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# SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



UTOPIA OR NIGHTMARE? FIVE YEARS OF ARABELLION  
WHAT IS LEFT OF THE DREAMS



EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools

<b>Contemplation: Encouragement and intercession</b>	<b>2</b>
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## **UTOPIA OR NIGHTMARE? FIVE YEARS OF ARABELLION**

<b>Between new images and old clichés</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Happy memories despite chaos and suffering</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Let the spring finally return</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Enabling a new start</b>	<b>10</b>

## **NEWS ABOUT WORK AT THE SCHNELLER SCHOOLS**

<b>Unexpected windfall</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Welcome visitors</b>	<b>14</b>
Benefactors and Executive Board members travel to Lebanon and Jordan	
<b>“A model for German schools”</b>	<b>16</b>
EVS Annual General Assembly with many celebrities	
<b>So that they may have a little hope</b>	<b>18</b>
Visits to the EVS and EMS projects for Syrian refugee aid	
<b>Solidarity beyond borders</b>	<b>23</b>

## **CHRISTIANS AND THE MIDDLE EAST**

<b>A question of courage and hope</b>	<b>24</b>
What Christians in the Middle East think about German refugee policy	
<b>Muslims demand protection for minorities</b>	<b>26</b>
Marrakech Declaration names atrocities in the Middle East	
<b>Religious freedom must be the foundation</b>	<b>27</b>
Skeptical words on the future of the Middle East	

<b>Letters to the editor/Imprint</b>	<b>29</b>
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**Dear Readers,**

It is five years ago that what is known as the Arab Spring started. What began with so much hope has meanwhile brought death to hundreds of thousands and millions are fleeing. The future of the Middle East is questioned more than ever before. In this issue we asked people from the regions for their personal opinion on the situation there. We wanted to know what hopes they had five years ago and what they still hope for today. Their answers are moving witnesses of strong faith.



In this issue you will find news about the refugee projects organised by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) in Syria and Lebanon. Even if these projects seem only like drops in the ocean in view of the immeasurable suffering of millions, they still give hope to many people, most of all to the children at the nursery school in the Valley of Christians and at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School or the refugee mothers attending the tailoring and hairdressing training courses. But the work fills all the other people involved with hope, be it on site in Syria, in Lebanon or here in Germany. All is not yet lost and it is worthwhile to continue despite all the desperation.

Having said that, this issue gives partners in the Middle East the chance to speak out about their criticism of German refugee policy. They have justified fears that their home country will be totally bled dry and there will be nobody to work at building a peaceful future in the Middle East. The Marrakech Declaration shows impressively that religious freedom is a key to peace in the Middle East. In the Declaration, Muslim scholars and intellectuals from all over the world stand up for the rights of religious and ethnic minorities living in the Arab region. And for this right we must campaign all over the world. This was the appeal made by Herta Däubler-Gmelin, keynote speaker at the EVS Annual General Assembly.

On behalf of the entire editorial team, we would like to thank you for your solidarity.

Yours,

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

Katja Dorothea Buck

## ENCOURAGEMENT AND INTERCESSION

*“When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He spoke and argued with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him. When the brother learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.” Acts. 9:26-31*

I would like to start with a true story about a young Muslim man who converted to Christianity. He had attended a Christian school, grew up in a Christian environment and finally ended up by adopting Christian values and principles. Some time after his conversion he met a Christian girlfriend whom he had known from kindergarten. They fell in love and decided to get engaged. At the beginning, they kept their relationship secret - especially from the girl's family. But one day, the family found out about their relationship. They were crazy and frustrated because they felt threatened and they were afraid because the couple was from different religions. The family tried to convince the young woman not to see the young man anymore. The young man wanted to explain to them he had known the young woman before he had converted to Christianity. He was willing to take the risk and

make his conversion public. But the family refused. The couple decided to separate from each other and wait for a while. But in the end, they realised that it was not possible. The young man finally got baptised and two years later, they were married in church. To this day, the woman's family has not accepted the marriage. His own family, on the other hand, has no problem with this.

To this day, the young man has never heard one word of encouragement. People look at his past or his family background and consider it as something negative or bad. I remember that all of us are called upon to never judge people. At the same time, we are all concerned about conversion but do we really look after those who have converted and observe the Gospel? Do we encourage them as churches or church leaders?

Here starts the explanation of the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles in which Barnabas helps Paul after his conversion when he meets people who do not trust him. The conversion of Saul, a persecutor of the early Christians, is one of the most significant events in the history of the early church. The pre-Christian Saul represents both a challenge and hope to any non-Christian. If God can turn the fiercest opponent of the Lord into his most willing servant, He has the ability to save anyone.

The Acts of the Apostles describe Barnabas as the great encourager. Barnabas met Paul shortly after his conversion on the road to Damascus. When Paul, the former persecutor of Christians, went to Jerusa-

lem, Barnabas stood up for him. Barnabas became Paul's spokesman when he was in dire need of someone. Peter and the other apostles were hesitant to meet Paul because of his previous history but Barnabas stood up and vouched for him.

This is the point where Barnabas shows present-day parish leaders what role they should play for upcoming generations. Many people need some small sign of approval. They need a word of recognition, a caring smile, a warm handshake and an honest expression of appreciation for the good we see in them or in their work.

As church leaders we are called to act as Barnabas did by encouraging those who may some day take on responsibility. We all need care and devotion so that we can grow in our faith. Encouragement helps disciples to become apostles and witnesses of the Gospel.



Photo: WikiCommons

Conversion of St. Paul, oil on wood, North Italian School, 16th century

*Liza Titizian is a student at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. This text is an abbreviated version of an article to be published this summer in "ORIENTierungen. Die Bibel im Kontext gelesen" (ORIENTations: Reading the Bible in Context) in the series "Recommended Sermons" by the LIT-Verlag publishing house and edited by Claudia Rammelt et al.*

*The book publishes replies by Middle East and German theologians on selected Bible passages.*

## BETWEEN NEW IMAGES AND OLD CLICHÉS

In January 2011, a young Egyptian woman published a message on YouTube pleading with her fellow citizens to take to the streets and claim what the Arab population needed most: dignity. I watched that video from Utrecht where I was living and studying at that time and I remember the tingle of both excitement and apprehension that I then felt. In this and numerous other social media messages a different and unprecedented face of the Arab world was revealed. For a brief moment in time, that YouTube message embodied the central meaning of the so called “Arab uprising”. Through it we saw an articulate young person, a critical and passionate ordinary citizen, an assertive woman who belonged to the new era of social media and the network society. This by itself clashed dramatically with the images we had been bombarded with for years of authoritarian old men repeating cliché slogans of times gone by.

New words were quickly included in the public discourse: democratisation, mobilisation, secularisation, change and hope. I remember following the news every hour from Tahrir Square in disbelief but also frightened that it would all end in drama. And drama did come!

Despite similar characteristics the Arab uprising movement that swept over North Africa and parts of the Middle East followed different trajectories and developments. The early enthusiasm broadcast in the media seemed to suggest that politics had changed forever in this region and that Arab society was at a turning point. But this was soon replaced by pessimistic

images. The peaceful marches of young people, male and female from all walks of life and all religious affiliations, quickly made way to militant men of uniform opinions who wanted to take or impose yet another authoritarian system by violence. The old systems were recycled together with their irrelevant leaders and speeches as if nothing had changed.

The most dramatic trajectory of the ‘uprising’ for me was the Syrian experience. Right from the start, very few people believed that the reactions we witnessed on Syrian streets could be trusted. They were of a different kind and order than the ones in Egypt. In alarm we watched as the world sent weapons to what was then called ‘the rebels’. And in disarray, I followed my Syrian colleagues and friends on Facebook as they posted daily horror images of their cities collapsing one after the other: Homs, Kessab, Aleppo and Qamishli. Churches were destroyed, citizens were displaced and the ordinary people’s basic trust in life was damaged. Instead of secularisation, religious fanaticism was the order of the day. Instead of assertive women addressing the crowds, women were being veiled, sold and raped. Instead of hope, there was despair.

The questions that I was hearing or reading when still in the Netherlands made me realise that Christians in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, were in desperate need of ways to make theological and spiritual sense of what had suddenly happened to them. As Lebanese nationals, the ugliness of human sin is a matter we have made peace with. We have





**Rima Nasrallah is a theologian at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut.**

were affected. A history of Christian presence and witness was being wiped out. We couldn't watch from a distance anymore. The situation is still unclear in this region and things change every day. We are now in Beirut witnessing the departure of thousands of Christians towards the West. With pain in our hearts we see the church shrink. But at the same time we derive a lot of hope from all those who courageously still live and serve in a region where things are so uncertain and justice is very far away.

*Dr. Rima Nasrallah is lecturer of Practical Theology at the Near East of Theology in Beirut.*

witnessed a long civil war during which atrocities of the greatest calibre were practised. The perpetrators were never brought to justice; on the contrary they are still an active part of our daily life. We have seen our sin and it does not shock us anymore. The Syrian Christians on the other hand were shocked, disoriented and discouraged.

In 2014, together with my husband, we were about to make a decision on what would be the next stage in our life and where. The situation in Syria was going from bad to worse. Refugees by the thousands were pouring into Lebanon and anyone who could leave the Middle East was doing so. All Christian communities

## HAPPY MEMORIES DESPITE CHAOS AND SUFFERING



Photo: Hind Khoury

"Memorable moments": Hind Khoury (in the black dress) at her daughter's wedding

I always shared with my people the simple dream of freedom, stability, normality and even deadly routine free from daily violence meted out by an army of occupation, or insecurity of losing loved ones and compatriots to premature death or incarceration; a routine free from uncertainty, of losing access to my home, to my land, or to a nearby village. I like to visit people and walk across an open field especially in spring when the landscape explodes with so many colours and perfumes; I love to read, watch films, attend concerts, enjoy the companionship of friends and family. We have known for a long time that our dreams are far-fetched since the might of power and greed have taken hold of our lives and placed our rights and our struggle in chains.

Suddenly, as what is referred to as the Arab Spring made breaking news, we stood mesmerised for days in front of our television screens. Suddenly we felt our dreams could be possible, reachable and doable. The peaceful revolutions, the huge crowds on the streets and the promise of democracy, freedom and social justice invaded our imagination and our spirits. It was unbelievable, it was exciting, it was so promising.

I have a strong affinity to all Arab people; we speak the same language, share the same culture, the same history and the pains and sorrows of colonisation and lost dreams. We so much wanted the promise of democracy to become reality in the Arab world. This would reverse religious extremism, we would be able to celebrate



our naturally pluralistic societies, and celebrate a region so rich in history and culture and yes, help obtain an independent and free Palestine. We felt renewed and invigorated as the joy of knowing that change was possible, the end of injustice was possible and a normal life and a promising future were possible.

After months of watching television and reading reports and reviews, we lived the pain of hopes turned into nightmares, starting with Libya, moving to our dear Syria, then to Yemen back to Egypt, Tunisia and more. How can it be that all our heightened hopes could turn so sour, so destructive and so painful? And, as hope was soon transformed into despair, our disappointment, our pain, and our sense of loss became immeasurable. Violence grew, death was rampant and refuge and homelessness became the norm. The only hope remaining is in our young ones as they charge ahead determined to struggle for freedom and a life of dignity.

In the summer of 2014, I had two weddings in my family, that of my daughter and the other of my son. With the successive attacks on the Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem by colonial settlers supported by the Israeli army, the burning alive of the 15 year old Muhamad Khdeir in East Jerusalem by violent settlers, and later as a third war on Gaza was launched, popular protests and army reprisals pervaded our streets and our towns. We had to be totally schizophrenic to pursue the wedding arrangements but I was adamant: they would be beautiful and happy occasions and enjoyable memories for a life time. I was keen to make my daughter's wedding most memorable especially after her difficult struggle with cancer a few years back.

I have to admit, I still cherish the joys and pleasures of these two weddings, so beautiful and so happy. Yes, life does go on and it is stronger than any oppressor or victim. Suffering is good if it does not destroy you. We know better now that human beings are not really fragile, we know that freedom can only be the fruit of personal and collective adamant struggle, we certainly need unity of purpose, the retention of our human values and a collective vision of inclusiveness, love and human dignity. We need leading thinkers and planners, we need international solidarity based on a respect for international law and human values brought about by the best in our religions. After all, what is most important is our shared humanity and respect for human life and dignity. What really matters is giving, not taking and it is a life rich in spirit, warmth and caring.

*Dr. Hind Khoury is General Secretary of Kairos Palestine.*

## LET THE SPRING FINALLY RETURN

What ever happened to the “Arab Spring”? They are dreams shattered on the rocks of an Arab reality that wars have turned it into empty houses where only terrorism and terrorists reside. It is a future stopped by missiles at the borders of a present that has become elusive to the families who were displaced together with their memories and concerns and tragedies while carrying a past full of beautiful pictures, most of which are torn to shreds.

Today and after the passage of five years, ever since the start of the first spark in Tunisia, followed by most of the Arab countries, from which I recall Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain, it became clear that the “Arab Spring” which our people considered is an autumn that is not over yet. It’s rather a winter whose storms have hit the children before the young people, and the women before the men.

Before the “spring” of 2011, our main concerns were focused on participation and recognition of the other. Today, the concern is over future and destiny. In the past, the concern was about citizenship and democratic values, and today it has become existence and entity. Our concern as Arab people was to change the principle of dictatorship and replace it by democracy in the practice of politics and government. By respecting the rights of the Arab citizen to live in dignity in his homeland and society. Before the “Arab Spring”, our sight was to reach for a better tomorrow, and today we remember yesterday with grief.



The picture has become sorrowful today and the context is painful. The scream of hungry children buzzes in the ears of some of the communities which embraced and hosted the displaced people who crossed the seas in a legal or illegal manner. Their only worry is to find a roof to shelter their children.

In brief, we waited long for this spring to come, hoping to pick its fruits and today we wait long for this spring to pass. What shall I tell about our East that smells of blood, and whose children die on the shores? What shall I tell about thousands of year old civilisations that have been destroyed by ignorance and terrorism? What shall I tell about empty villages and smashed monasteries and abducted citizens such as the two bishops whose fate is not known till this day? What shall I tell

**Father Michel Jalakh: “Despite everything I hope for a better tomorrow.”**



Photo: Buck

about changed dreams, as there is no longer a dream except to return to our homeland, home and a warm family, except to remain a solid family on the ground without loss of its members by death, drowning or separation?

Fear is greater today, especially fear of tomorrow. Many refugees displaced to the small country of Lebanon have changed its face. Some of them would prefer to return today and not tomorrow, some of them change to concentrate their lives here and some of them wait for a sign of relief to enter countries that can accommodate them, respect their dignity and provide a better future for them and their families.

We in the Middle East Council of Churches and through our direct interac-

tion with displaced families in Lebanon from Syria and Iraq, look on the bright side of things, to the laughter that does not separate the children when we care about them, or the faith of displaced families with whom we keep in touch. My faith in God has grown and I hope for a better tomorrow, as all families thank God that they are still alive and receive care, without forgetting what they suffered at the hands of the terrorists and takfirists (people who call them non-believers), and from the displacement, ill-treatment and death agonies. Today, the Council helps hundreds of families joyfully, whether they are in Syria or Lebanon, and even makes every small contribution to fill the vacuum caused by despair and grief.

After five years of “Arab Spring”, the region has not only changed, but the interests, concerns and dreams have also changed with it. Simply the dream today has become the return of spring to our East and the sun to shine on the mountains. So the light returns as the clouds of terrorism and murder disappear. The displaced return to their homes and villages. Life and prosperity return to our Arab homelands. The return of genuine laughter on the faces of children because the future is a laughing child!

*Father Michel Jalakh is General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches which has its seat in Beirut.*

## ENABLING A NEW START

I am a Lebanese-Armenian who has lived with dual identities and histories that have been examples of struggle and survival: the first one with its devastating conflicts and the second in its perseverance for recognition of the Armenian Genocide. The two have one thing in common: struggle to build a life in the midst of uncertainties, a life that goes much further than the personal dimension and embraces different aspects of the community at large.

Born into a Christian family, I was brought up within the loving care of my family and the Armenian Reformed Church. Undoubtedly, both shaped my career: to serve my community and the international community with the Word of God.

My journey in the struggle for hope started in 1975, the year the Civil War broke out in Lebanon. My struggle though is an ongoing struggle because of the Arab Spring, the threat posed by ISIS, and the persecution of Christians. And I ask myself: how can I survive in a region like this? Why do I have to be interrogated every time I travel? How can I have a meaningful life in the midst of paralysing fear, indescribable horrors and shocking suicide bombings? Where can I find peace? Often, peace seems like a mirage in the desert, the more you get closer to it, the further it goes away.

The concluding statement of the Global Forum on Genocide held in Armenia in April 2015 emphasised that the Genocide of 1915 was not only against Armenians but also against humanity, and called

upon all nations to act against crimes perpetrated on any ethnic or national group. As third generation Armenian, I still carry the pain of the Genocide and so does every Armenian. We carry the pain of our ancestors who were massacred and also the pain of being deprived of living in our homeland. Equally, as a Lebanese, I carry the pain of living as a Christian in a war zone where I was born and which in turn has become a second home for me.

These pains though enriched my life and led me to discover a unique hope. This hope has helped me to change the nature of my queries and realise that it is possible to live, prosper and dream in the midst of unending despair, death and destruction. According to Walter Brueggemann (Ed.'s note: an American Old Testament scholar), hope and newness in one's life are given by God. He explains his assertion by linking Exodus to Jesus' death on the cross. For him, Jesus' death and resurrection were the ultimate Exodus where we learn that hope is never generated among us but always given to us. And this is how I would describe my journey.

I have been working with Bible Societies in the Middle East for more than 35 years and serving my Church for more than 40 years. My responsibilities in both, decades of active involvement in ecumenical relations and academic training have significantly promoted my personal, professional and spiritual growth with a tremendous openness to the Other. My mission journey in this respect has been very enriching. By encouraging communities to be engaged with the Bible, I have per-



Photo: Les Kane

**Hrayr Jebejian: “Discovering a unique hope through suffering.”**

sonally witnessed the lives of many change by discovering this hope for their hurting lives.

What can the Church do in a region where there is no hope of a better life? The challenge of the Church is to first understand the Other and to experience the dynamism of the life of the Other. The

Church needs to continue to establish itself in the community so that it can create a profound impact. I agree with Brueggemann who argues that to create impact we have to create an alternative community with an alternative consciousness, so that the dominant community may be criticised and finally dismantled. But more than dismantling the old community, he asserts, the purpose of the alternative community is to enable a new human beginning to be made.

Today, the mission of the Church in the Middle East is to help the community to make this new beginning come true – a new beginning whose foundation is based on tolerance, acceptance and justice.

*Dr. Hrayr Jebejian is General Secretary of the Bible Society in the Arabian Gulf.*



# WE WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

The “Evangelischer Verein für die Schneller-Schulen e.V.” (Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools, EVS) supports and accompanies the work of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon and the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan. Its special task is to offer needy children a school education and vocational training at the Schneller schools. In its publications and at events, the EVS provides information about churches and Christians in the Middle East.

The Schneller Magazine is published four times a year. The EVS provides it free of charge to all readers. Buying the magazine does not automatically mean you are a member of the EVS. **We would be delighted if you decide to become a member of the EVS.** In this way you not only support 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.

A photograph of two young boys, one slightly behind the other, both smiling. They are wearing green and yellow school uniforms. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

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**EVS Evangelical Association  
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## UNEXPECTED WINDFALL

### Additional transfers of money to the Schneller schools

This year, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) was able to transfer an addition of more than 240,000 Euro to the two schools in Lebanon and Jordan. Provisions and the Church Conference donation permitted this unexpected windfall.

**D**ue to unexpectedly high donations, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon will receive an additional sum of more than 100,000 Euro. Of this money, 67,000 Euro will compensate for exchange rate fluctuations. The drop in the Euro rate on the world market has serious repercussions for the school since money transfers from Germany are made in Euro but the school settles accounts in Lebanese pounds.

In addition, the JLSS receives just under 35,000 Euro in volunteer donations in order to support low-paid kindergarten teachers and workshop trainers. Reverend George Haddad, director of the JLSS, had requested help in this matter. Especially in the first years in the profession, salaried teachers often earn less than 500 US dollars a month. The risk is great that they can be enticed away by employers who pay better salaries, says Haddad. The JLSS will use the extra money to provide financial incentives for them to stay and the director hopes to reduce the number of young, often highly motivated teachers who hand in their notice.

The collections at the opening worship service of the German Protestant



The sustainability programme of the TSS envisages a solar system among other things.

Kirchentag in Stuttgart mean an extra windfall for the two Schneller schools in Lebanon and Jordan. Of the over 135,000 Euro, the JLSS will receive a good 33,000 Euro to create more places for Syrian refugee children. During the present school year, 24 children from Syria are living at the school.

The Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman receives more than 100,000 Euro for their sustainability programme. The major part of the money will go to the purchase and installation of a solar system. This will significantly lower energy costs at the TSS. However, the funds will not quite cover the entire purchasing cost for this system which is between 250,000 and 300,000 Euro. For this reason the EVS links payment of the earmarked funds to conditions that firstly a financial budget be submitted, and secondly that the post of director which has been vacant for more than 2 years must be filled.

*Uwe Gräbe, EVS Managing Director*

## WELCOME VISITORS

### Benefactors and Executive Board members travel to Lebanon and Jordan

Whoever travels to Lebanon, Jordan, Jerusalem or Bethlehem nowadays rarely leaves without a queasy feeling. News from the Middle East often conveys the impression that nothing is safe there any more. Despite all this, we took the plane there. We were a group of 21 committed people who sit on the Executive Board of the German and Swiss Schneller Association or who work for the schools in Lebanon and in Amman through their contributions to the Schneller Foundation – and we were welcomed with open arms.

The joy of our coming was great. Together with Dr Habib Badr we celebrated worship service at the National Evangelical Church of Beirut (sponsor of the Johann Ludwig Schneller school) on Eternity Sunday and we even travelled to the impressive ancient sites of Byblos and Baalbek. We encountered the uninterrupted work of school at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Khirbet Kanafar, only 25 kilometres from the Syrian border. School director Dr George Haddad reported that the Syrian refugee children who the school had taken in had meanwhile settled in well, as far as that was possible in the present situation and in view of their traumatic experiences.

We spoke with the Syrian refugee mothers who are fetched from the camp together with their small children and are trained in a hairdressing salon – as well as those who are taking a course in tailoring. Their fates touched us just as deeply as their gratitude for their being accepted to the school.



Then we took a plane to Amman via a detour over the Gulf of Aqaba. Seeing the children and young people at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) living and being cared for in a protected space – even if it is in dire need of renovation in many places – strengthened our conviction that our support is meaningful and necessary. Handicapped children taking part in sports games, the co-operation between the Muslim religion teacher and the Christian religion teacher, and finally the presence of girls in the kindergarten and at school (in the meantime a perfectly normal sight) are positive examples that demonstrate how fruitful the intensive co-operation between Khalida Messarweh, the headmistress, and Bishara Tannous, the head of the residential home, has been. We then continued to Jerusalem, passing over Allenby Bridge – with all the petty Israeli checkpoints. There we were

received by Archbishop Suheil Dawani from the Episcopal Church which sponsors the TSS. There we presented our con-



Photo: Gräbe/EMS

The travel group in front of the Schneller altar in the Church of the Ascension of the Empress Auguste Victoria Foundation on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

cern to convert the post of temporary school director held by Rev. Khaled Freij, who has done such marvellous work, into a full-time post which the school urgently requires.

In Jerusalem we experienced the Sabbath with Jews of both genders singing and dancing at the Wailing Wall. Despite the tension that we felt in the air, we were able to move around undisturbed and celebrated a wonderful worship service on the first Sunday of Advent in the Lutheran Protestant Church of Our Saviour.

On the previous Saturday, we spent the day in Beit Jala at the Talitha Kumi school and then in Bethlehem. Rev. Jens Nieper

from the Berlin Missionary Society and school director Rolf Lindemann showed us the beautifully green school grounds from which we were able to see how sharply the separation wall around the Palestinian territories cut through the landscape. Almost a thousand children attend the kindergarten, school and hotel management school here; almost 60 per cent are Christian and 40 per cent are Muslim pupils – and they can even take the German Abitur (high school leaving examination). Finding work in the constricted Palestinian territories with the high rate of unemployment only becomes possible once they have completed a qualified course of training.

Our group of excellent singers, which had merged into a lively community, sang “Dona nobis pacem” and “Herr, gib uns deinen Frieden” (Lord, give us your peace) in several voices in the churches we visited. This spread the encouragement of Advent as a sign of liberation from all the cares and fears which do not go away easily but which in our Christian faith still stand under the sign of hope across all different walks of life. Deeply impressed by the spirit of the work at the three so different schools, we returned to Germany and Switzerland.

*Prof. Dr. Johannes Lähnemann is member of the Managing Committee of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS). The trip was accompanied by Dr. Uwe Gräbe, Managing Director of the EVS.*

*The trip was organised by KulTours in Ludwigsburg.  
[www.kultour-service.de](http://www.kultour-service.de)*

## “A MODEL FOR GERMAN SCHOOLS”

### EVS Annual General Assembly with many celebrities

**The 2015 Annual General Assembly of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) was remarkable for many reasons. Firstly the EVS selected a historical venue in Ulm. Secondly many celebrities were invited.**

The Münster (cathedral) in Ulm has several records to offer. It has the tallest spire in the world, it is the largest Protestant church and its 11 second echo after every tone can surpass the acoustics of any other church interior. On 8 November 2015, members of the EVS were guests of the cathedral parish and were heartily welcomed. With the keyword of hope, Prelate Gabriele Wulz could not have chosen a more befitting theme for her sermon. With memorable flair, she covered the spectrum from hope for invisible and immaterial qualities as expressed in the Epistle to the Romans through to the Schneller schools in the Middle East, which more than ever provide a shimmer of hope in a desperate region filled with violence and war.

After the service, the EVS met in the Haus der Begegnung (House of Encounters) where Managing Director Uwe Gräbe reported on the current situation at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon and the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Jordan. Although both schools are still located in peaceful regions where there is no fighting, the partners are still under enormous pressure. “War and chaos have become the background noise of everyday life in the Middle East,” said Gräbe.

It was a special honour for the EVS that Andreas Schoch, Baden-Württemberg Minister for Culture and Education, delivered the welcoming address by praising the model of the Schneller schools. “The concept of respectful interaction between religions is also a concept which could be useful to our schools in Baden-Württemberg, where young people of different faiths come together,” said Schoch. As the secular world changes, education should be based on values that transcend religious boundaries. “The Schneller schools can stand in as mentor for our present educational policy,” said Schoch.

During the Association’s Annual General Meeting that followed, EVS President Klaus Schmid reported on the highlights of the previous year, including the German Protestant Church Congress which took place in Stuttgart. The EVS stand on the Opportunity Bazaar not only attracted many visitors, the Church Congress Committee also decided that the collection from the opening worship service should be donated to the Schneller schools (see page 13).

EVS Treasurer Reinhold Schaal delved into the details of the Association’s finances which received donations of roughly 486,000 Euro in 2014. “It is pleasing to note that donations are continuing to rise,” said Schaal. However, it remains a matter of great importance that Schneller supporters continue to advertise the work of the schools in their parishes. “We need the backing of the parishes,” said Schaal. The Annual General Assembly of the Association ended by approving the Executive Board unanimously.





Photo: Buck/EMIS

From left to right: EVS Managing Director Uwe Gräbe, Prelate Gabriele Wulz, Education Minister Andreas Schoch and EVS President Klaus Schmid.

The EVS succeeded in winning Herta Däubler-Gmelin as keynote speaker. The former German Minister of Justice, who is member of the Board of Trustees of the Schneller Foundation, spoke about “Religion and human rights in the upheavals in the Arab World”. With the “Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam” in 1990 the Arab World created a type of counter-programme to the UN Declaration of Human Rights, but the problem is, as Däubler-Gmelin continued, that it places all basic rights and human rights under the principles of Sharia law. “The crucial points lie mainly in the area of religious freedom.” For example, a Muslim in Saudi Arabia would live in fear of state reprisals if he wanted to leave his religious community.

On the other hand, Turkey had managed to separate state and religion in its constitution. However, the current trend there was clearly turning against laicism. Again, in Iraq, the protection of minorities

had worked much better under Saddam Hussein than today. The same applies to Egypt where there have been serious violations against human rights since Abdel-fattah al-Sisi has taken office. The Christian minority is doing better than it had done in a long time. “It is sad to realise that religious minorities enjoy more protection in the Arab world under authoritarian regimes,” said Däubler-Gmelin. She concluded with an appeal that human rights were not the sole entitlement of Germans or Europeans. “We should fight for human rights all over the world.”

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

*This year, the EVS Annual General Assembly will convene in Stuttgart-Vaihingen on 13 November 2016.*

## SO THAT THEY MAY HAVE A LITTLE HOPE

Visits to the EVS and EMS projects for Syrian refugee aid



Photo: Gräbe/EMS

EVS President Klaus Schmid (right) during the visit to the refugee camp in Marj.

Syria has been ravaged by war for almost five years but it has ceased to be a “civil war” a long time ago. The people in the small country have become the political football of countless, conflicting international interests. The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) support various refugee aid projects in Syria and Lebanon. A site visit.

**T**he refugee camp of Marj in the Bekaa valley in Lebanon is home to the majority of refugee children and mothers who either attend school or the tailoring and hairdressing courses at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS).

The camp actually consists of several smaller camps in which several dozen families live. The refugees must pay the Lebanese land owners a monthly rent of 100 US dollars per tent. Apparently water supply is a problem. Larger tents have a service water tank which is used for showering, washing etc. In addition each camp has only a single drinking water tank which stands in the open. If the temperature drops below zero, which often happens in the Bekaa valley, the drinking water freezes up.

Most of the tents are made of tarpaulins bearing the UNHCR logo. However the UN refugee organisation is not active at all in Marj. It was very easy to buy the tarpaulins on the market, we were told. Some

non-governmental organisations (NGOs), among them from Kuwait for example, were looking after waste disposal or the toilet cubicles. An NGO has even built a school container in one of the larger camps. Meanwhile, the tents now have a concrete floor and an oil stove each.

We were also shown the tents which have been re-erected using donations received by the EVS and the EMS after a major fire a few months ago (see Schneller Magazine 3/2015, page 18/19). The tents are of sturdy design. Some blackened trees are still witnesses of the fire.

### Training course for refugee women

In November 2015, the autumn course for single Syrian refugee mothers started at the JLSS. The husbands of these women had either died during the war or were imprisoned by one of the warring parties. Every day, the women come with their toddlers to the JLSS where they are attending a three-month course to become hairdressers or seamstresses. Since more and more women are coming with toddlers, a nursery school teacher has been hired to look after these children who are much younger than the children in the regular school kindergarten. Before, the mothers had taken turns looking after the children. None of the women has health insurance. This is why we are increasingly receiving more and more inquiries: Can we finance a woman who has to have a breast operation? Or the urgent operation on the back of a young child?

More and more frequently we hear of the women who have graduated from the training courses, of which there have been three so far. Meanwhile, they manage to earn a small income which is enough to feed their children. One woman runs a

small tailor's shop in the refugee camp and refugees come to her to alter clothing donated to them. Recently, some of the women have found work in a textile factory, and others are working as self-employed hairdressers in the camp. One woman told us quite proudly that she had even been able to buy a refrigerator with the money she had earned.

### Refugee children at the JLSS

Almost 40 Syrian refugee children now attend the JLSS day school and/or live at the residential home. The educational psychologist Rosine Hajjar has now received support from Nidal Sawaya who has taken over responsibility for the refugee children at the residential home. They suffer from war-related traumas and their descent into poverty, on top of which come problems inside the families which are often linked to the refugee situation. The Syrian children continue to have enormous problems integrating into the foreign language classes at the JLSS. There is an enormous difference between the Syrian and Lebanese school systems.

### The pre-school in the Valley of Christians

The village of Kafroun is located on the edge of the Wadi Nasara (Valley of Christians) which lies between the towns of Homs and Tartus. The nursery, kindergarten and pre-school set up here are offered to internal refugee children aged from two to seven years. Meanwhile 55 children have been registered there. They were selected only based on their level of need. There are fifty per cent boys and girls, Christians and Muslims; and the Muslims are half Alawites and Sunnis.

In one class I met a boy who managed to flee just six months ago together with

his mother from Raqqa, the “capital” of the so-called “Islamic State”. Another child clasps his hands over his ears whenever there is a loud noise. And a third child (from Aleppo) was forced together with his mother to witness the beheading of his father. This child has only recently started to speak again after not one tone had passed his lips for six months.



Photo: Gräbe/EMS

**An age-old Schneller tradition: Even in the nursery school, all the children – whether they are Muslims or Christians – say a prayer together before a meal.**

All those involved in the project work so hard despite their low salaries to give these children the support and stability they really need. School meals – healthy and balanced with plenty of fruit and vegetables – are important since the families of these children have lost almost everything in the war. Most mothers would be unable to cook regular meals anymore without help.

At every meal, the children – both Christians and Muslims – say a prayer together before eating. Reverend Maan Bitar, the project leader, translated for us: “God, we thank you for everything you have given us. We thank you for this meal, for our clothing and for all good things. Please give these things also to those who lack them. Amen.” For a moment, we were almost able to forget we were in a country that was in the middle of a terrible war.

We thank all those who made this work possible through their donations or their prayers. Originally we started these projects with a time span of three years up to

the end of 2016 – in the hope that the war would have ended by then. In the meantime, it seems that Syria will remain a destroyed country for a long time to come, even if the war were to end soon (which we pray for!). We can and may not simply terminate this type of project - neither can we expect that these projects will be able to finance themselves in the foreseeable future. In June 2016, the EMS and EVS bodies will therefore discuss and decide on a possible extension. Could we already appeal to you to remain faithful by showing us your support and giving the refugees your prayers?

*Uwe Gräbe*

# SiMO

## REFORMATION – UND DIE EINE WELT 500 JAHRE REFORMATION IN DEUTSCHLAND UND DEM LIBANON

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der Near East School of Theology (NEST), Beirut,  
mit dem "Studium im Mittleren Osten" (SiMO)

23.-28. JUNI 2016 – BEIRUT, LIBANON



**SiMO – Studium im Mittleren Osten**

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Austausch mit der Near East School of Theology in Beirut



# OPEN INVITATION

The Swiss Association for the Schneller Schools (SVS) sends out an invitation to the next SVS Annual General Meeting, especially to readers of the Schneller Magazine in Switzerland.

It will take place on

**SATURDAY, 2 APRIL AT 14.00**

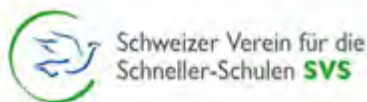
**in the Bullingerhaus in Jurastrasse 13 in Aarau, Switzerland.**

Fortunately, co-operation between the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) and the SVS has become even more intensive in the past few years. Three SVS Executive Board members and three other Swiss persons took part in the trip organised for benefactors and Executive Board members in November (see page 16/17). Among them was the man who volunteers his services for the very appealing website of the SVS, [www.schnellerschulen.org](http://www.schnellerschulen.org). At the Annual General Meeting, the members presented their reports about their journey to the two schools. The SVS is also delighted whenever Schneller supporters from Germany manage to come to Aarau.

The President of the SVS, Reverend Ursus Waldmeier, said the following about the Association's finances: "Fortunately our donation revenue is comparable to previous years and we have no declines to complain

about. We sincerely thank all those who support this work with donations. The members of the Executive Board make sure that the money goes directly to support the children in the schools – either by paying teachers' salaries or by paying school fees on behalf of their parents."

The SVS again received the "Ehrenkodex" (seal of quality) from the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches this year. "It shows that the work of the SVS is highly rated and is regarded as trustworthy by external sources," writes Waldmeier.



## SOLIDARITY BEYOND BORDERS

### Waldensian Church extends support for EMS projects

Starting in 2016, the Waldensian Church with its seat in Italy is supporting diaconal, educational and development projects of EMS member churches with an annual sum of 300,000 Euro - almost 50 percent more than in years before. This also includes the work of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut with migrants and refugees.

A co-operation agreement, which is provisionally effective until 2018, seals the relationship between the church with a rich tradition and the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). It replaces the first agreement which foresaw

an annual sum of 200,000 Euro for EMS project support in the years from 2013 to 2015.. The funds originate from "Otto per Mille" (OPM), an Italian social tax which the Waldensian Church receives. With this money, the church finances projects in Evangelical churches together with partners in Germany and Switzerland. In Italy, taxpayers themselves are allowed to choose the institution or organisation which they want to receive 0.8 percent of their income tax. The EMS is the first German missionary society with which the Waldensian Synod entered into co-operation in 2013.

"We are delighted about the trust the Waldensian Church has placed in our work," says Christine Grötzingler, Head of Project Support at the EMS. "The funds which we now receive on a regular basis allow us to support initiatives for which we have no other sources of finance, for example setting up the Philemon Daycare Centre organised by the National Evangelical Church of Beirut (NECB) for migrant and refugee children."

Dr. Kerstin Neumann, Head of Mission and Partnership, regards the co-operation with the Waldensian Church as a sign of ecumenical solidarity in Europe with the churches of the EMS Fellowship in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. "We share the same vision of world-wide Ecumenism and church solidarity beyond borders," she said. "This is what makes our co-operation so fruitful."

*Regina Karasch-Böttcher*



Work migrants have a very difficult standing in Lebanon. The National Evangelical Church in Beirut supports them and their children in a number of different projects.

## A QUESTION OF COURAGE AND HOPE

### What Christians in the Middle East think about German migrant policy

**The fact that Europe has opened its borders to migrants is met with criticism by Christians in the Middle East. They fear that the region will be bled dry and it will mark the end of Christianity in many places. On the other hand, the following applies to the West: whoever wants to tackle the causes of migration should band together with those who have not given up hope and still hold out despite the bombs and the terror.**

The upheavals in the Middle East are an existential threat to us Christians," says Paul Haidostian, President of the Armenian Evangelical Haigazian University in Beirut. "The mass exodus of Christians from Iraq and Syria is irreversible." Some leave their homeland because they see no future any more for themselves or their children; others are forced to leave by terror groups or by bombs. "The ones who stay behind are those who cannot go for health or financial reasons or who have decided consciously against leaving because they have not given up hope." It is exactly these people who are especially important now. "Those who stay increasingly have the feeling that they are on the losing side," says Haidostian. "When they hear how their friends are getting on in the West and compare that to the conditions under which they are living here, then it is difficult for them to hold out for any much longer."

Rima Nasrallah, lecturer at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, also feels bitter about the topic of refugees. She

blames European politics. The West has never considered a new concept for the region. "And now they are simply opening their borders. They really make it so easy for themselves," says the theologian. "Now they have completely given up on the Middle East and they are leaving everything here to the poor, the sick and the warmongers." Anyone who is young and qualified doesn't take long to decide whether to stay or not. She constantly experiences students who just get up and pack their bags because they are promised a visa for Canada, for example, or because their family has decided to leave. "Of course I understand them. But they are all lost to our work here. And for those of us who remain behind, it is becoming harder and harder. Who should we build a future with?"

This question also worries Najla Kassab. She is responsible for youth work and Christian education at the National Evangelical Synod for Syria and Lebanon. "It really hurts us to lose all of our young people because they see no more hope here and have left to build a new future in your country." She asks herself whether it wouldn't be possible to work together with the Western churches "so that these young people do not completely relinquish the hope of possibly returning some day and that they continue to feel connected to their home church. We do not want to see the day when there are no more Christians left in Syria. On the other hand, we need these young people when the war finally comes to an end in order to build up the country again," she says.

One thing Christians in the Middle East find particularly painful is the fact that little attention is paid in the West to what they say. “For us, the West has lost its credibility,” says Michel Jalakh, General Secretary of the Middle East Church Council. “Since the beginning of the Arab Spring we have been trying to explain to you what is at stake for us Christians. But you never wanted to listen to us.”

This statement must be understood against the background that Western church representatives in particular have repeatedly accused the churches in Syria since the start of the civil war of coming to an arrangement too much with the Assad regime. Of course there are still Syrian church leaders who have no scruples of being seen at the side of the Syrian President, who is well known to be waging a merciless war against his own population. But in many cases, the Christians in vil-

lages and towns in Syria often had and still have no other choice. And by now it should also be common knowledge in the West that for the other warring parties such as the Nusra Front or the Islamic State, protection of minorities is not a word they understand.

Perhaps the primary question in Western churches should be less about the side on which Christians in Syria are standing and more on how they should survive these difficult times together with other oppressed people. Here it is a matter of looking after those who stay behind and performing services for the people locally.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*



Photo: Metropolitico

Migrants at the German-Austrian border crossing of Wegscheid in November 2015

# MUSLIMS DEMAND PROTECTION FOR MINORITIES

## Marrakech Declaration names atrocities in the Middle East

**Freedom of religion for all is what 250 Sunni and Shi'ite theologians, judges, politicians and intellectuals from 120 countries demanded in the Marrakech Declaration which was published at the end of January in Morocco.**

In the preamble, the signatories already make it plain that they want to fight against animosity towards religious minorities in their countries. The conference was necessary "in view of the situation of minorities who are suffering from subjugation, uprooting and other acts of cruelty and on whom massacres have been perpetrated."

The Marrakech Declaration addresses a number of different parties. Muslim scholars are called upon to develop a jurisprudence of the concept of "citizenship" which is rooted in Islamic tradition and includes all religious and ethnic groups. The task of politicians and decision makers will be to take the political and legal steps required to put these principles into practice. Teachers and professors should "conduct a courageous review of educational curricula and schoolbooks in Muslim countries and delete all passages which instigate aggression and extremism against non-Muslims leading to war and chaos." All educated and artistic members of society and the entire civil society are called upon to cooperate to raise awareness for the rights of religious minorities living in Muslim countries.

The text also calls upon the various religious and ethnic groups who live in countries with Muslim majorities. They should

address their collective trauma often based on selective amnesia, and remember the centuries of joint and shared living on the same land. The Declaration ends with the statement that religion should not be employed for the purpose of aggressing upon the rights of religious minorities in Muslim countries.

The Moroccan Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs sent out invitations to attend the three-day conference. It was organised by the Forum for Peace in Muslim Society, a non-governmental organisation with its seat in the United Arab Emirates. Among the persons attending were also non-Muslims such as Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako from Baghdad who deplored the persecution and discrimination of Christians in Iraq. However, Sako also blamed the West, giving it co-responsibility for the catastrophic situation of Christians in the Middle East.

The Declaration is based on purpose on the Charter of Medina, a Muslim authoritative text from the seventh century. In it, the Prophet Mohammed defines relationships with the Jewish tribes living in the regions conquered by the Muslims. The signatories of the Marrakech Declaration regard the charter as a guarantee for the rights of religious minorities living in Muslim countries. The Charter already defined the principle of nationality, it says in the Declaration.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*



# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM MUST BE THE FOUNDATION

## Skeptical words on the future of the Middle East

**In the middle of February, the Hanns Seidel Foundation organised a panel discussion during the Munich Security Conference on the situation of Christian and Yezidi refugees in countries bordering on Syria. What distinctly emerged from the discussion was that a pluralistic society is the prerequisite for peace. But is this realistic?**

The Yezidi Iraqi member of parliament Vian Dakhil described in moving terms the fate of Yezidi refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan, those who had escaped the “Islamic State”. The Greek Orthodox Bishop of Wadi Narara (Valley of Christians) in Syria, Elias Toumeh, also gave a similar report about refugees in his region. Both speakers found an understanding listener in Gerd Müller, Federal Minister for Economic Co-operation and Development. A few weeks previously, Müller had spoken to refugees in the Kurdish towns of Dohuk and Erbil. It is not a surprising success that the world community declared its commitment at the Syrian Donor Conference in London to providing ten billion dollars for refugees over a period of three years. “The television transmission rights for the Premier League in British football cost about the same,” said Müller.

The key question of the evening was asked by Heiner Bielefeldt, UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief: “In view of the traumatic experiences made by refugees, how will coexistence ever be possible for people of different ethnic and religious affiliations in the Middle East?” He pleaded vehemently for

support for the forces in the Middle East which are capable of building pluralistic religious societies based on freedom of religion. This is because “without freedom of religion, any reconstruction in the Middle East will not succeed.”

The Yezidi member of parliament and the Greek Orthodox Bishop were rather skeptical. Too much trust had been destroyed among Christian and Yezidi refugees. They had experienced how most of their Muslim neighbours had sided with the plunderers when the “Islamic State” terrorists had marched in. Many people can no longer imagine how a pluralistic society could work.

“Perhaps the destinies of these people do not move us enough,” said the Archbishop of Bamberg, Ludwig Schick, who chairs the Commission for International Church Affairs in the German Episcopal Conference. He made a passionate appeal to truly become aware of the faces of the people behind stories like these and to really practice solidarity – for example by rebuilding schools. In view of destroyed confidence, Schick reminded the conference of the potential of religions: “Religious faith always exceeds what is humanly possible.” Schick’s statement was also an urgent appeal for prayer.

*Uwe Gräbe was invited to the event by the Hanns Seidel Foundation as Liaison Secretary of the EMS and Managing Director of the EVS.*

# SECURING THE FUTURE

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

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

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

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

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

Your contacts for questions relating to the Foundation:

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**EVS Evangelical Association**  
for the Schneller Schools

**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 3/2015**

Thank you very much for your article "Whispered behind raised hands". I scanned and shared it. I find the magazine so full of information – an important publication. Keep up the good work!

*Winfried Belz, Wilhelmsfeld*

**In remembrance**

Last year, the following members of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) died:

**Günther Bernhardt, Greifenstein  
Therese Henrici, Limbach  
Doris Kilpper, Schorndorf**

The EVS commemorates its deceased members and is grateful for their, in many cases, decades of commitment to Schneller work.

**131st Year  
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# SCHNELLER

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

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



'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Mt. 5: 8



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