was badly mistreated. When things got unbearable for her when she became pregnant, her only way out was to run away into the desert. This story from Genesis 16 reminded me of my volunteer work with Palestinian refugees since 1985 when I was directing a school for them in Lebanon. Today we make it possible for Syrian boys and girls to pass their school leaving exams.

The families of the children had left the homeland of Palestine. Like Hagar, they must have wondered whether God knew or cared about them. Their future was uncertain, their past seemed, most probably, too painful to think about. They felt abandoned by everyone on earth and forgotten too by God in heaven. In the midst of their despair, I am sure they experienced God's care and mercy, when they see people like us caring and loving them. As the “angel” of the Lord found Hagar, the “messengers” of God will find these poor and confused people. Hagar was encouraged, and she named the Lord: “El Roi – The Living One who sees me”. Ishmael her son was born, that is “God hears”. God hears the cry of the abandoned and forsaken ones because He is not deaf to their crying, and He saw their suffering because He is not blind.

When the war in Syria erupted a few years ago, many people fled and came to Lebanon. God saw these vulnerable and least protected ones. He called us and as with the Palestinians in the past, we were able to use educational means to show His care and concern. We Lebanese have long

endured a lot with Syrian government and army. Now Syrians came to our country as refugees. In God's heart there are no enemies, slaves or discrimination. God only has sons and daughters. With funds given to us from churches, we have rented apartments and turned them into schools. That is where Syrian boys and girls in the 9th to 12th grade level were able to come together. They were supposed to sit for official exams in Syria soon. We hired Syrian teachers to teach them according to their school level. After completing their Syrian school program we organized their trip to go to Syria and do their exams. We were very happy to see that most of the students passed the exams. We want them to be ready to go back home when the war is over.

We live in a time in which exclusion is burgeoning, and segregation seems the only way to resolve conflicts. We see among us, for example, how quickly those with the status of a stranger or an immigrant become a threat or at least a heavy burden because they come from a distant country, or have different accent, or because they have different skin color, language or social class, or even have different faith. Our differences turn little by little into symptoms of hostility, threat and maybe violence.

Unfortunately, the first reaction towards the stranger is to dismiss, discredit or curse him/her. Jesus, however, told us: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matt. 25:35) We should care for all. We cannot be Christians without living like Christians.



Photo: Saleeby

Syrian refugee girls study in Lebanon for exams in their home country.

Hagar's words opened a new horizon for me today and revealed God's heart which is the heart of the One who sees and cares. God is not only good to His saints but to all sinners too. Therefore, giving cannot be neutral, indifferent, lukewarm or impartial. Charity risks and engages.

Today a great number of men and women are deprived of their human dignity and suffer rejection and abandonment. Refugees, especially children and women, suffer violence, all fleeing extreme poverty and war to find a better future. Hagar's name, which means "migration", is now an inspiration for me today to SEE all who are on the fringes of society. Where God is, hope and mercy are flourishing. Those who feel alone, misunderstood and unheard, are the ones for

whom Christ came to serve. To the poor, the fleeing and the desperate girl God revealed Himself. He heard her cry and saw her. He gave her the strength that she needed to overcome her fear. Let us be the 'angels', the messengers, who bring hope to the lost ones and see them as God saw us.

Leila Saleeby is member of the Supervisory Board of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. She had been the director of a school of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut for a long time.

GOD SEES THE HARDSHIP OF THE ELDERLY

What it means to manage an old people’s home in time of war

War is something horrible but civil and the sectarian wars are the worse. Syria has been living through this experience for the past seven years. Homs is one of the cities which have had a major share of this horrible war. But when everything is turned upside down, elderly people who are dependent on help suffer quite considerably.

More than two years ago, the residents at the old people’s home in our Evangelical parish had to live under the control of fanatical groups. From January 2012 when these groups took over parts of the city until the middle of May 2014 when the government’s army released the area from the hands of these groups, the district in which the old people’s home of our parish is located was considered the front line. The radical groups had taken up their position only 100 meters away and attacked us almost daily trying to regain control over our district. Thank God that the home did not sustain any greater damage during this time.

But can you imagine what it means to manage an old people’s home in one of the most dangerous front lines in the world at that time? On 10 May 2014, the radical militia finally pulled back and surrendered the old city of Homs to government troops. At that time, we thought that everything would be all right and everyone in our district and in the whole city of Homs was first happy that peace had returned.

Yet new matters and problems began to

appear. We suffer from the damaged infrastructure, the power cuts, the lack of water and fuel, the latter because of sanctions by the West which in the eyes of many Syrians are felt as unjust. We need fuel for the generator to heat the rooms in the old people’s home. In addition the prices for food, clothing and medicine are astronomical. Compared to before the start of the war, the Syrian currency has lost ten times its value.

These daily challenges are what we are still facing every day. For instance, this winter we were able to have only 3000 liters of fuel for the generator and to run the heaters, while the need is more than 4500 liters each month of winter, so again: can you imagine how the situation of the old people is with the cold and without elevator? Needless to tell that many of the old people are not able to pay their contributions to keep this Church Old People’s Home running. It is not supported by the government because Syria has no program for such ministry. And I need many pages to tell you about the other serious matters we are facing as a church to keep the ministry of the home for the elderly.

This situation speaks to me in the same position as Hagar. As Hagar decided to leave her house far from the situation. Yet, we always experienced that God never abandons us, on the contrary, God is with us and He sees us, knows our needs and commands us not to leave, not to submit and stop this ministry. Voice of hope always come to us through the prayers and support that we get from sister churches and Christian institutions in the West.

The German Church is one of these soft godly whispers that we experience in these very dark days.

So we are here, facing the unbelievably harsh challenges. The miraculous Lord is showing up through you as a Church. With your support we feel that we are not alone, we are not only a tiny forsaken Church in the Middle East. No, we are still strong. Of course, we are standing in the front line. But we receive the support of our sisters and brothers of the universal church of Christ.

The Protestant Church in Syria is still alive with its prophetic voice sharing the love of God in the middle of the war.

As God took care of Hagar, he keeps taking care of us as a church in the middle of war and mercilessness. Even more than this, we believe in the promise that we are not the sons of Hagar, rather we are the sons and the daughters of God himself, and believe that one day these dark clouds will be converted to the rains that bring the good and wealth for which the church stands for to preserve His glory.

Reverend Mofid Samir Karajili is Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Homs.



Photo: Mofid Karajili

Despite all the challenges, there is no lack of care and love in the Old People's Home.

WE ARE GOD’S EYES

Helping sight-impaired children find their place in society

He who sees the suffering of others can do nothing but act, believes Samir Esaid. The pastor from Jordan started an integrative school for blind and sight-impaired children 14 years ago. One of the first girls the school accepted has meanwhile passed her school leaving exams with top marks.

When Sarah was 75 years old and had still borne no children, she asked Abraham to conceive a child with her Egyptian slave-girl Hagar. Sarah made this suggestion because she knew that she was then too old to bear children. God had promised an enormous multitude of offspring and it was no longer humanly possible for Sarah to fulfil this. Abraham listened to Sarah and

followed her advice. He accepted her will because he loved Sarah and respected her wish. This was the only reason why he went to Hagar.

Hagar conceived and suddenly the relationship between Sarah and Hagar changed. Sarah realised that Hagar’s son would be the only heir and she would lose her social position as a result. Her heart was full of envy, jealousy and hate.

Sarah started to humiliate and humble Hagar. It became so bad that Hagar ran away into the desert. As she was sitting exhausted by a spring, she met an angel who asked her where she came from and where she was going. She explained and she received the instruction to return and submit to her mistress. He also prophesied



Photo: EMS/Gräbe

At the kindergarten of the integrative school in Irbid.

that Hagar would bear a son who she should call Ishmael. Hagar should always remember that God had heard her and had seen her when she calls the name of her son. "Lord, you see me."

When she was in greatest need, God was concerned about her, he saw her and her suffering and she felt seen. The story shows us that our God does not sleep. God sees what is happening today. He sees the suffering of people in need, the suffering of refugees from Syria, Iraq and other parts of the world who flee from unbearable situations, as Hagar did in those days. Many of these people come in particular to Jordan, one of Syria's neighbouring countries. In the meantime, there are 360,000 refugees in the city of Irbid where I live. They need help. God sees them.

They are our brothers and sisters. When they suffer, we suffer too. Each time, we have an open ear, we act as their mediators with other aid or relief organisations, provide them with aids such as hearing aids, walking sticks, walking frames and wheelchairs, finance eye operations as necessary and give them free school materials. There are many different possibilities to show refugees that they are not forgotten, that they are seen.

Another major issue that has concerned me for many years is the strong separation between handicapped and non handicapped people in the Jordanian society. When I came to Irbid with my wife in 2003, there were no kindergartens for blind children in the north of Jordan. No school accepted them. God sent us to help these children and change something. He gave us eyes for us to see. We are God's eyes and with them we can see the weak, the oppressed, the suffering and the dis-

advantaged. We founded an integrative kindergarten and later this was followed by a school. The primary schools in the surrounding region do not accept any blind or sight-impaired children. We acted out of necessity and so we offer a school education up to the tenth class. Today, we have managed it and we are proud that we provide lessons to 26 blind and 14 sight-impaired children together with 219 sighted children. These people should not be kept in secrecy, they should not be hidden away. Instead they should be seen and take part in public life. They should find their place in society.

The first blind girl pupil we welcomed to our kindergarten in 2003 passed the Jordanian school leaving exams this year with top marks. We want to show tomorrow's generation how perfectly normal it is to live and learn together, no matter what the handicap, religious affiliation or gender they may have. Children learn with open eyes to go through the world, talk to each other, help each other, be tolerant and honest and to co-exist in peace with each other.

I believe that God gave us eyes for us to see and act. We are God's eyes.

Reverend Samir Esaid heads the integrative Arab Episcopal School for blind and sight-impaired children in Irbid (Jordan).

GOD HONOURS US EVEN IF WE ARE IN PLIGHT

The meaning of Hagar for Muslims in Europe

The 12th century mystic and theologian al-Ghazali remarks in a text on spiritual discipline that the word ,travel‘ in Arabic is etymologically related to ,character‘. In his comment the scholar goes on to explain that it is so because in travel one’s true nature (character) is brought forth. Hagar is a good example of this.

Drawing a correspondence between travel, character and the inner life are not uncommon territories for the Abrahamic faiths to reflect upon. Indeed, all of their respective founders have at one time during their ministries traversed an inhospitable desert. In the case of Islam, Muhammad was a seasoned merchant and shepherd expelled from his home and left to travel in exile for three months in the unforgiving Arabian desert.

As a British born, 2nd generation Pakistani who is married to an American and now lives in Germany, the presence of travel remains evident in my life. The small medieval town of Tuebingen where my wife and our new born daughter live houses the Center for Islamic Theology (University of Tuebingen). Our arrival in Germany comes at a particularly tempestuous moment in the life of present day Europe, with the ongoing refugee plight, the effects of Brexit, the threat of terror attacks and a general sense of unease regarding the political climate.

Having our own trepidations about living in Germany during such a moment, our experiences have been quite to the contrary. We have very much been wel-

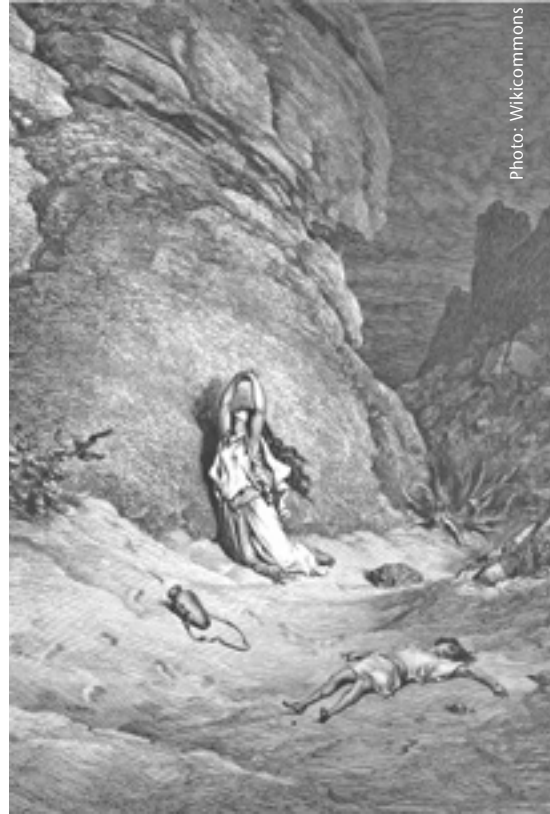


Photo: Wikicommons

Hagar and Ishmael banned by Abraham to the wilderness. By Gustav Doré (1866)

comed and had the privilege to gain an insight into the richness of religious life in Baden Wuerttemberg. Its provincialism has affected a lasting charm on our sensibilities towards this small pocket of Germany with its rhythms of time mirroring the Christian sacred calendar, interspersed with seasonal delights (Schwäbische Fastnacht and the Tuebingen Chocolate

Festival!). In the warp and woof of this colourful life we have been blessed to be given our patch and partake in it through fellowship with our new community.

In our travels the story of Hajar has remained a source of reflection. Told in the Quran and resembling similar narrative features from the Bible, the recognition and honour bestowed on her by God in the wildness is due to her steadfastness to call upon the 'One Who hears'. A paragon of the lonely, destitute and forgotten, this wandering mother of the desert prefigures the spiritual struggle which unites all the Abrahamic traditions. According to Islamic tradition when Abraham informs her of God's plan to travel and leave her and the babe Ishmael, her response is simply "God will not forsake us". Read alongside the Biblical response as Hagar is told by the Lord that "I hear you" there is a wondrous kinship felt in both scriptures of her spiritual reliance requited by God's Mercy. For Hajar the desert, as an unforgiving land, became habitable and is what Muslims today call Mecca.

As the world faces rising political, cultural, economic and religious tensions it seems inevitable that some voices, from all ends on the spectrum of extremism, would have Europe become a desert for Islam and Muslims. They would have the saga of Hajar be relived in our present day only without redemption and solace.

Contemplating upon these happenings, my sense of home felt in Germany, and indeed Europe, has arisen not merely because of a passport but that I am reminded that place is irrelevant to faith in the fellowship of people. That religious communities may disabuse hatred with

the hospitality of faith seems our common goal. As we strive to work together in our own ways and travel towards the good of humankind and creation, the burden of these labours are made less onerous in the face of the smiling friend. As one of the great matriarchs of Islam, Hajar's story brings comfort in the knowledge that the gentle embraces of Godly Grace lays in His honouring us even in plight. For it is God that, the great son of Tuebingen Friedrich Hölderlin reminds us:

**Knowing always the proper
measure,
Touches sparingly and just for a
moment the homes
Of men — unexpectedly, and no
one knows when
(from: Friedensfeier)**

*Mujadad Zaman is Research Fellow
at the Center for Islamic Theology,
University of Tuebingen.*

A TWO-FOLD MISSION FROM GOD

Messianic Jews in Germany

Twenty years ago, I was asked by an Orthodox priest what Christian denomination I belong to. I said, “I am a Messianic Jew.” He thought he had misheard what I had said and asked, “Did you mean a Martian Jew?” That’s not a joke! At least it didn’t sound like one. It seems people are more ready to believe a Jew comes from the planet Mars than a Jew who belongs to the Messiah. But seriously now.

I was born into a secular Jewish family in the former Soviet Union. Most Jews there were atheists. Seventy years of Communism had not failed to leave their mark on us. The entry in our ID cards that we were of Jewish nationality and the latent presence of anti-Semitism were the only but noticeable features that we belonged to the People of God. When I came to faith in Jesus at the age of 33, I was eternally grateful to God that he had found me.

“Lord, you see me” – “ata El ra’i”. This is how Hagar names God after he found her in the wilderness. When I studied the Bible later and came across this passage, I immediately identified myself completely with this Egyptian slave-girl. How great our God is. He knows us, He even sees us when we can’t see Him! For more than seventy years, most Jews in Russia and the Ukraine had not seen God. But God saw us – we were uncertain and frightened because of prevalent anti-Semitism, entrenched in secularism, influenced by Communism and Jews only by name and

nationality. He looked at us and He revealed Himself to us in his Son, the Messiah Jesus. He reconciled me, He gave me the joy of living and most important, He gave me a calling and for the past 25 years, I have been able to live out this calling. In the early 1990s, the modern Messianic movement started in Germany. Today, it is estimated that there are 2,000 to 3,000 Jews living in Germany who believe in Jesus. They form their own Jewish Messianic communities which are not only attractive for non-religious Jews but also for Christians who are seeking their roots in Biblical Judaism.

As Messianic Jews we value our Jewish heritage. We study the Torah and other Jewish sources. We have rediscovered the beauty and profundity of Biblical feasts for ourselves. We circumcise our children, fast and pray at Yom Kippur (Great Day of Atonement) and build sukkahs (temporary huts) constructed during the festival of Sukkot. At the Feast of the Passover, we read the Haggadah (story of the exodus from Egypt) and celebrate the resurrection of our Messiah who was sacrificed as the Lamb of God. In addition we organise conferences and summer camps for children and young people. We pray every Sabbath for the people and State of Israel and try to support various projects there.

I believe God gave the Messianic Jews in Germany a double mission: first the return of our people to their Jewish identity with all their duties and obligations towards God and humanity. The essential thing here is to acknowledge the Messiah who reconciled us with God the Father.

On the other hand our duty is to reveal their Jewish “roots” to Christian communities and paint a Jewish Messiah before their eyes. This helps us to come closer and closer to unity in Jesus as God foresaw and also to combat anti-Semitism which is still present.

Despite all the challenges, when I see what God has done for his Jewish people in the synagogues and in the Jewish Messianic communities in Germany in the past 25 years, I can only say, “Lord, you see me.” Today, there is again a public Jewish life in Germany. The fact that our children and grandchildren have not become assimilated is very encouraging. This confirms our mission in this country and gives us hope that Jewish life in Germany has a future. This fills me with joy and assurance.

Anatoli Uschomirski is Pastor of the Jewish Messianic community “Schma Israel” in Stuttgart. His book “Hilfe, Jesus, ich bin Jude: Ein Leben zwischen den Welten” (Jesus, Help Me: I Am Jewish. A life Between Worlds) was recently published by HCM Hänssler Verlag.



The Christ Church in Jerusalem is a meeting place for Messianic Jews.

INFO

Messianic Jews and the Kirchentag

The question whether Jewish Messianic communities are allowed to take an active part in the Kirchentag (German Protestant Church Convention) has been a repeated source of controversy over the past few years. During the preparations for the 2015 Kirchentag in Stuttgart, the Presidium of the Kirchentag clarified its position in a detailed commentary on “why Christian groups with Jewish missionary intention and practice may not be granted active participation in Kirchentag”. (www.kirchentag.de/aktuell/nachrichten/nachrichten/archiv-stuttgart/messianische_juden_gespraech/messianische_juden_statement.html)

Messianic Jews are not invited to attend the official Christian-Jewish dialogue in Germany. However a new publication by German theologians committed to the Christian-Jewish dialogue is now proposing that there should be a meeting between the mainstream churches and Messianic Jews. (Ulrich Laepple (publ.): “Messianische Juden eine Provokation”. (Messianic Jews – A Provocation). Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, Göttingen 2016)

VICTORIOUS INAUGURATION OF THE FOOTBALL FIELD

Schneller pupils win against deans from Heilbronn

“Do you know, our football team won against you Germans? And next time Lebanon will be world Champion!” This was the proud expression on the faces of the boys and girls who kept coming up to me in the days after the inauguration game on the new football field at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in the middle of March. Yes, we Germans had lost against the JLSS team with a score of 1:3 to be precise.

Mr and Mrs Ruopp from Tuttlingen were present at the match. They had donated new computer equipment to the library and the wonderful new playing field to the JLSS in memory of their son who had died suddenly. At the same time, a group of female and male deans from the Heilbronn Prelature under the leadership of Prelate Harald Stumpf and Member of the Church Office Klaus Rieth had arrived with their spouses in Khirbet Kanafar. After meetings with

church and Muslim representatives in Beirut, their plan was to visit the JLSS. What could be better than to challenge each of the teams to a friendly Lebanon-Germany match on the new football field? Members of the local school administrative board also came from Beirut.

After presentations of oriental dances and music, Ilse and Ulrich Ruopp first unveiled a plaque in the library to commemorate the new computers. Then finally, it was time for the kick-off on the football field. The group of not so young female and male deans (although they had managed to stay young) had difficulties in putting a team together. This is why the EVS Executive Secretary also had to play. In addition the German team was strengthened by two theology students from the NEST in Beirut. One of them actually scored the face-saving goal.

But many of the deans, the Prelate and the Executive Secretary soon reached the limits of their sporty fitness against the well trained Schneller pupils. When an exhausted dean was finally replaced by a female dean, there was no holding on the Lebanese side back. Many of the self-confident Lebanese girls demanded to replace the boys on the field. Many of them later came up to me with great pride a few days later and said, “Do you know, we won against you!”

Uwe Gräbe



Photo: Altenmüller

In the end, everyone was a winner.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR ERWIN RITTE

Amman (EVS/TSS). Since the beginning of February, Erwin Ritte has been supporting the Director of the Theodor Schneller School (TSS), the Reverend Khaled Freij, to reorganise the school. We asked the former finance officer for the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck about his first experiences at the TSS.

What was your greatest surprise when you arrived at the TSS?

I was surprised how friendly I was received by all the employees at the TSS. Everyone knew I had come to assist the new Director to improve the organisational structure and work schedules, which also involve job cuts and salary reviews. Of course there is great fear and distrust towards me, not at least because very few of them can speak English and I have no knowledge of Arabic at all. Nonetheless their reception was very warm.



Photo: EMS/Gräbe

Erwin Ritte (right) with Klaus Schmid from the EVS Executive Board at the TSS in Amman

What is your greatest joy at the TSS?

The beaming faces of the children when I walk through the grounds! This week, I ate lunch with a group of younger girls - noodles with mincemeat sauce and salad. Each child was allowed to have second helpings and nearly all the children ate their plate clean. The atmosphere at table was very pleasant and relaxed. Next week, I will join a group of boys for lunch. I would like to do this regularly so that I can get to know the children and young people at the boarding school better.

I keep on seeing how the children treat each other with respect and kindness and how they behave towards their educators. The educators, many of whom have just started at the boarding school, provide the children with loving care but also consequent strictness.

Which problem do you want to definitely find a solution to before you return to Germany in summer?

There's a lot of progress on the photovoltaic project. Contracts have been made and purchase orders awarded. One company has already started measurements on site. I am confident that the system can start operation before I leave at the end of July. I am also optimistic about producing a new organisational chart, job descriptions, work schedules and responsibilities. Work in this sector will certainly not be completed by the summer. But we will definitely make great progress.

NEW COURSE FOR REFUGEE MOTHERS

Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS). At the beginning of February, a new training course for Syrian refugee mothers started at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon. Ten women, whose husbands were either dead, missing or in prison, are taking part in this three month course. They are learning how to sew and tailor with Lebanese designer Carmen Zino. Every morning, a bus fetches them and their children from the refugee camp in Marj and takes them to the JLSS.

Besides training, the women receive a small wage, heating oil to heat the tents where they live, medicine, milk and clean drinking water for their children. They also receive a subsidy to pay for the lease on the land where they are currently

living. During the time they spend at the JLSS, they and their children also receive a snack and a hot lunch. An additional teacher was also hired to teach the children while their mothers are learning how to sew.

One of the ten women had lost a leg and is dependent on help from the other women to move around. The school director, the Reverend Georg Haddad, has promised her that the school will do all it can to provide for the women during the course and also afterwards.

The programme is financed by the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) and by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

NEW FURNITURE, NEW LIGHTING



Photos: EMS/Gräbe

The Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace has donated 20,000 euros for renovation work to the rooms of the school and boarding home at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS). This money went towards repainting the living rooms in the boarding home. It also allowed the purchase of new beds, cupboards and beside tables for the children which all come from the woodworking shop at the TSS. Four classrooms were also renovated and the suspended ceilings and lights were also replaced.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO NEW MEMBERS!

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) supports and accompanies the work of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon and the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan. Its special task is to offer poor children school education and vocational training at the Schneller Schools. The EVS supplies information about churches and Christians in the Middle East in its publications and at its events.

The EVS publishes the Schneller Magazine four times a year and sends it to readers free of charge. Subscription to the magazine does not automatically bestow membership to the EVS Association. **Dear Reader, we would be delighted to welcome you as member of the EVS** and receive your support not only for the Schneller schools but also the work of the editorial team.

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.

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SCHNELLER AT THE KIRCHENTAG

Stuttgart/Berlin (EVS). The work of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon and the Theodor Schneller School in Amman will also be presented by the Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) at the 36th German Protestant Kirchentag from 24 to 28 May 2017. The Kirchentag this year takes place in Berlin and Wittenberg on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. You'll find us at the **Market of Possibilities in Berlin on Stand 2.1-115.**

Relax in our Café Salam with Oriental coffee and biscuits. We look forward to your visit and exciting conversations with you about the Schneller schools and about the Middle East in general.

FRAGMENTED LEBANON

Stuttgart (EVS/EMS). The Lebanese theologian Dr. Rima Nasrallah van Saane will talk about "Mission, Religion and Values in a Fragmented World" on **Monday, 5 June 2017.** The talk takes place during the feast of the world-wide church and mission of the Church of Wuerttemberg and forms the start of an international EMS symposium. The speaker is lecturer for Practical Theology at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut. She will discuss the question how churches in Lebanon fulfil their mission 500 years after the Reformation. Their environment today is marked by coexistence as well as rivalry between several cultures and religions.

The talk is open to the public and is in English. Depending on demand, "whisper interpreting" into German will be offered.

Event venue: Hospitalhof Stuttgart, Büchsenstraße 33, 70174 Stuttgart. No registration is required. The talk is free of charge



SAVE THE DATE!

Stuttgart (EVS). The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) is hosting this year's General Meeting at the Church of Nikodemus in **Stuttgart-Botnang** on **Sunday 22 October 2017.** During this event, Reverend Klaus Schmidt, Chairman of the EVS, will be awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany for his many years of commitment to Schneller work. We will announce more details of the overall programme in the next issue of the Schneller Magazine. All members will receive a separate invitation closer to the date.



EVS Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools

TWO ASSOCIATIONS, ONE CONCERN

Swiss and German Schneller associations exchange views

Following a long tradition, the two Schneller associations on both sides of Lake Constance meet regularly about every two years. At the end of January, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) invited the Swiss Association for the Schneller Schools (SVS) to a joint meeting in Stuttgart.

The exchange helps members of the executive committees to become better acquainted with each other and with current association work. It is also an important platform to exchange information about the situation at the two schools, the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon and the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Jordan. The two schools foster their own contacts with the Swiss and German executive committees. Both the Chairman of the EVS Uwe Gräbe and the SVS President Ursus Waldmeier visit the schools regularly.

The exchange between the two associations has become more intensive in the past few years since it often makes sense to speak with one voice to the schools on many issues. For example, important concerns can be discussed on site and the associations can provide the school directors with even more support for their work.

At a joint meeting in January, for example, the discussions appreciated that the JLSS, which is located not far from the border to Syria, has held up well despite the war and its consequences. For the past few years, the school has given support to refugee children and their mothers from



Joint evening meal of the two executive committees

a neighbouring camp alongside the normal teaching and boarding school.

The members of the two association executive committees are well aware of the difficult situation at the TSS. The new Director Khaled Freij is highly committed to addressing the enormous challenge of creating new structures after years without leadership. Erwin Ritte has been assisting him since February. The former finance officer of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck was assigned by the EVS to provide the Director with support.

Despite the serious discussions, there was still time for a convivial get-together after the meeting of the SVS and the EVS. Many an idea for co-operation has come out of informal talks during the evening, especially over an oriental meal, as was the case this time in Stuttgart.

*Reverend Dagmar Bujack,
SVS Chairperson*



EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools



Schweizer Verein für die
Schneller-Schulen SVS

TOGETHER IN MARIA'S FOOTSTEPS

Mary's Path – an interfaith initiative by Lebanese women

Mary's Path is a Christian-Muslim movement which has been committed to a culture of freedom in Lebanon for a good twenty years. Besides knowing about the other's background story, the initiative also gives space for encounters. This can be a conversation, a meal together or even praying together.

The bus in down-town Beirut starts to fill up. Many women and a couple of men are going on an interfaith excursion to Akkar. The region in the north of Lebanon has a poor infrastructure and few employment openings. We want to visit Muslim, Christian and mixed-religion villages and talk to the religious and community representatives there. We are accompanied by the Muslim feminist Hosn Abboud and the Maronite Therese Farra, who initiated Mary's Path together.

40 km behind Tripoli we turn off the coastal road and drive into the mountains to Bazbina, a Sunni and Greek Orthodox village. The garden full of blossoming flowers, fruit and olive trees, provides ample shade. The priest of Bazbina, the sheikh and other village representatives are expecting us. In their words they emphasise that the inhabitants there have always lived together peacefully and that they bring up their children to do the same. The headmistress of the school points out how important it is to know each other's traditions. The cultural officer relates that the villagers always bring in the harvest together. In Bazbina they are proud of their tradition of co-existence. At the beginning of the civil war, arms deal-

ers were simply sent away because the inhabitants did not want to fight against each other.

The group which formed around Hosn Abboud and Terese Farra at the end of the 1990s calls itself Mary's Path. It is a Christian-Muslim movement which aims at spreading a culture of peace among the Lebanese people. It is a movement of human encounter and spiritual unity, founded by Christian and Muslim Lebanese people who believe in the presence of Mary. The aim is to create an attitude of openness towards others and then undertake things together. The figure representing the name of the initiative, Mary, stands for the maternal energy that unites and does not separate.

Since 2002, the group has invited people to go on a type of pilgrimage inside Lebanon twice a year. The group makes visits to Christian and Muslim centres together and encounters are organised with sheikhs, priests, mayors and teachers etc. from the villages. There, they talk about critical issues. Afterwards, there is always a big meal accompanied by music and dancing.

We travel further north close to the Syrian border. In a dusty street village called El-Bireh where 12,000 Muslim inhabitants and 8,000 Syrian refugees live. The community has enormous problems with housing and water supply. Not far away is the larger rather well-to-do Christian village of Qobayat where the hospital and the NGOs responsible for El-Bireh are located. This explains why most of the aid funds go to Qobayat, and this alone leads



Photo: Martina Waiblinger

Hosn Abboud (left) from Mary's Path with sheikhs from El-Bireh and a priest from Qobayat

to tensions between the two villages. In the assembly room of the mosque we meet the mayors of the two communities, a priest from Qobayat and the sheikh from El-Bireh. The issue is treated very cautiously by all sides. The participants emphasise that they are working on a solution to the problems. "We teach a modern Islam at the school, against violence, a peaceful Islam. We do not want any Salafists who preach violence," says the Sheikh.

After a visit to a mosque dating from 1882, we drive to a restaurant where the people talk, sing and dance. On the way home we make a stop at a Carmelite monastery where a monk sings us a song of Mary and together we pray an interfaith prayer. A touching and surprising day comes to a close late at night.

Martina Waiblinger

INFO

There has been an official interfaith prayer in Lebanon since 2011. In 2010, Sheikh Mohammad Nekkari brought up the idea before the National Commission for Muslim-Christian Dialogue to celebrate a joint religious ceremony of Christians and Muslims in honour of the Virgin Mary. Since 2011, the 25th March, which is Annunciation Day, has become an official national holiday in Lebanon and is celebrated by joint events and an interfaith prayer.

A BIG STEP FOR A SMALL CHURCH

First ordination of a woman in the Middle East



Photo: NESSL

Rola Sleiman blesses the congregation for the first time as an ordained pastor.

At the end of February, the National Evangelical Synod in Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) ordained the first woman pastor in the Middle East. The second followed at the end of March. This topples a bastion of patriarchal church structure – at least on the Evangelical side.

Who would have thought that Tripoli would go down in modern church history? In the past few years, the second largest city in Lebanon was the scene of repeated bloody skirmishes between various Islamist militias and is regarded as a no-go area for tourists. And of all places it was the small Evangelical Church of Tripoli where Rola Sleiman

was ordained as the first woman pastor in the Middle East at the end of February.

This step was long overdue. For decades, it is not only the Protestants in Lebanon and Syria who have discussed whether women should be admitted to the office of pastor. This question has also arisen in Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, in fact all over the Middle East where women are studying theology. Here it is not only a matter of formal gender equality, it also affects employment opportunities. In general, highly qualified female theologians – and there are quite a few in the Middle East – are only deployed by their churches to do children and youth work.

Whether they will ever be the equals of

their male fellow students lies in the power of decision of each individual church. And in all the churches in the Middle East, even the Evangelical churches, it has always been men who have lead the way. It is by no means easy to find a majority among them to support the ordination of women. Every female theologian between the Euphrates and the Nile has heard the counter-arguments all too often. It is not written in the Bible. Or women have a totally different role to play in society than men. And Ecumenism is always a favourite card that is played. In particular many church leaders feel that a woman pastor would not be taken seriously by Orthodox or Catholic colleagues. Women and men who stand up for the ordination of women are always facing the reproach that they would divide their church.

A particularly bitter pill to swallow for many protagonists was that, of all things, the Arab Spring, which all of a sudden sparked off discussions about gender equality and democracy everywhere, served hardliners as a clear-cut counterargument: in troubled times, there were far more important problems to solve than the discussion about women in the office of pastor.

Finally, at the end of January, a majority decision was reached by the men with voting rights at the NESSL. Promptly five weeks later, the Church invited for the ordination of Rola Sleiman. From the start, it was obvious that she would be the first woman pastor in the Middle East. Since 2008, she had already been more or less playing the role of a pastor at the small Evangelical church in Tripoli. That was when the pastor had emigrated to the USA and the parish, where Rola Sleiman herself originates from, feared to remain without

a pastor. The resolute woman who studied Protestant theology in Beirut simply started, without asking too many questions, to organise parish life and to preach and became female minister to about 30 families in the parish.

Word soon reached the ears of the Church Office in Beirut that she was very much appreciated by her parish. She had been officially consecrated as preacher a few years previously, and this is almost equal to the rank of pastor. The only things she was not allowed to carry out were the two sacraments of baptism and communion. A male pastor was always sent to Tripoli to perform these services.

At the end of March, the NESSL ordained the second woman pastor. Najla Kassab, married to the present General Secretary of the NESSL, is currently responsible at the Church Office for the sector of Christian education. She has gained an international reputation as a distinguished theologian.

It remains to be seen the extent to which the decision at NESSL will affect other Evangelical churches in the Middle East. One thing is certain: it will have no effect on the Catholic, Orthodox or Oriental churches in the region. They are fundamentally opposed to women taking the office of pastor, in other parts of the world as well. But it gave the women's organisations in Lebanon all the more reason to celebrate the ordination of Rola Sleiman. She was applauded as "number one role model" at the International Women's Day at the beginning of March.

Katja Dorothea Buck

NO, GOD CANNOT BE AN OVEN!

In Cairo quotations from the Reformation are on show as Arabic calligraphy

There's no way to avoid the anniversary of the Reformation, even in Egypt. The German Evangelical Church in Cairo has thought of something special for this occasion. They had important statements by Luther, Melancthon, Calvin and Zwingli written in Arabic calligraphy. The outcome was not only an exhibition but also unexpected insights in the Christian-Islamic dialogue.

Whoever has attempted to translate a German saying into another language knows that the result can often be nonsense. Figures of speech and connotations are so different that it is impossible to translate them word for word. It is even more difficult when attention must also be paid to theological nuances. This is why it needed a team to translate the Luther, Melancthon, Calvin and Zwingli quotations into Arabic, thought Nadia el-Karsheh, Pastor at the German Evangelical Church in Cairo. She quickly found someone in the figure of Egyptian theologian Tharwat Kades who was pastor at the Evangelical Church in Hessen and Nassau for 40 years. Not only is he an expert in Protestant reformers, he can also claim Arabic as his mother tongue. Ahmed Darwish volunteered his services as calligrapher. Since his visit to the Wartburg three years ago, the artist and historian has been an ardent fan of Luther. He is especially fascinated by the reformer's concepts of liberty.

Despite this, Nadia el-Karsheh had doubts about simply asking the Muslim

Darwish. Calligraphy is not simply handwriting with a bit of colour added. Due to the ban on images in Islam, this art form has developed into one of the most important forms of artistic expression in Arabic culture for people to portray the revealed Word of God. But that is not all. "I wasn't sure whether we could really ask him to artistically process statements in which Christ plays a central role. In Islam Jesus is not the Son of God, only a prophet." However her doubts were unfounded, added el-Karsheh immediately. "On our first meeting, Darwish was excited by the idea and wanted to start straight away."

In autumn last year, el-Karsheh, Kades and Darwish met regularly to first translate the 500 year old quotations into Arabic. "The two men did most of the work," says el-Karsheh who learnt Arabic from her father, a Christian Palestinian, but she rates her knowledge of the language as too little for theological discussions. "It was marvellous to see the two Egyptians go into raptures about the quotations," she says. "Tharwat Kades was able to inspire Ahmed Darwish, who knows no German, for the linguistic beauty of the quotations." She only intervened when she had the impression that the translation failed to reproduce the actual statement. For example the Calvin quotation "If you want to learn something about the stars, look up at the sky and not in the Bible." Darwish was shocked by this saying. Islam specifically teaches that God revealed everything that humans can know in the Quran. In this case there can be no clear separation between faith and science. As

a result, Kades suggested adding a “not only” in Arabic – that people should “not only” look into the Bible but also up at the stars. But that went too far, in el-Karsheh’s opinion. “This would not have done justice to Calvin.” Of that she is certain.

On the other hand, other terms such as compassion, mercy or righteousness are no problem at all. They also exist in the same meaning in Islam. There was only one Luther quotation where the three of them failed to agree. “God is like a glowing oven full of love.” For Darwish, the reformer went too far with his hefty imagery here. To equate God with something material and with something as mundane as a baking oven was out of the question for the Muslim. “We simply left the quotation out,” says el-Karsheh.

The 17 Reformation quotations now hang as colourful calligraphies in the German Evangelical Church in Cairo in picture frames provided by the Goethe Institute. In fact it was the Goethe Institute that first gave her the idea to make a calligraphy exhibition to mark the anniversary of the Reformation, admits Nadia el-Karsheh openly. Some time ago, the Goethe Institute had put on an exhibition about the constitution and Ahmad Darwish had written the most important articles in calligraphy.

The exhibition is on show at the German Evangelical Church in Cairo until November. It will also be in Germany for a short time, from 15 to 22 August in Wittenberg where the Cairo parish will present it at the World Reformation Exhibition. Both Tharwat Kades and Ahmed Darwish will also be there.

Katja Dorothea Buck



Photo: Katja Buck

Reverend Nadia el-Karsheh admiring some of the calligraphies in the sanctuary of the German Evangelical Church in Cairo.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Response to Schneller Magazine 1/2017

I would like to take this opportunity to briefly express my gratitude to the exceptionally good and detailed news about the Schneller Schools. I have been involved for many decades with the EMS and gradually focused my attention on the Schneller Schools. At present, I have the impression that these schools are among the best and almost the only means by which we can still help at the moment. Unfortunately, I can only contribute very little since I have just turned 93 years old. But it was so nice to learn what can still be achieved in spite of all the hardship. I hope you can continue to attract many supporters for your work in a region which is in such upheaval, a region for which we all wish peace so much to lighten up the lives of these children.

Rose Rauther, Korntal-Münchingen

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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



“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” Genesis 8:22



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