

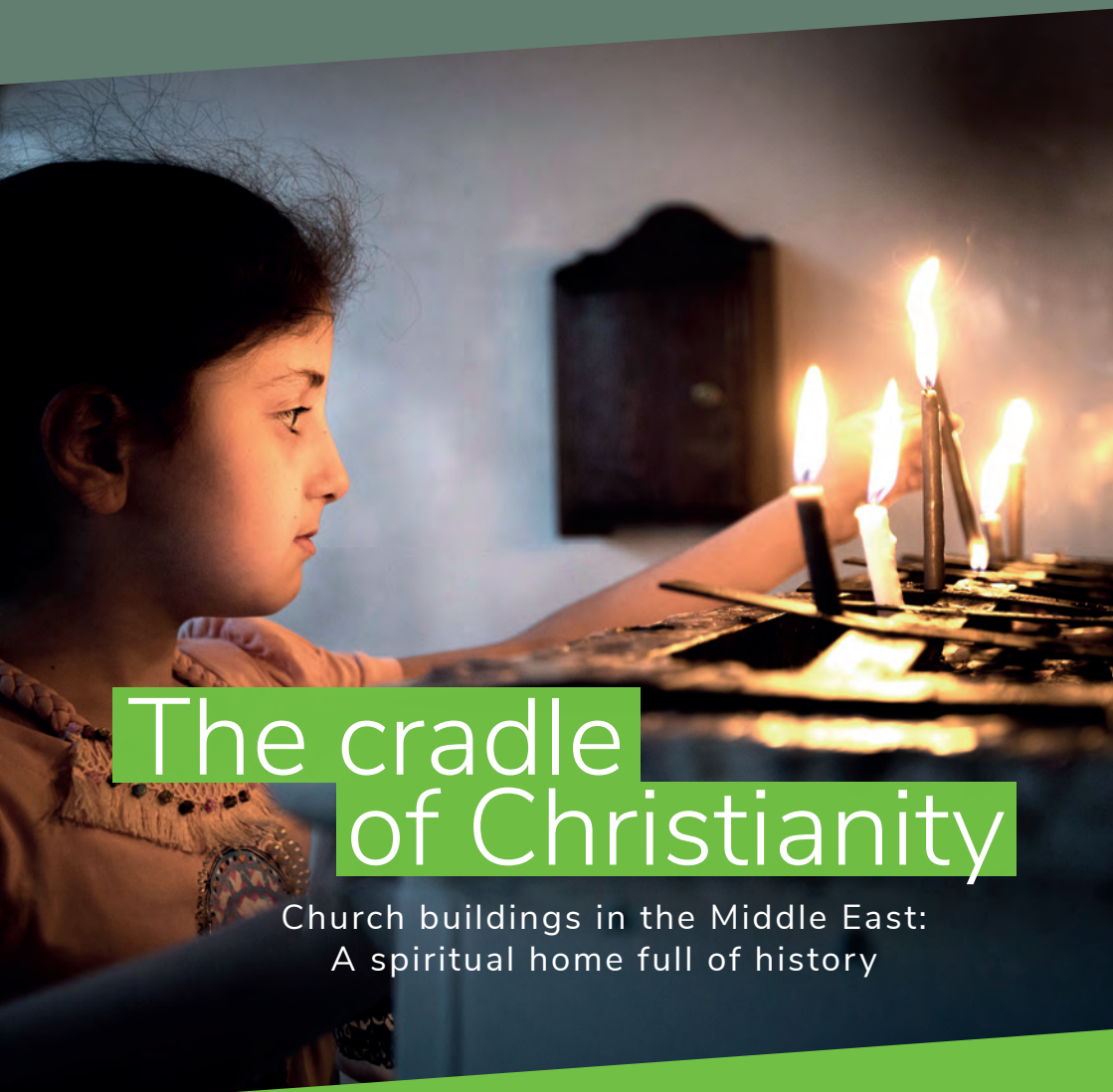


EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools

02/2026

SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ABOUT CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



The cradle of Christianity

Church buildings in the Middle East:
A spiritual home full of history

www.evs-online.org



CHURCHES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Searching for the world's oldest churches.....	6
Church construction and legal status of Protestant congregations.....	9
Egypt legalises a further 191 Christian churches.....	12
The message of the cross remains.....	14
It takes more than churches.....	15
A meeting place and a sanctuary.....	18
Where heaven and earth meet.....	21
Baptismal site in Jordan.....	23



NEWS ABOUT THE SCHNELLER MINISTRY

News from the Theodor Schneller school.....	25
Car mechanics for electric vehicles.....	23
News from the Johann Ludwig Schneller School.....	27
Schneller festival with Pierre Jarawan.....	28
SVS: Special donation for Lebanon.....	30



CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

An important step towards greater gender equality.....	31
New Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church.....	32



SERVICE

Arab players at the Syrian Orphanage.....	33
Wartorn Faith.....	34

Front cover: Worship service in Qamishli. Syria.

Copyright: epd photo/Sebastian Backhaus

Back cover: The churches at the Schneller schools in Lebanon and Jordan

Copyright: EVS/Uwe Gräbe



Dear Reader,

The Middle East is the birthplace of Christianity and some of the church ruins there are among the oldest in the world. They are, so to speak, the 'cradle of Christianity'. This issue will therefore focus on church buildings and their significance for Christians in the Middle East.

In his article, Professor Rainer Sörries introduces us to some of the oldest church sites and explains why the search for the 'oldest church' is not as simple as it might seem. Even today, new churches are being built, such as a huge Catholic church at the baptismal site of al-Maghtas in Jordan, or a rather smaller Anglican church built as a result of exceptional circumstances in Tarshiha, northern Israel.

Archdeacon Emanuel Youkhana from Dohuk reports on the destruction and reconstruction of churches in Iraq, while Professor Herta Däubler-Gmelin, member of the Board of Trustees of the Schneller Foundation, discusses the legal aspects of church construction in the Middle East. Two further articles on the subject explore what Egyptian Christians associate with churches and why, in Lebanon, the message of the cross offers hope despite all the destruction.

One historical event demonstrates that the Church is constantly reinventing itself: Rev. Dr Rima Nasrallah from Beirut is the first woman to head a church in the Middle East. There is also news from the Schneller Schools – and the Schneller Festival in November will feature a special guest.

Some of you may have noticed that the summer issue of Schneller Magazine was missing from your mailbox. For cost reasons, there will now only be three issues per year. However, to compensate for this slightly, you should have received a summer mailing featuring the latest updates from Lebanon and Jordan.

Now let Reverend Stephen Lakkis captivate you with a moving story he experienced as a boy in Lebanon. Its message is more relevant now than ever before.



We hope you enjoy reading our magazine.
Yours,

Judith Kubitscheck

Judith Kubitscheck

Snow day

I was about 10 years old on that day when we went to the snow. We had been visiting my uncle Ralf at his home near Amioun. It was a place that he had built himself on part of my grandparents' land, decorated with simple furniture and watched over by the same Orthodox icons that my grandmother had hung in her own home just a few hundred meters down the street. While northern Lebanon was relatively safe, it was the early 1980s and the signs and threats of war were still all around us. My cousins were a similar age to my brothers and sister and me – an age when boredom quickly led to rowdiness. That was probably why my uncle Ralf suddenly decided to pile us all into his car and drive us up the mountain to see the snow. At that time he drove an old Mercedes, like the hundreds of cigarette-stained taxis that were working Beirut's streets in those days. We all squeezed into the back seat, sitting half on top of each other, and then we were off.

But the trip was painfully slow. Every few hundred meters we had to stop at military checkpoints. And as we approached each station, Uncle Ralf would tell us to sit still and stay quiet until we were through. At each checkpoint fierce-looking soldiers would walk around the car, carrying their guns and peering through the windows at us, while one would interrogate Uncle Ralf. What are we doing? Where are

we from? Where are we going? And always the same answer: He is just getting us out of the house and taking us to play in the snow.

The mood in the car was quiet as we finally arrived. But once we spilled out of the car and saw all the snow, the fear of the checkpoints was quickly forgotten, replaced by snow fights and laughter. It's hard to say who came up with the idea first, but soon we had decided it would be hilarious to cover our uncle's car with snow. We piled the snow up high on the bonnet and the trunk and as high as we could reach on the roof. Uncle Ralf just leant against a nearby tree and smoked, and let us have our fun. Soon enough it was time to head home. But even then, Uncle Ralf didn't bother to clean the car off. He just drove it as it was, covered high in snow. We thought that was hilarious, too. Until we arrived back down the mountain at the first checkpoint.

The soldiers must have hardly known what they were seeing. As we got closer and closer to the checkpoint, the soldiers exited their whitewashed concrete shack, stood in the way and signalled us to a stop. But the spell was broken when the last soldier wandered out, saw the car and shouted amazed: "Snow!" Instantly, their rifles were on the ground as the soldiers grabbed handfuls of snow off the car and started running around the car laugh-

hing and throwing snow at each other. In that moment I realised these “fierce soldiers” were really just young men, barely older than us, but pressed into the service of war.

„We may lay down the rifles
and enjoy the snow“

In Genesis 1:26–27 God decides to “make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” and does so. “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Yet like every other part of God’s creation, the image of God within us is also vulnerable to destruction. Hatred and the desire for war distorts this divine identity within us, pulling us away from the type of identity and life God wants for us. And feelings of injustice, seeing the indifference to the suffering we experience, distorts our identity even more – because injustice is itself a form of violence that harms the image of the God of Justice within us. So the powers of war and conflict seek to recreate us in their own image, that we may no

longer be children of God destined to enjoy life with God and one another, but that we are shaped instead into tools that should use violence, inflict fear, and kill. This was never what God wanted for us.

A core tenet of our Christian faith is that Jesus is not only fully divine but also fully human. In Christ we finally see the true image of God, but also what it means to live as a true human being: with compassion, rejecting violence, and with love for our neighbour. And that is a message of hope for ourselves and our children alike – that we can strive to live life another way; that we can be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29), being truly human like him, rather than allowing violence, injustice and war to distort this image of God placed within us; and that we may lay down the rifles and enjoy the snow together.



Rev. Prof.
Stephen Lakkis
Minister for Peace and
Justice, Protestant
Church in Baden,
Germany.

Searching for the world's oldest church

The earliest Christians also gathered together to pray. Christian archaeologist Reiner Sörries demonstrates that house churches, as well as official church buildings, existed in the Middle East long before Emperor Constantine.

In the first centuries of our era, Christianity was not a legally recognised religion in the Roman Empire, which stretched from Gibraltar in the west to the Euphrates in the east. Its followers were frequently subjected to severe, and at times bloody, persecution. This only changed when Emperor Constantine legalised Christianity in 313 AD in what is known as the Edict of Milan. Churches were then built in many places, often even with imperial support.

Under the influence of Emperor Constantine's mother, Helena, they were erected primarily at sites directly associated with the life of Jesus, such as in Bethlehem over the Grotto of the Nativity or in Jerusalem over the Tomb of Jesus. One of the most recent discoveries of churches at sites associated with the life of Jesus is the El-Maghtas complex, excavated in the 1990s on the Jordanian side of the River Jordan. A multi-nave basilica was uncovered, from which a wide flight of steps leads down to the water – that is, to the spot where Jesus is said to have been baptised.

Two churches have made it into the Guinness Book of Records

The issue of where Christians held their meetings and celebrated services before the 4th century has long preoccupied archaeologists and church historians. So, where is the world's oldest church? Two archaeological sites have made it into the Guinness Book of Records – the churches at Dura Europos (on the Euphrates) in the far east of Syria and at Aqaba on the Red Sea in Jordan. There are good reasons why these two churches share this distinction.

The Christian place of worship in Dura Europos, known since the 1930s, is a house converted for this purpose. This explains why it has entered the realm of cultural knowledge as a house church. It dates back to around 232 AD. This corresponds exactly to how and where one imagines worship services took place in early Christian times: in private rooms and houses.

In Acts 20:7–12, it is reported that during his third missionary journey, Paul stayed for seven days in Troas (in Asia Minor), where he preached in the upper room of a house and cele-

brated the Lord's Supper. For a long time, the find at Dura stood alone, until a comparable discovery was made near Megiddo in northern Israel in 2005.

If the second entry in the Guinness Book of Records, in Aqaba, Jordan, is also described as the oldest church, it is because this is not a converted house, but a building that was erected specifically for use as a church. The building, which was not excavated until 1994, was dated by the archaeologist Thomas Parker to the end of the 3rd or the early years of the 4th century – still before the Constantinian shift. Whereas churches were typically built as three- or multi-nave basilicas after this shift, the 28 x 16 m mud-brick building in Aqaba has a different layout (Fig. 1) and is therefore still independent of the standardised architectural style of later periods.

The oldest churches are to be found in the Middle East

It is certainly no coincidence that any search for the oldest churches in Christendom ultimately ends up in the Middle East, since that is where Christianity first established itself. They

were first recognised as a Christian (and no longer as a Jewish) community in Antioch, where 'the disciples were first called Christians (Χριστιανούς)' (Acts 11:26). In the Western world, the missionary work of Paul and his fellow believers is well documented, not especially through his letters to Asia Minor, Greece and Rome. However, very few people are familiar with of the Apostle Judas Thaddeus. He is one of Jesus' twelve disciples who carried out missionary work in the Middle East, and together with Bartholomew he is considered one of the founding apostles of Armenia. Armenian Christians strongly believe that he founded a church in the year 66. He is said to have suffered martyrdom and was buried in his own church. This tradition is linked to the Armenian monastery of Saint Thaddeus, also known as the Black Church, situated approximately 18 km from Maku, in present-day Iran. It could now also be regarded as the oldest church in the world, although the building standing today dates from 1319/29.

A church in Kiş (sometimes also spelled Kish or Gis), situated near the town of Sheki in Azerbaijan, shares the same fortune. An ancient source states:

1. Apse
2. Clergy area
3. Barrier
4. Nave (lay people)
5. North aisle
6. Corridor
7. Tower?

FIG. 1



'One of the Lord's disciples, named Elisay (Elisha), who was ordained by Saint James, the Lord's brother, came to Albania (in the Caucasus) in times of old. That is where he preached; then he built a church when there were as yet none in Armenia. This is the church in Kiş, the very first in the Orient. The church that stands there today dates back only to the 11th or 12th century. Yet even this building is an 'icon' of the earliest Christian churches, which had been erected as far back as apostolic times (Fig. 2).

The oldest church in Jordan?

The fact that churches have been damaged, destroyed and rebuilt over the centuries makes it seem almost unlikely that it would still be possible to find any archaeological remains of the 'oldest' church in the world. That made the news that swept through specialist magazines and online portals in 2008 all the more electrifying: "World's 'oldest Christian church' discovered in Jordan: We have uncovered what we believe to be the first church

in the world, dating from 33 AD to 70 AD." What was found was the following: A flight of steps (Fig. 3) leads into a natural spacious cave which shows clear signs of human working. A masonry wall divides it into two sections. The front section is believed to be a living space and the rear section seems to be a place of worship with a sort of semi-circular apse occupied by a bench hewn from the rock. A tunnel leads from the cave to a source of water.

The archaeologists who carried out the excavation had put forward the theory that this was a place of refuge and worship for the 70 disciples that Jesus had sent out in pairs to preach the Gospel (Luke 10, 1:24). However, there are also prominent archaeologists who question the dating.

So, as yet, a single 'oldest church' does not exist. It will be interesting to see what further remains of churches are yet to be found in the Middle East, the cradle of Christianity.



FIG. 2

Church in
Azerbaijan

FIG. 3

Cave church in
Rihab (Jordan)

Reiner Sörries

is Professor Emeritus of Christian Archaeology at the University of Erlangen and author of the book "Die älteste Kirche der Welt", Böhlau Publishers, Cologne, 2022

Church construction and the legal status of Protestant congregations in the Middle East

A comparison with Germany

Religious freedom is now one of the basic constitutional principles in many countries. At least on paper. However, in practice, the options available to Protestant churches in particular vary considerably when it comes to official recognition as a religious community, the acquisition of property or the construction of places of worship. A comparison with Germany clearly shows that the difficulties can be quite considerable and are often greater than those faced by Muslim communities in Germany when it comes to building mosques.

Syria:

Recognition despite difficult circumstances

Besides the traditional churches, Syria also recognises the National Evangelical Synod in Syria and Lebanon, a Reformed-Presbyterian church which has a long history. Before the civil war, the state cooperated to some extent with recognised churches and even supported new building projects by allocating land or streamlining the building permission process.

The outbreak of the civil war brought about a fundamental change in the situation. Many churches were destroyed and numerous Christian communities

were displaced or forced to emigrate. Much of the focus now is on rebuilding churches and ensuring the safety of congregations. There have been no reports of organised protests against Protestant church-building projects, either before or since the start of the war.

Iraq:

No recognition and security issues

The Iraqi Constitution also guarantees freedom of religion. However, Islam is the state religion. Only a few Protestant churches have been granted the necessary official recognition status. Many Protestant congregations therefore face considerable difficulties in acquiring property or applying for the legal registration of buildings as churches. This presents major problems and this is compounded by the difficult security situation.

Christian communities have repeatedly been the target of attacks, kidnappings and intimidation over the last few decades. Churches were systematically destroyed, especially in areas controlled by 'Islamic State' terrorist groups. The biggest obstacles here are not public protests but violence and the lack of a legal framework.

Lebanon:**Institutional recognition in the denominational system**

Currently, people in Lebanon are greatly suffering from the Israeli Army's devastating bombardment, which is repeatedly fuelled by Hezbollah. At present, no one knows how this terrible situation can be brought to an end. Influencing Netanyahu's policies is just as essential as putting pressure on Hezbollah. Protestant facilities have also been repeatedly destroyed. Reconstruction will be a difficult task. Despite this, Lebanon possesses – not only in law but also in practice – a unique confessional system that officially recognises many religious communities. The Evangelical community also has legal status and is represented by the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon.

Recognised Evangelical congregations can acquire land, register church buildings and benefit from tax advantages. The main difficulties are faced by smaller Protestant groups that are not part of this system. On the other hand, public protests against the construction of new churches hardly play any role at all.

Jordan:**Recognised historical churches**

Jordan officially recognises several Protestant churches including the Anglican Church and the Evangelical

Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. These churches are permitted to acquire property and officially register their buildings.

However, all new church projects require the approval of state authorities. Permits are granted in consultation with church and state bodies. Conflicts occur sporadically and tend to focus on political and ecclesiastical matters; public protest movements are rarely documented.

Israel:**Religious freedom and local conflicts**

In principle, Israel guarantees the freedom to practise a religion. Protestant churches with a long-established history, such as the Lutheran and Anglican Churches, have assured rights of ownership and utilisation.

Unlike in most other countries in the region, isolated cases of public protests against Christian institutions have been reported here. These protests are primarily directed against new projects which are perceived by ultra-Orthodox groups as missionary in nature. In addition, there are political and security-related restrictions in East Jerusalem and on the West Bank which make access to churches more difficult.

Palestine:

For Protestant churches in Palestine, the legal situation is significantly

better than, for example, in Iraq. Traditional Lutheran and Anglican churches are recognised, are allowed to own property and operate churches.

The greatest difficulties today lie less in formal ecclesiastical law than in the political consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that involve restricted freedom of movement due to the Israeli government's policies, permit requirements, the emigration of many Christians, and security issues on parts of the West Bank.

Germany by comparison

A comparison with the situation of non-Christian religious communities in Germany reveals some fundamental differences: Religious communities are free to acquire land, erect buildings and organise themselves as they see fit. This applies equally to mosques, churches and synagogues. The recurring conflicts surrounding mosque or church construction projects often arise from issues concerning planning law or urban planning. However, extremist groups and political parties are also keen to capitalise on such debates; 'open days' are intended to contribute to greater mutual understanding and respect and by and large they succeed in this.

Conclusion

This comparison shows that Protestant churches in the Middle East face very different legal constraints. Whereas coun-



Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem

Photo credit: Fundus/Hans-Georg Vorndran

tries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Israel grant recognised Protestant churches extensive rights, congregations in Iraq, for example, are often still struggling to achieve even basic recognition by law. In Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, there are particularly difficult circumstances at present, while in other states, security issues and poli-

tical conflicts obstruct the construction of churches. In Germany, religious communities generally have the same legal access to property and building projects. Efforts continue to be made to resolve local conflicts – which are often exploited by extremist groups – through initiatives promoting coexistence.



Photo credit: Sebastian Bolech

Professor Herta Däubler-Gmelin

She is a lawyer and served as Federal Minister of Justice from 1998 to 2002; she has been teaching for decades at the Free University of Berlin, the Protestant University of Applied Sciences in Ludwigsburg and at universities abroad. In her professional capacity, she advises employees, works councils and companies on matters including AI. She is active internationally on issues such as human rights, the fight against corruption, the rule of law and 'transitional justice'. She chaired the University Council of the State University of Music and the Arts in Stuttgart and is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Schneller Foundation.

Egypt legalises a further 191 Christian churches

In April, the Egyptian government issued an executive order legalising a further 191 Christian churches and affiliated buildings of different Christian denominations with retroactive effect. This brings the total number of church properties that have been legalised to 3,804. However, several hundred applications are still pending.

The legalisation campaign stems from a law passed in August 2016 concerning the construction and renovation of church buildings. It is intended to make it easier for Christians to obtain planning permission for places of worship. Before the law came into force, Chris-

tians had complained about planning permission procedures that were virtually impossible to navigate. As a result, many religious buildings were constructed without the necessary permits. The human rights organisation "Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)" welcomed this development but called for this legalisation process to be extended to other unrecognised religious communities, such as the Ahmadiyya, the Bahá'í and Shia Muslims, in order to uphold the freedom of religion and belief enshrined in the constitution and to ensure the equality of all citizens.

Credits: CSW, Egypt Independent, KNA

The message of the Cross remains

The image of a destroyed church has been etched into Farah Bou Kheir's memory. Yet, here the theologian explains why, in his eyes, this photo still carries a message of hope.

„I come from southern Lebanon, from a village located just five minutes from the border between Lebanon and Israel. When the conflict escalated, civilians quickly came to understand what I call the logic of war: whoever is perceived as a threat by the IDF becomes a target.

Consequently, daily life changed completely. Every ordinary decision became a security calculation. Parents wondered if it was safe for their children to step outside. Farmers questioned whether they could safely harvest their land. People listened constantly to the buzzing of drones and checked the latest news before deciding whether to leave their homes. Eventually, many were forced to flee.

Yet, in the midst of this harsh reality, one image from Yaroun - a village in southern Lebanon - remains etched in my memory. Almost everything surrounding it has been destroyed, yet one thing remains standing: the cross. The cross does not erase the destruction around it. It does not answer every question. It does not make the suffering disappear. But it reminds us that hope is not anchored in safety, stability,

or buildings - it is anchored in Christ himself.

It is now summer 2026. Although large-scale fighting has decreased, the situation remains incredibly fragile. Many homes are still damaged, and the residents of Yaroun have been unable to return due to security concerns. The status of the church after March 2026 remains uncertain. Unfortunately, it is highly likely that the entire site has been reduced to rubble.

Yet, the local church in Lebanon continues to stand by its communities. They continue to pray and to serve. The Church of Yaroun has taught me a deeper truth: Christian resilience is not simply recovering after a crisis. It is remaining faithful to Christ while passing through the crisis. It is choosing to worship even among the ruins.“

Farah Bou Kheir

is a NEST graduate and holds a Master's Degree in Theology. A similar picture and an article of him can also be found in the book "Wartorn Faith" (for more, see p 34).

St. George's church in Yaroun

The Melkite Greek Catholic Church of St. George in Yaroun, South Lebanon, stands in ruins. Yaroun is a village whose population is three-quarters Shiite, but which also has a long history of Melkite Christian presence. Since October 2023, the village, located on the border between Israel and Lebanon, has been severely hit on multiple occasions. The parish church of St. George and numerous homes - Christian and Muslim - were destroyed in the first months of the conflict, while the rest of the village sustained significant damage. Following the ceasefire in November 2024, Yaroun was once again systematically destroyed.

Since March 2026, following the escalation of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, everything has once again been destroyed, and all residents have been forced to flee. (Credit: Kirche in Not)



Photo credit: Ramiz Dallah/Shutterstock

It takes more than churches

Since the end of ISIS's reign of terror in Iraq, numerous churches have been rebuilt. Nevertheless, the Christians in Iraq need more than stones and buildings.

The Christian presence in Iraq dates back to the beginnings of Christianity. The Church of Iraq, established by the apostles St. Thomas, St. Addai, and St. Mari, brought the Gospel to the East, reaching Mongolia and China. During its golden age, it was one of the largest churches in East and West. Its fathers served as a bridge between Arab and Greek civilizations and initiated one of the earliest Christian-Muslim dialogues in the 9th century between Patriarch Timothy the Great and the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mahdi. Despite its demographic decline, the Christian community has remained politically, economically, and culturally active in Iraq.

Across the Nineveh Plain,
31 churches were damaged by ISIS

Christian churches have existed throughout Iraq for centuries. Although many disappeared after the Islamic conquest and the Mongol invasion, churches remained wherever Christians continued to live, particularly in Mosul, Dohuk, the Nineveh Plain, and Erbil. Throughout the Ottoman era and modern Iraqi statehood, church construction was permitted, as freedom of worship (not freedom of religion) is guaranteed, resulting in the right to

build churches wherever and whenever needed.

Before ISIS occupied Mosul in 2014, the city had 39 churches and monasteries of various denominations, while the Nineveh Plain had more than 60 churches and monasteries, and Sinjar had three churches.

ISIS systematically targeted Christian, Yazidi, and Shia places of worship. Some churches, including the historic Al-Tahira Syriac Orthodox Church likely dating back to the 12th century, and St. George Assyrian Church in Mosul among others, were completely destroyed; others were damaged or used by ISIS for various purposes. In the ISIS-controlled parts of the Nineveh Plain, 31 churches and seven monasteries were damaged while Sinjar's three churches suffered severe destruction.

The United Arab Emirates funded
the reconstruction of a church

After the Iraqi state regained control in 2017, a reconstruction campaign was launched. Most funding came from international sources, as the Iraqi state only later contributed. Ten churches in Mosul were reconstructed.

One of the most significant projects is UNESCO's „Revive the Spirit of Mosul,“ which included the reconstruction of Al-Tahira Syriac Catholic Church, funded by the United Arab Emirates, built on the site of a seventh-century church in Hosh al-Biya, which contains four adjacent churches of different denominations, all heavily damaged by ISIS. Pope Francis prayed there during his historic visit in March 2021. The project also restored the Dominican Church of the Clock, named after the clock in its tall tower.

With support from the Swiss organization ALIPH and the French organization Oeuvre d'Orient, St. Thomas Syriac Orthodox Cathedral and Al-Tahira Chaldean Church were also reconstructed. In the Nineveh Plain, all damaged churches have been rehabilitated, including seven restored by CAPNI.

People before stones

While church reconstruction sends an important symbolic message and highlights the architectural ecclesiastical presence in Mosul, Mosul's Christian community questions its future. This shows that it is not just crucial to invest in church buildings but also in people. Before ISIS in 2014, more than 20,000 Christians lived in the city; today, fewer than 50 families remain. Only one Syrian Catholic priest and a Chaldean bishop serve the remaining faithful.

This raises the question among Christians: will there be a time where all the bells of Mosul's churches ring as they once did? Most displaced Christians from Mosul do not appear enthusiastic about returning, not primarily because of security concerns, but because of the collapse of trust, the fragmentation of the social mosaic, and their greater sta-

The “Virgin Mary Cathedral” of the Church of the East in Mosul is still destroyed



The Chaldean Al-Tahira Church has been rebuilt



bility and integration with the host community in Kurdistan.

Christians need social acceptance

The challenges facing Christians are not the stones of churches but social acceptance and an environment that offers reassurance. This requires addressing legislative discrimination, particularly the automatic Islamization of minors when one parent converts to Islam.

School curricula, which lack reference to Christian existence, historical and cultural role.

Or the marginalization in political life, where the Christian role is limited to beautify the image without having role in decision making.

These ongoing factors over decades have reduced the Christian population from about 3% of Iraq's population in the 1980s to around 0.4% today, making Christianity, once Iraq's second-largest religion, the third after Islam and Yazidism.

Despite these challenges, Iraqi Christians possess organized institutions at home and in the diaspora with significant economic, academic, media, and international resources.

The diversity in Iraq is rich and authentic, a value added to Iraq if legally

protected, economically supported, and accompanied by an environment of mutual respect. The Christians in Iraq say: „We are all for Iraq if Iraq is for all of us.“



Rebuilt: The Dominican
„Church of the Clock“ in Mosul



Emanuel Youkhana
is an Archdeacon
(Archimandrite) of the
Assyrian Church of the East
and founder of the Iraqi aid
organization CAPNI (Dohuk)

A meeting place and a sanctuary

How a vision gave rise to a church in northern Israel

A small Christian home group, a plot of land they were given, and many unexpected twists led the Jiryis, a German-Arab couple, to build a place of worship – even though that wasn't their original intention. The recently built church is intended to be an oasis of peace.

A building with white walls and light-coloured stone, complete with bell tower, is now a familiar sight in the village of Tarshiha in northern Israel: the Protestant 'Christ the King Church'. For Pastor Hatim Jiryis and his wife Renate, the very existence of this church is a miracle.

It all began around 24 years ago with a woman from Tarshiha who was interested in the Protestant faith. She asked Hatim Jiryis, who had moved to the neighbouring village of Rama, to come to her home for weekly meetings to pray with her and read the bible. This became a small group that met in rented rooms.

"We didn't intend to build a church"

When Shlomo Bohbot, the then Jewish mayor of Ma'alot-Tarshiha, donated a third plot of land to the Muslim community for a mosque, a man encouraged Jiryis to apply for a plot of land for a church as well. "At first, I was completely at a loss as to what to make of the idea," says the theologian. "We didn't intend to build a church." The

town already had a Catholic and an Orthodox church. Besides, his group was quite small at the time – numbering around 50 to 60 people – and they didn't have the financial resources.



The decisive spark that led them to take the idea seriously after all was a visit from a friend, an Anglican vicar from England. Without knowing anything about the plans, he told the Jiryis couple that God would provide them with the money to build a church. The couple were stunned. "Could this really be a sign from God?" they asked themselves. They couldn't get the thought out

of their heads. Hatim Jiryis then submitted an application to the mayor and prayed for clarity.

Walnuts for the church building

Then one miracle followed another, the couple recounts, clearly moved. Since the mayor had had positive experiences with Protestant churches and organisations in the Holy Land, he donated a plot of land measuring around 2,000 square metres to the small group in 2018 – on condition that the church be built within three and a half years. Despite the tight deadline and the complex bureaucracy near the border with Lebanon, all the permits were granted within a year – something the architect himself thought was quite unusual. A Christian organisation from Switzerland donated a large sum of money and provided an interest-free loan since it wanted to invest a substantial amount of money as quickly as possible before new tax legislation came into force so that the money would not be subject to tax.

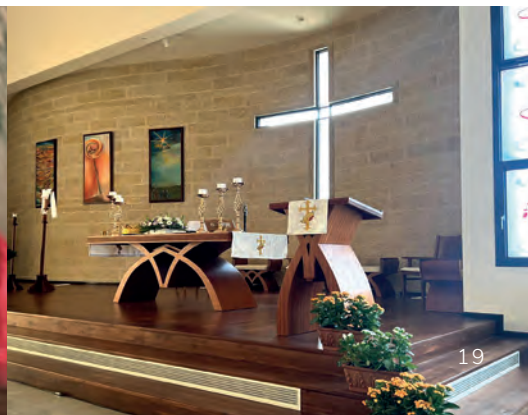
More donations came from businesspeople, parishes and even children. Renate Jiryis, who is originally from Baden-Württemberg, was particularly moved by a girl who sold walnuts she had collected to help fund the church's construction and by a twelve-year-old boy who donated all his christening money to the cause.

Recreational activities for socially disadvantaged families

Not even the Covid pandemic delayed construction. Since there was enough space on the building site, work was able to continue in compliance with the regulations.

After a lengthy process, the congregation joined the Anglican Church in 2017 in order to obtain official recognition by the State of Israel.

The church was consecrated in 2021 and was deliberately designed as a multi-purpose building. The church interior is furnished with chairs rather than pews to allow for greater flexibility, and it has become a popular venue



for concerts thanks to its excellent acoustics.

The congregation, with just under 100 regular attendees, runs youth groups, bible study sessions, English camps for children of all faiths, and recreational activities for socially disadvantaged families.

As the church is built of solid concrete, the ground floor is officially approved as a recognised shelter for the neighbourhood. "If rockets come from Iran, you have ten minutes to get to the shelter. If something comes from Lebanon, there's hardly any warning at all."

"An oasis of peace in a dark world"

The couple have noticed that, since 7 October 2023, life has changed in this Arab-Jewish town. Even though coexistence there is still considerably better than in Jerusalem, for example,

there has been a rise in mistrust. Many Christian Arabs feel caught between the fronts. "I am Israeli, but not Jewish; I am Arab, but not Muslim."

For Hatim and Renate, their church is intended to be an "oasis of peace in a dark world". Its architecture is built in the shape of a cross with an extended arm. This design symbolises Jesus's invitation. Inside, three paintings depict Jesus as the newborn King, the King on the cross and the returning King.

"We do not want to convert anyone to our denomination; no one is obliged to become a member of our church," emphasises Hatim Jiryis. "Our aim is for people to find inner peace in God and for us to worship Jesus together as King."

Judith Kubitscheck



Hatim und Renate Jiryis

Where heaven and earth meet

The importance of churches and monasteries for Egypt's faithful

A Coptic woman stands at the iconostasis of the church in Maadi, her hand resting on the curtain leading to the sanctuary as she prays in silence. At the Makarios Monastery, a child playfully climbs onto the sarcophagus of several bishops and then leaps into the arms of a monk. Deep contemplation and the carefree abandon of a child – both expressions of a special sense of familiarity.

Then I realise: this way of relating to and treating ‘the sacred’ in and around churches and monasteries in Egypt clashes with my Protestant values. And I begin to ask my brothers and sisters there what their church means to them. Here are a few very subjective and by no means exhaustive answers:

My church – is my home,
my other heavenly home

“From a very young age, I felt at home in two places: with my biological father

and with my heavenly Father. I grew up with the sounds of the liturgy and the scent of incense. This is where my soul finds peace.”

My church – is a place of learning
about the faith of our forefathers

“I am part of a church that has experienced God’s grace through faith, hope, love and perseverance for the past 2,000 years. The liturgy dating back to the 4th century connects me to early Christianity and its worship.”

My church – is a place of refuge

“When I’m in society, I feel as though I always have to defend my Christian faith, so I’m often under a certain amount of stress. Outside, I’m exposed to the call of the muezzin, whether I like it or not. Inside, in church, nobody questions me; I’m not in the minority there. I can breathe a sigh of relief and be completely at ease with myself.”



Saint Mark's Cathedral in Cairo

Photo credit: Evang. Salam-Center



My church – is theology set in stone

“Everything in the church reflects my faith: the three doors symbolise the Trinity; the cross and star motifs glorify the cross of Jesus; the icons bring the biblical figures to life. In the church, I can immerse myself in my faith.”

My church – is an encounter with heaven

“When I’m in church, heaven opens up to me. The earthly space expands, and the divine realm becomes reality. I don’t come here to experience a religious spectacle or to listen to a philosophical lecture, but to encounter God – in a very real way.”

My church – transcends the boundaries of time

“In church, I am surrounded by a host of witnesses, from the prophets to the martyrs, in icons and relics. Here I come face to face with our history – a history of overcoming evil and remaining steadfast in faith. They bear witness to faith and devotion and encourage me to follow their example. The central portrayal of Jesus as the Ruler of the World, the Pantocrator, transports me even now into the eternal world with the risen Christ. Past, present and future become one.”

One person summed it up in the following words: “We enter the church and at the same time the Kingdom of Heaven – right here, right now. The Divine Liturgy is the living, breathing worship of the Church as it stands before the throne of God. It is where heaven and earth meet. Time and eternity touch. Christ is present, giving himself to us in love.”

Now I also enter our churches here in Germany with a different mindset.

The insights of my Egyptian brothers and sisters help me to feel God’s presence in ‘his house’ from a new perspective and to experience it a greater sense of wholeness. This is where I meet my origins – and the destination towards which I am journeying.



Heidi Josua

a religious educator and Orientalist, and heads the Salam Center and the Arab Evangelical Congregation in Stuttgart.

www.salam-center.de

Baptismal site in Jordan:

This huge new church is waiting for peace and pilgrims

In early 2025, a huge new Catholic church was consecrated at the traditional site of Jesus' baptism on the Jordanian bank of the Jordan River. Father Rifat Badr, a Jordanian priest of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and director of the CCSM (Catholic Center for Studies and Media) in Jordan, explains what makes the church special and why much more is planned by 2030.

Schneller Magazine (SM):

How did the idea of building the Catholic Church at the Baptism Site come about?

Father Rifat Badr:

After signing of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel in 1994, the site returned to Jordanian sovereignty, having previously been a military zone filled with landmines. Following demining efforts, initiatives began to revive Christian pilgrimage to this sacred place.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan allocated land to various Christian

denominations to build churches. The Catholic Church received enough space for both a church and pilgrim facilities. Designed with large doors opening onto spacious courtyards, it can host around 1,500 people inside and more than 5,000 outdoors. The church was officially inaugurated in 2025 in the presence of Papal representative, His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Paroline, and the Jordan Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad representing King Abdullah II and the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Eminence Pierbattista Pizzaballa.

SM:

What makes the church unique and how does it reflect the story of the baptism of Jesus Christ in its architecture and art?

Father Rifat Badr:

Architecturally, the church was designed in the shape of a cross, according to the vision of a French architect, under the supervision of Mr. Nadeem Moasher and his wife, who are members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre



and who donated the biggest sum of money to build the church. They also intended this project to commemorate their eldest son, who passed away in a car accident near the baptism site while on his way to the Dead Sea to celebrate his high school graduation.

The baptismal font follows the tradition of early Christian baptisteries: descending the steps symbolizes sharing in Christ's death, while ascending represents resurrection and new life. The stained-glass windows depict biblical events connected to the Jordan River.

SM:

How many visitors has the church received so far?

Father Rifat Badr:

The recent years have witnessed significant challenges that have affected pilgrimage and religious tourism. The COVID-19 pandemic, followed by the war on Gaza and the US-Israeli-Iranian war, have all impacted the number of pilgrims and visitors.

Under normal circumstances, the Baptism Site receives around 300,000 visitors annually. However, we hope that stability will return to the region so that we can welcome millions of pilgrims by the Jubilee year 2030.

SM: What is the "Jubilee Year 2030" exactly?

Father Rifat Badr:

It will commemorate 2,000 years since the baptism of Jesus Christ, who was baptized at the age of thirty. It is a worldwide celebration for all Christian churches.

Plans include developing the surrounding area into a religious and tourist village where pilgrims can stay for several days, experience the sacred atmosphere, and live a spiritual journey near the waters of the Jordan River where Jesus Christ was baptized 2,000 years ago.



Father Rifat Badr is Director of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media (CCSM) in Jordan

Al-Maghtas

The Baptismal Site is located on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. Since 2015, the site - also known as „Bethany Beyond the Jordan“ - has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site. UNESCO describes it as being „of immense religious significance to the majority of denominations of Christian faith, who have accepted this site as the location where Jesus of Nazareth was baptised by John the Baptist. This reference encouraged generations of monks, hermits, pilgrims and priests to reside in and visit the site, and to leave behind testimonies of their devotion and religious activities, dating to between the 4th and the 15th century CE.“ In addition to the Catholic Church, there are several churches of various Christian denominations at this site: a Greek Orthodox church and a Russian Orthodox pilgrimage centre with a church. The Lutherans have also built a church there, and the Anglicans have laid the cornerstone for a church. On the opposite bank of the Jordan, on the West Bank, lies Qasr al-Yahud, where the baptism of Jesus has also been commemorated for centuries. This tradition dates back at least to the 6th century, and perhaps even to the 5th century.



Photo credit: Reiner Sörries

SCHNELLER SCHOOLS

News from the Theodor Schneller School

It was a very special moment when the whole school assembled for the graduation ceremony at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) at the end of May. 72 graduates all at once – the school has not seen so many in several years! Forty of them had completed vocational training among them the first six to spend a whole year in training on electric vehicles. There were also the first ten to pass their BTEC technical qualifications. And finally, the very small

ones – the children who has finished kindergarten and also received a certificate. The entire event was again set against the backdrop of exciting music from the school choir under the baton of conductress Qamar Badwan, including a fiery song she had composed for the first ever participation of the Jordanian national football team in the World Cup.

All the parties involved try their hardest to continue developed the TSS, even in times of crisis. The Director, Rev. Khalid Freij, announced that the first nine



rooms and a suite on the upper floor of the guest house had been finally refurbished. The only thing missing now was the furniture! The Jordanian authorities intend to build a road on the school site along the boundary to the neighbouring refugee camp to connect the main road in front of the entrance to the TSS to the new motorway. Such a project needs careful consideration. For this reason, the matter is now being referred by the Schneller Board to the synodal bodies of the Episcopal Diocese.

Uwe Gräbe

TSS training in step with modern needs

Car mechanics for electric vehicles

The new Electric Vehicle Service and Maintenance Training Program at Theodor Schneller School prepares qualified technicians for the growing hybrid and electric vehicle sector in Jordan. To meet labor market needs and provide modern vocational training opportunities, the school introduced

this specialization in cooperation with Kia Jordan.

The cooperation with Kia was initiated because it is one of the leading automotive companies in Jordan, importing hybrid and electric vehicles while operating several specialized maintenance workshops. Kia has been collaborating with the school in both training and employment. Several graduates of the school are currently employed by the company, with some holding supervisory positions. Through a Memorandum of Understanding, Kia has equipped an Electric Vehicle workshop at the school, offers three-month internships at its service centers, and gives graduates priority for employment. The accredited nine-month program combines six months of theoretical and practical training at the school with three months of hands-on experience at Kia workshops. Graduates receive a nationally recognized certificate endorsed by the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission / Ministry of Labor and have excellent opportunities for permanent employment with Kia as well as other specialized companies and automotive maintenance workshops.



Six trainees have already absolved this specialized training. At the beginning of the 2026/2027 academic year, six more trainees holding the Jordanian General Secondary Education Certificate (Tawjihi) enrolled in this specialization.

Dr. Khaled Freij, director of TSS

News from the Johann Ludwig Schneller School

Nothing is normal in times of war. So, neither the Director of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) nor the EMS and EVS delegates from Germany (or from Jordan) were able to attend the Beirut Schneller Board Meeting at the end of May.



JLS students during the school's sports day

Photo credits: JLS

The only possibility for them was to attend online by videoconference. It also became crystal clear that war not only means danger for life and limb but additionally poses a severe economic threat. All those in charge are striving to keep the wages and salaries of co-workers to at least 60 to 63%, or ideally over 70%, of pre-crisis level through great efforts (and with substantial financial support from the EVS). The general inflation has been so severe that even minor successes disappear into thin air after a very short time. Without an immediate end to the violence, this beneficial work can hardly be stabilised.

Uwe Gräbe



Amira Jaradat, mother of children of the TSS

"I remember very well seven years ago when I enrolled my children at the Theodor Schneller school. Many people criticized me because I was enrolling my Muslim children at a Christian school. But the reality was exactly the opposite: our children were treated with care, attention and respect. Their religious duties and prayers were always respected. During Ramadan, the Christian carers even ensured that the children were woken up in time for "suhur". [...] Thank you so very much [...], you have shown in a truly wonderful way what interfaith coexistence truly means in our country."



Schneller festival with Pierre Jarawan

At the start of 2027, the Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace will celebrate its 20th anniversary. To mark the occasion, a full year of anniversary celebrations is planned, which will be launched with the Schneller Festival and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) General Meeting on 15 November 2026. The former EVS General Secretary and EMS Middle East Liaison Secretary, Rev. Andreas Maurer, who was instrumental in esta-

blishing the Foundation at the time, is hosting this very special event at the Paulinenpflege Winnenden, where he is now the managing director.

To top it all, the guest of honour is the writer Pierre Jarawan who has very special ties to the Schneller schools and their regional situations. At the Schneller festival, he will be reading from his latest book (and of course he will be signing copies). Whether you are a member or not, you are heartily invited!

Schneller festival in Winnenden, Germany, on 15 November 2026

10:00 Service in the
Winnenden Castle Church

11:30 News from the Schneller schools
– on the site of the Paulinenpflege

13:00 Lunch

14:00 Reading and talk with
Pierre Jarawan

15:30 General Meeting: Agenda

16:30 Closing ceremony and
blessing for the journey



“The Schneller school is the starting point of our family history”

On 15 November, writer Pierre Jarawan will be a guest at the Schneller Festival to mark the start of the anniversary year of the Schneller Foundation. In an interview with Schneller Magazine (SM), he explains how he came to have family ties to the Johann-Ludwig-Schneller School in Lebanon, and why he believes the work of the Schneller Schools is so important.

SM:

Mr Jarawan, you have very special ties to the Schneller School in Lebanon – what are they?

Pierre Jarawan:

My parents met there, so in that sense my story would be inconceivable if the Schneller School had not existed in Lebanon. I have vague memories of visits there when we children were still



very little, but ultimately the school remains the starting point of our family history.

SM:

You were born in Jordan and used to visit your relatives in Lebanon very often. What do you associate with these countries, and do you think that memories of these encounters may have perhaps found their way into your books?

Jarawan:

I have absolutely no memories of Jordan; we came to Germany when I was three years old. It's different with Lebanon – my grandmother on my father's side still lives there today, as do many other relatives. We visited the country regularly and often. Later, as a writer, I often travelled there to do research. In the end, no book can be entirely free of personal influences, but it's not as though I've incorporated my personal stories into my books; they

are novels that tell fictional stories, set against a historical backdrop and inspired by historical events.

SM:

A central concept of the Schneller schools is Christian and Muslim children learning together. Do you think such schools can contribute to peaceful coexistence in both countries?

Jarawan:

Breaking down prejudices against 'others' is the first and most important building block when it comes to long-term coexistence and, ultimately, peace. This requires places where people can meet. This is the only way to overcome resentment. Of course, there are other basic building blocks involved here (historical and legal reconciliation, creating a culture of remembrance, to name but a few), but it won't work without coexistence. In this respect, the Schneller Schools make an immensely important contribution.



Photographer: Maximilian Heinrich

Pierre Jarawan

www.pierrejarawan.de

is author, writing coach and freelance photographer. He lives in Munich. He was born in Amman, Jordan, in 1985 to a Lebanese father and a German mother, after his parents had left Lebanon due to the civil war. His literary debut, "Am Ende bleiben die Zedern" (In the End, the Cedars Remain), was published in 2016 and is an international, multi-award-winning bestseller. His second novel, "Ein Lied für die Vermissten" (Song for the Missing), was published in 2020 and was shortlisted for the Dublin Literary Awards in its English translation. His third novel: Frau im Mond „The Woman in the Moon“, which was published in April 2025, won the Tukan Prize and was named one of the 20 best novels of 2025 by "Der Spiegel".

SVS: Special donation for Lebanon

The Swiss Association for the Schneller Schools (SVS) decided to transfer the sum of €10,000 to the Schneller school in Lebanon at its General Meeting in March 2026. The Director, Odette Had-dad Makhoul, had written saying that she would like to provide her coworkers with some financial assistance in view of rising prices.



Due to the uncertainty of the situation, she urgently needed to stock up on food supplies for the students. She also needed diesel for the school bus and the generators.

Our special donation should cover this for the moment. The budget contained the usual basic contributions of CHF 30,000 to each school. CHF 69,500 were approved for special projects at JLSS and CHF 54,750 for special projects at the TSS. It is only thanks to your generous support that we are able to provide the schools with the level of assistance mentioned. A very heartfelt thank-you to all donors!

Ursus Waldmeier

President of the SVS

Congratulations Steffen Bilger!

"The Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace warmly congratulates member of the Board of Trustees Steffen Bilger MdB (member of the German Bundestag) on his appointment as Federal Minister of Transport.

We wish him luck and every success in this challenging task."



Photographer: Tobias Koch



Rima Nasrallah during her
installation service

Photo credits: Uwe Gräbe

“An important step towards greater gender equality”

It is the first time that a woman has become the spiritual leader of a church in the Middle East

A spontaneous, loud and heartfelt round of applause broke out after Reverend Dr Rima Nasrallah van Saane had given the blessing at the end of the service in the National Church of Beirut. For a moment, it really felt that something like hope was in the air. In a Lebanon where the south has been devastated and its capital is full of internally displaced people. What had just taken place here during the service can undoubtedly be described as 'historic'. Since 28 June, Nasrallah has been 'Senior Pastor' and thus the spiritual head of the small Reformed National Evangelical Church of Beirut (NECB). At 50, she is the first woman to lead this church and is one of the first six women ever to have been ordained since 2017 in the traditional Arab evangelical churches of

Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine and Jordan. An important step towards greater gender equality

In the past, she had served as Dean of Studies and Professor at the Near East School of Theology (NEST), a partner

institution of the EMS and part of the study programme "Studying in the Middle East" (SiMO).

Her predecessor in the post, Rev. Dr Habib Badr, pointed out that the Church Council, the governing body of the NECB, had taken a unanimous decision to appoint Rev. Rima.

— — — — — ” — — — — —
In the current situation in Lebanon, many people no longer have any prospects. As a church, we want to offer hope and live out that hope. Life is what we can offer in the face of evil. We hold services and run youth programmes even when bombs are falling.

Rima Nasrallah

Two days before his successor's installation, Badr received a retirement send-off in a church packed with more than 300 guests from ecumenical, political and civil society

circles. He had spent 41 years in this role, during which he and his church had had to weather countless wars and crises.

In his sermon during the installation service, he struck a contemplative note. "Have we perhaps betrayed ourselves and our children by remaining in

this country and this church? That has stood here for the past 178 years?" Badr's answer, however, was unequivocal: It is and remains the task of the local church to fight against the forces of death and hell. For it is precisely there that we encounter Christ himself. An encouraging thought with which to pass the baton to his successor.

New Patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church



Credits: Press photo of the Chaldean Church

The Chaldean Catholic Church has a new patriarch: Paul III Nona. The 58-year-old, whose real name is Amil Shimoun Nona, was installed in his office in Baghdad at the end of May.

He succeeds Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, who was previously head of the Church.

As Archbishop of Mosul, Nona witnessed first-hand the advance of the 'Islamic State' terrorist group in 2014. During the occupation of the city, hundreds of thousands of Christians and other minorities were forced to flee their homes. His own congregation was also completely displaced, and he fled to Erbil. From 2015 until his election as Patriarch, he served as Archbishop in Sydney.

The Chaldean Catholic Church emerged in the 16th century from the Assyrian Church of the East and is one of the Eastern Catholic Churches in union with the Pope in Rome. Today, it has around 650,000 members worldwide. Although the Patriarch's official seat is in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, a significant proportion of the faithful now live in the diaspora, primarily in the USA, Australia and Western Europe.

www.chaldeanpatriarchate.com

Credit (Vatican News, among others)

A Master's thesis with added value: Arab players in the Syrian orphanage

This spectacular Master's thesis from Stuttgart marks a clear break with previous historical research on the Schneller institutions in the Holy Land. The author challenges the previously accepted assumptions of a cultural decline in the Ottoman Empire and a largely illiterate local culture in Palestine at the end of the 19th century, against the backdrop of which a radical cultural transformation or surge of modernisation is said to have occurred only as a result of growing European influences. Instead, Seeger emphasises the role of the Ottoman and Arab reform movements of the late 18th to early 20th centuries, the 'Tanzimat' and the 'Nahda', and sees the success of the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem (the first Schneller School) as stemming primarily from the fact that the Schneller family (unlike other German players!) managed, after initial setbacks, to integrate themselves into this existing context and, through far-reaching networks, initiate a fruitful exchange of knowledge between Europe and the Arab world.

Accordingly, it is logical that, in his analysis of the history of these relationships, Seeger focuses primarily on the Arab figures associated with the Syrian Orphanage – such as the long-serving master printer Khalil Haddad (1868–1949) and the philologist Elias Haddad (1879–1959), who transla-

ted, amongst other things, Lessing's „Nathan the Wise“ into Arabic and was largely responsible for the re-establishment of the Schneller School in Lebanon after the Second World War; or the polymath Tawfiq Canaan (1882–1964), to whom we ultimately owe a significant contribution to the construction of the Auguste Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. By focusing on the Arab players, it also becomes clear, for example, just how much activity was still possible at the Syrian Orphanage even after 1940 – that is, following the internment of the Germans and the official closure by the British. For instance, five apprentices at the orphanage's printing works had voluntarily placed themselves under internment so that they could continue printing for British and Palestinian clients – and thus their apprenticeships – 'quite happily' until 1948.

This publication represents what is probably the first consistently decolonial study of the Syrian Orphanage and reaches the heartening conclusion that its role always 'consisted of being a tolerant place of cultural exchange.'



Stefan Seeger, Arabische Wissenskultur in Jerusalem 1860-1948: Eine verflechtungsgeschichtliche Analyse der Rolle des Syrischen Waisenhauses, Masterarbeit, Stuttgart 2025, OPUS – Online publications of the University of Stuttgart <https://doi.org/10.18419/opus-18149>

“Wartorn Faith”

What a remarkable book! It delves deep into existential, theological and political issues. And what a special group of contributors - Christians from various countries in the Middle East and Germany. They are all united by a special anniversary: 25 years of the Middle East studies programme (SIMO). The programme was initiated by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) in collaboration with the Near East School of Theological Studies (NEST) in Beirut. Since 1999, 100 students from Germany have spent a year of study in Beirut together with students from countries in the region. Some of them were able to meet up in June 2025 in Erfurt and exchange views. Like a magnifying glass, the contributions in this book reflect the whole complexity of reality – in an English that is easy to read.

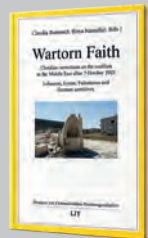
Personally, there were four key themes that emerged as I read: sharing in suffering – listening – hoping – acting! Sharing in suffering: the authors take us to the places of suffering and share in it - when Uwe Gräbe weeps with families in Israel as well as in Palestine over the loss of loved ones; when Hanna Stobbe experiences the pain on both sides (she worked as a volunteer in Israel, studied in Beirut and married an Israeli).

Listening: This book makes a stand against the sin of know-it-allism, of

dogmatic partisanship, particularly in the German context – and included nuanced reflections on the relationship between the Shoah and contemporary injustice. The people who stand alongside those experiencing violence learn to listen to the narratives of others, to empathise and to think proactively.

Hope: How can one have hope in the face of the misery of killings and destruction?! It is astonishing how the book gives a voice to those who are suffering as bearers of hope. In particular, Christians from the stricken south of Lebanon live in hope with the awareness that God, in Jesus, entered directly into suffering, with the visions of the prophets and psalmists, and with Paul and his experience that God makes himself strong in his weakness.

Prof. Johannes Lähnemann



Claudia Rammelt, Rima Nasrallah (Eds.)

Wartorn Faith: Christian reflections on the conflicts in the Middle East after 7 October 2023, LIT Verlag Berlin 2026, 190 p

You can also download this book **free** of charge from:



https://metadata.lit-verlag.de/downloads/91721-8/9783643917218_p_060526_whKhDDz.pdf

Volume 142, Issue 2, September 2026

Publishers: Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools e. V. (EVS) in the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity e. V. (EMS)

Editor: Dr Uwe Gräbe (responsible under press law),
Judith Kubitscheck (Editor), Leonard H. Ayasse, Vogel-
sangstrasse 62 | 70197 Stuttgart
email: evs@ems-online.org | www.evs-online.org
Registered office of the association: Stuttgart
Translation: Chris Blowers

Layout: www.simone-struve.de | Simone Struve
Printed by: Druckerei Maier GmbH, Rottenburg
Circulation: 10,000 copies

Contact details for the Swiss Association for the Schneller Schools in the Middle East (SVS):
Rev. Ursus Waldmeier,
Rüt mattstrasse 13, CH-5004 Aarau

Donations account (postal):
CH62 0900 0000 4001 1277 8
Donation account (bank):
CH47 8080 8001 8975 0443 1

E: Mail: info@schnellerschulen.org
www.schnellerschulen.org

The Schneller Magazine is published three times a year. The subscription price is included in both the EVS membership fee.

”

**Surely goodness and
mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the
house of the
Lord forever.”**

Psalm 23:6



**Evangelische Mission
in Solidarität**

Evangelical Mission in Solidarity

The EVS is member of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity.

The Schneller Schools are dependent on your donations.
They would be delighted if you supported their work.

Donations to the EVS:

Evangelische Bank eG

IBAN: DE59 5206 04100 0000 4074 10

Endowment contributions to the Schneller Foundation:

Evangelische Bank eG

IBAN: DE09 5206 0410 0000 4074 37



**EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools**

Vogelsangstr. 62 | 70197 Stuttgart
Tel. (0711) 636 78-39

www.evs-online.org