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# SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



## AND WHO LOOKS AFTER THE PARENTS? AGEING IN THE MIDDLE EAST



**EVS** Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools

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Dear Reader,

for a change, the picture welcoming you on the cover page of this issue is not a child's face but that of a fine, old gentleman sitting in a Lebanese street café. What stories do you think he could tell us about his youth? I well remember Reverend (now Bishop) Ibrahim Azar's group of senior citizens who often sat together playing backgammon and cards under my office window in Jerusalem. Among the elderly gentlemen was one who always wore his best suit on days when he went out. Some time ago, at the breakfast room of the Moadieh Evangelical Center for elderly people in Beirut, a well-dressed elderly lady came over to me and asked in her best Oxford English: "Are you also attending the conference?" She was already suffering from dementia but she still knew that asking most foreign visitors to Beirut about "the conference" (whichever one it is) very often hits the nail on the head.



The generational question has long reached the Middle East. How do dynamic urban societies treat their elderly? How can people retain their dignity up to a ripe old age, even if the traditional union of the extended family no longer cares for them? There were many discussions on questions such as these when a small delegation from the Beirut residential centre recently met representatives from the Pflegestift Waiblingen, a nursing care foundation based in Waiblingen, Baden-Württemberg. This is the first time that an international partnership or network between two old people's nursing homes came about through the mediation of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). This issue offers you an insight into this project as well as into the living conditions of elderly people in several countries of the Middle East.

We received many letters and calls in response to the last Schneller Magazine on "Crises and opportunities in the Schneller history". The article on the Syrian Orphanage during the years of National Socialism unleashed a variety of different reactions. We were expecting this and so we have provided space for this discussion in the Letters to the Editor in this issue.

On behalf of the Editorial Team I wish you a blessed and restful summertime, and I hope a peaceful summer in the Middle East

Yours

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Uwe Gräbe". The script is cursive and fluid.

Uwe Gräbe

## FROM WHAT SPRINGS DO WE DRAW?

One of my hobbies is hiking. I'm always amazed at the quietness surrounding me. I concentrate on the path ahead and on my destination. This is how I flee from everyday drudgery and hectic. Other things become more important. I have time to enjoy nature and the creation.

Anyone setting off on a hike should know the rules and stick to them. Nonetheless, I find it helpful when a hiking guide reminds you of them before setting off. That's what our guide, a Bedouin, did on a hike from Dana to Petra in Jordan: we stay in the group; the slowest in the group sets the overall pace; we take no short-cuts in an area we know absolutely nothing about. And most important, we should take enough water with us and only drink it at the set breaks. We should ration the water among ourselves since there is no chance to refill our bottles on the long hiking route.

Water is rare and precious in the Jordanian desert. We realised this very dramatically during the course of the day. The higher the sun rose, the higher we climbed and the more exhausting it became to walk in the barren desert, and the greater our thirst became. We knew we had to ration water and that we still had hours of hard walking before us, but this made my mouth all the drier and my thirst all the more acute!

We longed for the times we could take a break. When a break finally came, it was an amazing feeling to quench our thirst in small sips. I remember one particular moment like this along the hike. It was at a particularly impressive moment when

we took a break on a hill overlooking the plain to the west. We had trudged laboriously up an old Bedouin path for hours and had climbed 2000 altitude metres in the scorching heat. All this took a back seat as I marvelled at the beauty of the panorama. Nonetheless, I was only able to enjoy this view of creation after I had stilled part of my thirst.

**"Then he said to me, ...To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life."**

*Watchword for the year 2018  
from Revelations 21:6*

John also gives a description of the heavenly Jerusalem in the Bible. However, the words in Revelations conceal deep human longings, despite all the mysticism. "...To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life."

Despite the experiences on that hike, I cannot say for certain that I really know what it is like to be thirsty. In 2010, the United Nations recognised the right to water as a human right. Nevertheless, millions of people die from insufficient water supplies in many parts of the world every year, mainly of them children. Over the past few months, even our brothers and sisters in Cape Town had to experience what it means when water is rationed. For us in Europe this situation is very hard

to imagine. Even more impressive are pictures of people in dangerous regions who are deprived of access to clean water. They queue up at tank lorries and taps and do not even have the guarantee that they will receive their daily ration of water in the end.

In Revelations, however, it's more about the thirst for water. It's about the thirst that is in every human, the thirst for life in all its facets. To quench this thirst, there seems to be almost unlimited offers in our modern age. There is even an industry that has sprouted up to cater for it. We gladly accept these offers and even allow ourselves to indulge in them. We invest in our lifelong dreams and hobbies and celebrate every event. Our life plans are very different.

At a very late stage in life, we ask ourselves about the source of life. What quenches our thirst? What are the springs from which we draw our strength? Often, these questions only crop up when we come to a crossroads in life or when crises govern our life. Then the question becomes even more urgent: What springs do I live from? "...To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life." God's spring water gushes forth and it doesn't cost anything, whether we draw from it or not. This is His offer to us.

*Kerstin Sommer, EVS Chair*

Photo: Kerstin Sommer



**Anyone hiking through the Jordanian desert must ration his water supply very carefully.**



## THE TRAGEDY OF THE ELDERLY

### What the crises in the Middle East mean for elderly people

The societies in the Middle East are generally regarded as young. Due to increasing life expectancy however, there are more and more elderly people who need looking after. At the same time, many families are leaving the region and starting a new life far away from their parents.

According to estimates by the United Nations, the percentage of people over 60 years old will exceed younger people by the year 2050 in nine countries of the Middle East (Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and Tunisia). Due to the high birth rates in the past decades, it is also estimated that the number of elderly people in the whole region will more than quadruple by 2050, from 22 millions in 2010 to 103 millions in 2050. Who will look after these people when everyday life is becoming more and more difficult? It's the traditional duty of the family, or more precisely the daughters and step-daughters. That's the distribution of roles

that has so far governed social life in the Middle East.

Now, more and more women are working, either because of economic necessity or for emancipation or other reasons. There's little time left for caring or nursing. On top of this comes the factor of emigration. Young men and women find work abroad and put down their roots there but their parents remain in their homelands. This is one of the consequences of the rapid changes brought

about by globalisation. At the same time, the nursing home option has not yet gained as much ground in the Middle East as in western countries. Firstly, there are fewer institutions. Secondly, sons and daughters still have to justify themselves very much more when they pass on the responsibility of looking after their parents to others.

But this is only one side of the coin of the subject of "Ageing in the Middle



Who asks about the needs of the elderly?

East". One thing that is almost entirely ignored in international reports are the impacts that crises and wars have on elderly people. It is often said that children in Syria are a lost generation. Justifiably, it is often bemoaned that hundreds and thousands of children have not been to school for years. But whoever asks what the war means for their grandparents? Everything they built up has been destroyed. At the same time, we know that there is no time left for them to build up something new. They will leave nothing behind for their children. The houses they built lie in ruins. Once flourishing businesses and companies are bankrupt. The land and soil which were passed on from one generation to the next for centuries had to be sold to finance their escape.

Those who had to go into exile in their old days will spend the last days of their lives in the vague hope of returning once more to Syria; to walk through the garden which they tended and looked after all those years; to walk through the street where they lived almost all their lives; to meet the people that were part of their everyday life. How many die in exile without fulfilling this dream even once?

In times of crisis, even less attention is paid to elderly people than to children and young people. Pointing out that they have already lived their lives, they often draw themselves the attention of aid workers to the next generation. The tragedy of elderly people in the Syrian war can be guessed at by the story of a woman who died in Beirut in 2014. She was an Armenian Christian and had lived her whole life in Kessab. The little town in northern Syria directly next to the Turkish border was founded by survivors of the genocide against Armenians a hundred years ago.

When Jihadist troops overran Kessab in the spring of 2014 and expelled all 6,000 inhabitants, the old inhabitants refused to leave the town. Among them was this elderly lady. She preferred to die in Kessab rather than be expelled again like her parents and grandparents, she said.

But the jihadists had other plans. They forced the 16 elderly people into a bus, told them they were seeing Kessab for the last time in their lives and took them to the other side of the border in Turkey. They dropped them in Vakifli, the last Armenian village at Musa Dagh, and left them to their fate. Three months later, relatives brought the old woman to Beirut where she died in an old people's home shortly afterwards. She never saw Kessab again.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

## IT'S ALL ABOUT WHAT'S SHARED IN COMMON

**When religious borders are no longer important in old age**

**Evangelical Christians in Lebanon are by far the smallest Christian minority. But of all things, it is one of the smallest churches that runs one of the few old age and nursing homes in the country: the Moadieh Center in Beirut.**

**T**he Evangelical Center for assisted living, named after the two founders Hilda and Jean Moadieh, is situated in the middle of the bustling district of Ras Beirut, not far from the famous Hamra shopping street and only a few steps away from the small but excellent Near East School of Theology. For the past five years, about 30 elderly persons have been living there in a kind of sheltered housing. Carers help them when dressing or personal hygiene becomes too much for them. And cooks make sure that meals are varied. "However, we can't look after residents who need intensive care," says Joyce Khouri Eid who manages the centre. "It's not like in Germany. We're just not

equipped to handle that." Joyce Khouri Eid knows the differences between the two countries. At the beginning of the year, she was in Germany together with Rev. Dr Habib Badr, Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut (NECB) which not only sponsors the Johann Ludwig Schneller School but also the Moadieh Center. Together they visited the Waiblingen nursing care foundation, a large nursing home for elderly people near Stuttgart, to initiate a partnership between the two institutions – the first of its kind, by the way. "It's impressive how elderly care is documented and financed in Germany," says Khouri Eid, who is a trained nurse. "In Lebanon there is next to no external regulations for care."

On the other hand, the Moadieh Center has something that probably no old people's home in Germany can offer: residents who come from many different cultures and denominations. Few of the residents belong to the Evangelical church. Instead many of the residents are Orthodox, Maronites, Shiites, Druze or Sunnites. All of them experienced the dreadful civil war in Lebanon (1975 to 1989) and some of them were even on different sides of the conflict. But for most of them, this is no longer an issue, says Joyce Khouri Eid. "When people argue, it's about other things than politics or religion." Many of them must certainly have had terrible experiences during the war. But few of them would talk about them. She can only remember a single case when the pain of the past broke out with one of the residents while they were all eating.



Photo: Moadieh Center

**Togetherness is fostered at the Moadieh Center.**



The Moadieh Center makes sure that all the residents get along with one another and that the identity and habits of each person are respected. For example, the meals are of course organised so that Muslims can observe Ramadan. Everyone has space in the prayer room to say their prayers in the manner they are accustomed to. Even the moments of joint contemplation which are regularly organised by NECB staff are observed so that each person can find himself or herself and nobody needs to feel obliged to do anything. "Some of our Muslim residents regularly take part in our Bible meetings," says Khouri Eid. "And one of them said recently that a lot is the same in Christianity as it is in Islam." Meanwhile, even the staff, many of whom are Muslim, love to sing along with the hymns.

The Moadieh Center is not only active inside its own four walls. When she took up this job five years ago, Joyce Khouri Eid started making contact with old people's homes of other religious groups. Meanwhile, besides the Evangelical Moadieh Center, the network consists of a Maronite, an Orthodox, a Roman Catholic, a Greek Catholic, a Druze, two Sunnite and a Shi'ite institution. The managers meet regularly, visit each other and exchange views about their work. Currently, the nine institutions are working on a joint Memorandum of Understanding which will one day become the basis for them to raise a common voice to the government about the needs and interests of elderly people.

And of all things, it was the representative of the smallest religious group who took the initiative to form this network. Perhaps this may have something to do with the fact that Evangelical Christians are the youngest and least known minor-

ity in Lebanese society. "Hardly anybody knows what 'Evangelical' means," says Khouri Eid. She usually gives a very general answer that they are Christians and saves herself and others any further details. Apparently, this vagueness is sometimes helpful to bring people from different communities and groups together.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*



**The beginning of a new partnership between the Waiblingen Pflegestift and the Moadieh Evangelical Center for the elderly in Beirut: (From left to right) Frank El-Banany, Head of the Waiblingen Care Foundation, Christina Kuhn, Senior Care Manageress, Joyce Khouri Eid, Head of the Moadieh Center, and Rev. Dr Habib Badr from the National Evangelical Church in Beirut**

## NOT THE END OF THE LINE BUT AN OASIS

### A home for people without a home

**At the Pelizäus Home in Alexandria (Egypt) four Catholic nurses look after 78 elderly and handicapped people. It is considered one of the best nursing homes in the country although it receives no support from the state.**

The impressive building with its splendid gardens was donated by Wilhelm Pelizäus in 1899. The businessman from Hildesheim had become rich from his trade with Egypt. He wanted to provide the people who had remained in Alexandria during their research or business trips with a dignified old age. At that time, there were many such people. Up until the 1950s, many nationalities lived in the port city on the Mediterranean: Greeks, Italians, Spaniards, English, French, Moroccans, Tunisians, Germans, Armenians, Jews and of course Egyptians. Side by side, they gave Alexandria its cosmopolitan flair that can now only be surmised in the works of the great novelists.

Foreigners who were unable to return to their home countries spent the last months and years of their lives at the Pelizäus Home. To this day, Catholic Sisters of Mercy of St Charles Borromée run the home. If you come from the airless traffic chaos of the metropolis of millions you will spontaneously take a deep breath of relief. The quietness and coolness here are a blessing. 78 old handicapped people live at the home which the Egyptian government has certified as the best of the 138 old people's homes in the country. The certificate hangs in the entrance. But the government does not support the home financially. This has its advantages

since otherwise the Egyptian state could impose demands in cases of doubt. The Pelizäus Home is therefore dependent on what the residents can pay. And on donations.

"Good morning, my dear," says Sister Batula to a young man in a wheelchair sitting in the large well-tended garden behind the house in the spring sun. His eyes are empty. Apparently, he doesn't hear her. She strokes his cheek gently and places her arm on his shoulders. "The man is Armenian. Once he was a doctor but then he became mentally ill," she says. "His mother died recently. Now he has nobody to look after him." His church covers his nursing expenses.

Mr Georges is also alone. He is a French teacher and lives in a large room with shelves full of books. The polite man is not old, neither is he handicapped in any way. However, he was unable to cope with loneliness any more after his mother died here at the home several years ago. He asked the sisters if he could move into a room in the Pelizäus Home and since then, he has been living on the first floor.

Not all residents live in single rooms. Many live in double rooms. Others have a bed in one of the large dormitories accommodating ten men or women. Mrs Amira has a single room. The daughter of the 94-year old died recently. "One son lives in Turkey, the other in Cairo. His wife is a little difficult", says Sister Christina who supervises the ward where Mrs Amira lives. A smile lights up the old woman's wrinkled face when the sister opens the door. The blind woman recognises who is

there by the person's voice. "That's nice. You've come to visit me," she says in her croaking voice. Sister Christina gives her a hug and fetches a bag full of sweets from the bedside table. Some small talk. Another hug. Then Sister Christina has to continue her duties. "Mrs Amira was born in Alexandria. Actually, she's Greek but she became a Muslim when she married an Egyptian," she says and adds that many Muslims were now living at the home. "Their relatives prefer to bring them to us because they say we sisters are honest and we do everything from our hearts here.

The last German resident died only a few weeks ago. She was married to an

Egyptian and had worked at the school of the Sisters of Mercy of St Charles Borromée for 40 years. "The family of her husband decided that she should be buried according to Islamic tradition. She would certainly not have wanted that." Sister Christina doesn't want to comment any further. She has to go to the ward kitchen and see whether everything is prepared for the evening meal. After that, she will be meeting up with her three fellow sisters in the chapel for evening prayers. Her day will start early next morning at five o'clock when she has to prepare breakfast and the medicines for her ward.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*



Two residents enjoying the spring sun in the courtyard.

## CHILDREN'S PAY-BACK DEBT AND RELIGIOUS DUTY

### The challenges of being old in Jordan

**We are still maintaining many societal practices and responsibilities nowadays towards the elderly in our Middle Eastern societies, still there have been changes in various aspects.**

**N**owadays we witness growing numbers of centres for the elderly in Jordan, both in private or church-sponsored facilities. Some elderly could hardly get the intensive attention needed at their respective homes, especially where special care has to be given since nowadays both spouses have to work in order to maintain the minimum standard of living for their household, thus leaving little time to give to the elderly at home.

From my experience, I have observed that many Jordanian families are still reluctant to send their dear old ones to any elderly care centre. This could be basi-

cally due to inherited Arabic culture that elderly care has a strong societal value as well as being a religious duty. It is a kind of pay-back debt that young people should return to their parents. Parents generally care for their children well past the time when the children reach their age of maturity compared to Germany, for example, and that endures their whole life through. A matter that makes parents worried for their children is that they get a proper education which is highly expensive, then find the proper job and income, manage the high costs of marriage and secure the finance for a house. Their care and responsibility even extend towards the grandchildren. In return, parents expect tender loving care at their children's private homes in old age.



Photo: Uwe Gräbe

It may not be Amman but Jerusalem: a group of elderly men playing cards.

**“In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap.”**

*(Psalm 92:14)*

In regard to interaction of different generations, there is a high respect for elderly generations. Jordan is exerting all efforts to modernize Jordan in a way that could be environmentally friendly to the elderly, though this could seem extremely difficult, because the infrastructure was not built for this dimension. The Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under the patronage of the King gives reason to be hopeful. Nowadays, building codes respect the needs of the elderly as well as the people with special needs. Thanks be to God that now, all Jordanians above the age of 60 years old have health insurance for public hospitals. But it will take us much time to reach a satisfactory level. The challenges for the elderly in the societies in the Middle East are great when it comes to the infrastructure, such as the lack of transportation, wheelchair ramps, rehabilitation centres or specialized diaconal ministries.

In reality we are all heading towards old age. A person in his old age is in need of special loving care and old-age friendly environment. A life with dignity is what is needed, whether in Germany or in Jordan or elsewhere in the world. We have a constant feeling that old age is a blessing from the Lord and is still useful if well invested.

In Jordan one can notice many people have already obtained earlier retirement age, though retirement age for women is

60 years and 65 years for men. At such ages they still have great potential of contribution to the society. Thus, voluntarily work could be invested in and cultural activities could be nourished.

At our Lutheran Church for example we have created the Community Ecumenical Centre “Al Khaimah” that also serves several elderly people who attend on a semi-regular basis. In the Evangelical spirit, we look after this age group and accompany them. Such a centre should be creative as well in creating extra space for socialization, entertainment and interactions. Last year we developed a new regular gathering named “Wednesday Cultural Saloon”. This activity brings around 13 persons together to talk and discuss a previously announced topic or subject. This is one of the ways to make life meaningful, fruitful and participative.

As a pastor I find it so interesting to draw close to the elderly and to learn from their accumulated experiences and to gain from their useful wisdom. In Jordan and the Arab World parents in old age are a duty to care for, to love and to serve. This emanates from our Arabic Christian and Islamic tradition, teaching us of “Doing good to them”.

*Samer Azar is Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Good Shepherd Church in Amman.*



## SECOND GRADER COLLECTS FOR SCHNELLER SCHOOL

**Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS).** The youngest supporter of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) comes from Lebanon. Micah Musa from Beirut had his birthday in February, so he asked his friends and relatives to make donations for the JLSS instead of buying him gifts for his birthday. He was able to raise LBP 477,000 (250 Euro) and US\$ 1,150 (940 Euro). The young boy writes this in a handwritten letter to the school: "Thank you for everything you do for the kids, and please tell them that me and my friends say hello to them and hope to see them soon."



Third-generation donor Micah Musa

In addition to the letter and the donation, Micah also sent lots of his toys to the children at the school. The toys went to boarding home boys who are the same age as Micah. We were absolutely thrilled about this, writes George Haddad on the school's website ([www.jlss.org](http://www.jlss.org)). "We would like to express our most sincere gratitude to Micah for his most wonderful kindness," writes the Director. "We congratulate the Musa family for transmitting their wonderful spirit of charity to the

third generation. This is something very special that they should be proud of."

Micah Musa's father and grandfather are the most loyal supporters of the JLSS in Lebanon for many years. His grandfather, Sami Musa, has been on the local governing board of the school for many years.

## EARNING THEIR OWN MONEY BY SEWING

**Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS).** At the end of January, ten Syrian women again celebrated the successful end of their three-month seamstress training at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS). Besides their certificates, the women received a sewing machine. They must all struggle along as single mothers in a neighbouring refugee camp. The JLSS team running the training course also celebrated with them. George Haddad, Director of the school, spoke a prayer and then thanked fashion designer Carmen Zino for her dedicated work instructing the sewing courses. The JLSS kitchen had baked a large cake for this occasion.

With their new sewing skills and their own sewing machines, the women are now able to earn a small income for themselves and their children. Many women from previous courses have meanwhile found a job or are earning a living as self-employed seamstresses.

The programme is supported by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS). At the graduation party the women thanked the sponsors for the financial aid.

## PRIZE MONEY FOR THE SCHNELLER SCHOOLS

**Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS/EVS).** The children at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon are delighted with the repairs to old play equipment and the purchase of new ones. Free play during class breaks and in the afternoons gives them moments of light-heartedness. The playgrounds on the site have finally been renovated from donations from Berenike Metzler, who donated part of the prize money that she received for her doctorate to Schneller work, and the financial support of the Stuttgart company of Trelleborg Sealing Solutions.



The playground below the girls' boarding home

## PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN LEBANON FACING CLOSURE

**Stuttgart (EVS).** In summer 2017, a national law placed private schools in Lebanon in financial trouble. The parliament decided that all teachers should receive 30 per cent more pay, backdated to the last two years. This also placed the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in great difficulties as it was clear that the JLSS, as opposed to most private schools, would not be able to finance the higher costs by demanding more school fees from parents. The governors of the JLSS therefore devised a master plan to secure the future of the school but it involved some very painful cuts in the day school. As a result, some of the teachers who had served the school for many years had to be dismissed and the 7th to 9th grades had to be closed, at least for this school year. The boarding home children in these age groups are currently attending public schools in the area (see Schneller Magazine 4/2017.)

The fact that the school would not have been capable of surviving without these painful cuts is shown by the announcement from the Maronite church (the church with the largest membership and strongest finances in Lebanon) that many of its private schools were facing closure. The Maronite Patriarch Bechara Rai warned about the “irreversible consequences” of the new school law. Rai said that the Patriarchy in Bkerké had received several reports of private school closures, especially in rural areas and in city suburbs. Other schools had already informed the families of their pupils that in future they would no longer be able to fulfil their educational responsibilities if the government did not step in to alleviate the

serious situation and provide the necessary funds in the current national budget to finance teacher salaries at private schools.

Rai remembers that requests for government support had come from both Christian and Islamic schools. About two thirds of the roughly million pupils in Lebanon attend private schools. Although public schools in Lebanon are free, they offer much poorer conditions for learning.

### THREE NEW VOLUNTEERS IN AMMAN

**Stuttgart/Amman (EMS/EVS).** Since the beginning of January, three ecumenical volunteers are again working at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman. Originally, Annika Knapmeyer, Lisann Mai and David Löw had travelled to Cameroon with the Ecumenical Volunteer Programme of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). However, due to the difficult political situation in the anglophone part of the country, they had had to break off their stay after only three months. Now they are helping out at the TSS.

All three are working at the boarding home in residential groups which are called “families” at the TSS. They are assisting educators in their daily work, helping children do their homework or playing with them. Two of them are also offering a type of special classes in the German language. “The work is very varied and is great fun most of the time,” says David Löw after the first few weeks there. What he found impressive, he says, was that children at the TSS took on responsibility at an early age; and then there was

the dedication with which many educators lived by the Schneller principle. For David Löw, the new start in Jordan is “in many respects a great opportunity and I will certainly take many experiences and impressions back with me to Germany.”

All three volunteers found the language barrier the greatest challenge. “Communication with the children hardly gets past small talk,” says Lisann Mai. But she also noticed that her Arabic was slowly improving. “I hope I’ll be able to have deeper talks with the girls soon.”



Lisann Mai, Annika Knapmeyer and David Löw help out at the boarding home of the Schneller school.

And Annika Knapmeyer is impressed by the openness of the girls towards her. “What makes me very happy is that the children took me into their group straight away and I have become part of the family. The amount of joy I get back every day is what’s so beautiful about my job.” She also really appreciates working together with the educator and admires her dedication. “She gets up early every morning to wake the children up and puts them to bed in the evening. She talks to the parents and is also a kind of surrogate mother. And she’s been doing that for the past nine years.” She doesn’t really know yet

what she will take back with her to Germany, says Annika Knapmeyer. "But I'll definitely take with me the Arabic I've learnt, a suitcase crammed with goodies and all the beautiful, moving, sad experiences from which I've learnt a lot. They'll stay with me for the rest of my life."

*For information about the Ecumenical Volunteer Programme, go to [www.ems-online.org/weltweit-aktiv/oeekumenisches-freiwilligenprogramm](http://www.ems-online.org/weltweit-aktiv/oeekumenisches-freiwilligenprogramm)*

## NOTE DOWN THE DATE IN YOUR DIARY

The General Meeting of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) will take place this year in Ditzingen on **Sunday, 11 November 2018**. That will be exactly 158 years to the day after the founding of the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem. Please see the September issue for more details.

The date has already been fixed for 2019: **Sunday, 3 November 2019**. The reason why this date has been announced so early is because the EVS has already won over the Bishop of Baden-Württemberg, Frank Otfried, to preach the sermon. However, the EVS is still looking for a congregation to invite the Association on that date. The EVS is dependent on the hospitality of church congregations to hold its annual festival and is unable to pay any rent for the venue. However, the Association can offer a special incentive for 2019 since the regional bishop will come and hold the sermon.

The EVS Secretariat (tel. +49 711 636 78-39) will be delighted to receive feedback from interested congregations in the Stuttgart region which are easy to reach by public transport.



## MUSICIANS WANTED!

### **Volunteers wanted for short-term contract at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School**

Are you a professional church musician or music teacher (still of working age or in retirement)? Are you interested in spending your holidays in one of the most beautiful regions of Lebanon and putting your skills to practical use? Do you enjoy awakening the love of music in children and young people? Can you imagine giving a concert in a rural area which has few cultural events to offer? Can you improvise and make yourself understood in English? Then you're just the right person for us!

With immediate effect the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon is offering short-term appointments to musicians. During the school year (October to June), you will spend four to six weeks at the JLSS. During this time, you will organise and produce a music project with pupils ranging from five to 14 years old and regularly play on the small historical organ on site (see Schneller Magazine no. 01/2018, page 18). If possible, you will also give a small public concert at the end of your stay.

We will organise your flight and travel health insurance for you. In return the JLSS offers you free accommodation and board during your stay as well as transportation to and from Beirut airport. Besides the organ, the JLSS also has a rich collection of wind instruments which are available for your project.

### **Have we aroused your interest?**

Then contact Reverend Uwe Gräbe, Executive Secretary of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools.

Tel.: +49 711 63678-37  
[graebe@ems-online.org](mailto:graebe@ems-online.org)





## FROM WITTEMBERG TO JERUSALEM

**Castle Church and Orphanage Chapel bear the same signature**

**Recent find in the archives: one of the architects of the Wittenberg Castle Church went to Jerusalem shortly after the church's inauguration. Not only did he build the Church of the Redeemer there but also the Orphanage Chapel.**

The first links between Wittenberg and Jerusalem for back to the 16th century. When the previous Castle Church was built in 1515, "Friedrich the Wise" started an extensive collection of relics which originated from the Holy Land and drew pilgrims from far and wide. Two years later, Martin Luther not only nailed his theses to the wooden door of this church, he also denounced the veneration of the relics there as idolatry. Nothing is left over from the door or the relics today. The church was completely burnt down to the ground in 1760 during the Seven Year War. To replace the burnt wooden door made famous by Luther's theses, the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV donated a thesis door cast in bronze on 10 November 1859 to commemorate the 375th anniversary of Luther's birth. Finally, 25 years later, Emperor Wilhelm II commissioned his architect Friedrich Adler to rebuild the church in neo-Gothic style. The Emperor wanted the new church to stand as a "Monument to the Reformation" in time for the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth in 1883.

At that time, there was already a new link to Jerusalem. The architect Friedrich Adler had taken on the planning of the German Church of the Redeemer on the

Muristan site in Jerusalem. In Wittenberg, Adler was ably backed during the construction of the Castle Church by his assistant Paul Groth, who would later go to Jerusalem and, in a manner of speaking, seal an architectural bond between the Wittenberg Castle Church, the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem and the chapel of the Syrian Orphanage.

Who was Paul Groth? Paul Ferdinand Groth, the son of ship's captain Johann Ferdinand Groth, was born in Neu-Wintershagen (now Grabienko, Poland) on 29 June 1859. There he attended primary school from the age of 7 to 14 years. In 1874, he was accepted to the Realgymnasium (grammar school) in Stolp (now Slupsk, Poland) where he stayed until Easter 1878. He switched to the Gymnasium (grammar school) in Danzig where



**The wall paintings in the sanctuary of the chapel in the Syrian Orphanage stem from the personal hand of architect Paul Groth.**

he passed his secondary school certificate in 1880. After leaving school, he studied civil engineering at the Technical University of Berlin where he met Friedrich Adler, his professor and mentor. After graduating on 6 July 1885, Groth was appointed government construction site supervisor.

Owing to his personal connection with Adler, who was in charge of reconstructing the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Groth was appointed to the Royal District Construction Inspectorate in Wittenberg. There after one year, he completed his master builder's examination and dedicated himself completely to rebuilding the Castle Church, the site of Martin Luther's grave. The Castle Church was re-inaugurated on Reformation Day, 31 October 1892.

Afterwards, Groth was requested by the board of trustees of the Jerusalem Foundation in Berlin to take over as construction manager of the Evangelical Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem. From September 1893 to 1899, he lived with his family in Jerusalem.

During excavation work for the foundations of the German Church of the Redeemer, he discovered vessels and coins from the time of the Jewish rebellion in the first and second centuries. This made the historical dating of the site possible in the first place. In fact, it was an archaeological find of great significance. Groth sent a very detailed report to the Jerusalem Foundation in Berlin. They were less interested in the copper coins and archaeological find than in the completion of the church's foundations. As a result, Groth kept the coins in his private collection.

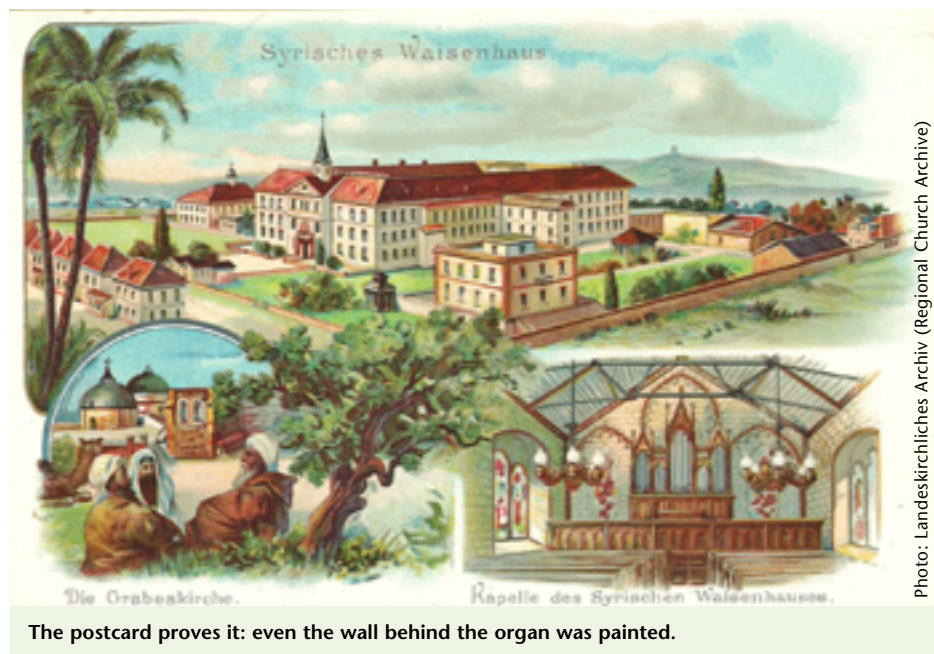


Photo: Landeskirchliches Archiv (Regional Church Archive)

The postcard proves it: even the wall behind the organ was painted.

At the same time as this task on the Muristan, Johann Ludwig Schneller, Director of the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem, was trying to win Paul Groth to build the chapel at the Syrian Orphanage. Groth took on this task and was even responsible for the interior painting work when the chapel was finished. Before the Church of the Redeemer was inaugurated, construction on the chapel of the Syrian Orphanage was completed.

The Church of the Redeemer was inaugurated by Emperor Wilhelm II and his wife Auguste Victoria on 31 October 1899. At that time, Groth acted as President of a branch of the German-Palestine association (Deutscher Verein zur Erforschung Palästinas) in Palestine.

He returned to Germany in 1899 and became district building inspector in Hanover. However, he never gave up his commitment to the Holy Land. At the request of the Jerusalem Association in Berlin, Groth started plans for a church for the Evangelical congregation in Jaffa. He finished 312 detailed drawings for which he declined any fee. After the inauguration in Jaffa in 1904, he also supervised the drafts for the interior painting which was completed in 1907. Groth moved from Hanover to Halberstadt where he worked until his retirement. Until the end of his life, he stayed in contact with the German community in Jerusalem. Paul Groth died at a very old age in the GDR in 1955.



Photo: Landeskirchliches Archiv (Regional Church Archive)

**Paul Ferdinand Groth and son in Wittenberg, 1891**

*Dr Jakob Eisler is scientific assistant at the regional church archive (Landeskirchliches Archiv) in Stuttgart. A few years ago, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools granted the historian an honorary membership for his services clarifying Schneller history. Eisler presented the results of his research on Paul Groth to the public at a scientific conference in Jerusalem in November 2017.*

## NEW LIFE IN OLD WALLS

### The site of the former Syrian Orphanage today

The Schneller compound ('the Syrian Orphanage') is one of the 110 most significant historic sites earmarked in the official "List of Monuments" (1988) for special preservation. Israeli architect, urban planner and historian Gil Gordon is consultant to the City of Jerusalem and to investors for the preservation of the building and the entire site.

In 2004, a modern master-plan for the site was approved after 10 years of public debate. Firstly, eight old German buildings are designated for preservation around a central park open to the public. Secondly, three new luxurious residential blocks are to be developed around this historic nucleus. And lastly, vast underground car parks will assure that no vehicles would enter the protected site. By the demand of the Municipality, all the his-

toric buildings were marked generally as "public buildings" under its supervision. It should be mentioned that the Schneller site today is in the middle of an Orthodox Jewish suburb and under heavy development pressures.

Contractors began developing the eastern part of the site five years ago. Today, 2/3 of the luxurious residential buildings have been completed and sold to rich Orthodox Jews from abroad. The rest is under construction. The central park has been completed and is open to the public. The western part of the site is waiting for its turn. With the German buildings things are going slower.

The main building with the belfry (1856-1910) is the symbol of the site. The preservation of this colossal building is estimated at circa 9 million \$. The winner from the public call for tenders is a reli-

Photo: Gil Gordon



The preservation costs of the main building are estimated at 9 million US dollars.



**Investor's advertisement: The new residential buildings behind the main building with the belfry (left below the map) are already two thirds occupied.**

gious Jewish French organization called "Kehilot Yisrael" which plans a huge Judaica Museum in it. They cleaned the building, fenced it, and now started the planning process and fund-raising. I found they respect the Schneller building a lot (as Jews!) and plan its preservation accordingly.

The House for the Blind (1903) is the most beautiful building on the site. The Municipality allocated it 6 years ago to the Department of religious education which turned it into a religious elementary school for girls ('Beit-Ya'avov'). It was ill-treated from the beginning: No preservation effort was made and there is no sign that the city engineer's office (under heavy political pressure) cared for it or that the preservation department controlled the situation. The Municipality lacks money chronically.

The Girls Dormitories (1936) is a great preservation success. This house contains 48(!) floral 'carpets' of Art Nouveau floor tiles and beautiful iron railings and metal work of the same style. It was allocated to the 'GUR Hassidic organization' and turned out to be a Talmud Tora (religious high school) for boys. This organization spent two full years working on the build-

ing – this time under supervision of the Municipality. As the preservation consultant of the building it is my estimation that the building will be the model for future projects in the site.

Five more old building are shut, fenced and empty, 'islands' in the middle of the site. They are waiting for a "savior" but so far entrepreneurs refrain from adapting them because of the high preservation costs.

*Dr Gil Gordon is inspector and consultant for preserving the buildings on the Schneller compound. In 2010, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools granted him an honorary membership for his services in preserving Schneller history. For further information go to [www.gordonarc.co.il](http://www.gordonarc.co.il)*



**The central park area is already open to the public.**





## Obituaries

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) takes leave of **Sami Habibi** who died at the age of 95 years. Habibi was the first Arab Director of the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman. Very soon after he took office, some traditionalist members of the Executive Committee in Germany expressed their reservations and doubts since he was not a clergyman. Habibi was a born director with a natural authority. He was extremely hearty towards the children but for his staff, he was an incorruptible boss who gave clear unmistakable instructions. Everyone was proud to have such a highly esteemed director. Habibi was not only held in high regard by the Jordanian society as he was a member of a well-known insurance company, he also sat on the high committee of financial advisers to the royal family. However, this meant that whenever the King called, he had to appear, even if he was in the middle of a meeting of the local Schneller board of governors. The high standing bestowed upon him by the King is no less astonishing since Habibi was a Palestinian and a Christian.

Habibi's clear instructions on work in the workshops and his ties to Jordanian industry quickly showed considerable success. The finances of the Schneller school also became more efficient and more transparent. He seldom intervened directly in the actual heart of the school, the boarding home. He enormously appreciated the very challenging work of the educators and immediately and

willingly put into practice a reduction in group size which arose from the work of education seminars by having two new seminar buildings constructed. Sometimes it seemed that the director was somewhat envious of the greater social closeness to the children and educators which members of the clergy had through their work at the school. When over three hundred thousand Palestinian refugees fled from Kuwait to Jordan during the Gulf war in 1991, among them more than eighty thousand schoolchildren, Habibi opened the doors of the Schneller school to them.

His social and political commitment started early on in his life. In 1960, he was appointed chairman of the refugee organisation for Palestinians by the World Council of Churches. The work of Sami Habibi (born in Haifa in 1922) as director of the TSS in Amman from 1984 to 1997 found recognition far beyond the borders of Jordan. He was awarded the German Federal Cross of Merit (first class) in 1995. In 1997, the Anglican Bishop Samir Kafity honoured him with the title of "Secular Canon at St Georges Cathedral in Jerusalem". The EVS will honour the memory of Sami Habibi with great respect.

*Reverend Ulrich Kadelbach was EVS Executive Secretary from 1986 to 1998.*

The following member of the friends of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools passed away to eternal rest:

**Ludwig Kreh, Giengen**

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We are delighted to receive feedback from our readers. Praise as well as criticism allow us to continue our work with the Schneller Magazine. However, we reserve the right to edit your letters for space reasons.

**In reply to Schneller Magazine 1/2018,  
“A delicate matter that requires research”**

It has always been the same. It was certainly so in the past and will continue to be so in future. The fact that people living in a foreign country feel a particularly close affinity to their homeland and act accordingly (pleasant example: the October Festivals all over the world). The propaganda of the National Socialists, which had beguiled a large part of the German population, was also spread unfiltered by the press and radio (short-wave) to Germans living abroad and was certainly met with special interest as there was a lack of criticism or opposition.

Although I have no direct personal experience of this, my grandparents and parents lived and worked at the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem. I was born there in 1938 and know many things from first hand. My father was recalled to Germany for military service in 1939. After the start of the war with England in 1940, as is generally known, the Syrian Orphanage was closed for a short time and the remaining Germans were interned with the Templars in Sarona, Jaffa. The living conditions there were very cramped. In 1941, 1942 and 1944 respectively, three groups totaling more than 400 Germans were exchanged for Jews in an exchange of prisoners of war at Atlit on the Turkish-Bulgar-

ian frontier where they spent many weeks in quarantine. This is how we came to Germany in 1942. Many others were deported to Australia.

*Bertfried Nuss, Augsburg*

As a member of the founding Schneller family, it seems to me almost impossible to say something about this article, trapped as I am between two millstones which show completely contrary interpretations of the history of the Syrian Orphanage. This is because of family loyalty on the one hand, but on the other hand this is also due to the family's links to National Socialist Germany of the 1930s as critically presented in the article. Which interpretation applies to me today, e.g. referring to the passage that it was “painfully obvious ... how many workers at the Syrian Orphanage were members of the Nazi party”, etc.?

Were they “Hitler’s willing helpers”, as the title of Goldhagen’s book suggests; were they beguiled by Nazi ideology right through to the bitter end, as is vividly stated in Huber’s “Promise me, child, that you will shoot yourself”? The “extensive and historically authentic research” which Uwe Gräbe calls for already exists in large numbers. There only remains for me to quote a further publication in conjunction with the Evangelical Church during the Third Reich: Tanja Hetzer’s “Deutsche Stunde”, which takes the then leading Evangelical theologian Paul Althaus as an example to describe the dilemmas which can hardly be judged ultimately neither then nor now. Personally, further and more detailed historical research will not finally result in a proven secure position from which I am able to judge. Instead, the general authority of the Bible becomes

clear to me in view of this final undecidability: "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged." (Matthew 7:1, NRSV)

This only makes it clearer what irresolvable difficulty there is to make decisions about our actions and our conduct today. It would explain exactly why the forces and constraints of the times apparently compelled us to depart from Kant's "categorical imperative". What responsibility can we assume today from the apparent contradictions? How will we judge our conduct in a hundred years' time, for example towards Israel's policy in Gaza and against the Palestinians? Maybe it will be condemned as horrific.

But one thing beyond a shadow of doubt for me as the great-grandson of Johannes Ludwig Schneller is that the Schnellers responsible at the Syrian Orphanage at the time did their personal utmost to the full extent of their responsibility. And it is our duty to do the same towards them to the best of our knowledge and belief!

*Christoph Schneller, Karlsruhe*

In addition to the numerous publications that already exist on this topic, the additional need for research which you identify should concentrate on continuing to defuse the unresolved field of tension in which the institutions and persons responsible found themselves at that time. It was a time infused with the spirit of the 1920s and 1930s, the special features of the political situation then and the mentality of Germans living abroad, in this case the Germans in Palestine. They were dependent for their survival on the constraints imposed upon them by the persons responsible and the institutions entrusted to

them, the personal convictions and inner motives of the players, provided there are reliable sources for this.

Let me quote you one example to illustrate this: you quoted a well-known memorandum in which the Syrian Orphanage is referred to as the "centre of German National Socialist nationality". Today, this is a shocking statement if no explanation is given of the background. It only becomes interesting for the historian when the statement is placed in context as follows: The memorandum was prepared in view of the concern of securing the property rights to the Syrian Orphanage (SO) in the future. In a letter to Ernst Schneller dated 30 March 1943, Ludwig Schneller pointed out the risk of confiscation of church property of all kinds – buildings, plots of land and capital – by the National Socialist state. There was a possibility that "the men in charge are also thinking of expropriating the property of the SO ... in Germany and Palestine". To avert this risk, the Executive Committee decided to request Ernst Schneller to draft two documents on the cultural and political significance of the work of the SO. The papers should be at hand, were the Nazi leadership to undertake any concrete steps towards expropriation.

(...) Two years before the end, the Executive Committee at the time was still hoping to continue the work of the SO after the war. The memorandum contains no affirmation or statements regarding National Socialist ideology; in the language of the time, they describe the services of the Orphanage in Jerusalem and the significance of its work for National Socialist Germany.

(...) What seems to me important in the

interests of serious historical research is embedding events in context and refraining from mentioning incidents for which there are no reliable sources.

*Dr Martin Schneller, Zlan (Austria)*

In the last few years, I have dealt intensively with the relationship between mission and National Socialism and written about this in detail in my book “Kirche in Bewegung. Die Geschichte der evangelischen Mission in Bayern” (Erlangen 2014). National Socialism found many adherents, not only in Palestine but also among the Neuendettelsau missionaries in New Guinea. A local group of the NSDAP was founded in Finschhafen in 1937 and the majority of missionaries and their wives became members of the NSDAP. When the German Consul Walter Hellenthal came on a visit from Sydney, swastika flags were flying and the Mission Muschel band performed the Horst Wessel song. The missionaries requested him to support their appeal for a relaxation of the ban on assemblies in Germany with the government in Berlin. The majority of missionaries were deported to Australia at the start of World War II and later lived with their families at the Tatura camp together with the Germans in Palestine. In his book “Laß dein Brot übers Wasser fahren...” (Treuchtlingen 1996, page 96) Wilhelm Fugmann reports about the funeral ceremony for Adolf Hitler: “The song ‘Guten Kameraden’ was sung and an Evangelical pastor held a commemorative speech for Adolf Hitler based on the passage of John 15:13 “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” According to information I have received from former missionary children, the pastor in question was in fact Hermann Schneller. This is

confirmed especially by Rev. (ret.) Dr Hermann Reiner who was deported with his mother Rosa from New Guinea to Australia in 1941. His mother attended the worship service and was greatly outraged at the sermon delivered by Hermann Schneller.

In a similar way to the Germans in Palestine, the Neuendettelsau missionaries were a long way from Germany and suffered under the rule of the English or Australians. For this reason, they hoped that National Socialism would improve their working conditions. Tatura was regarded as a “Nazi camp” which housed many “Reich loyalists”. There until 1945, they celebrated the national public holidays when the party comrades wore their party metals, waved swastika flags and put up pictures of Hitler. Although there were no party meetings, there were comradeship evenings and HY and BDM groups where the members turned up in uniform. There was also a local group of the NSDAP in Moshi, in what is now Tanzania. Its members were mainly co-workers of the Leipzig Mission.

Most German mission societies saw their chance in National Socialism to win back the population to the faith and fight against Bolshevism and atheism. This was also the case with pietistic missions such as the Liebenzell Mission which was recently the subject of a scientific study by Helmut Egelkraut (Helmut Egelkraut, “Die Liebenzeller Mission und der Nationalsozialismus” LIT Publishers 2nd Edition 2016). For this reason, it would be worthwhile to start a similar study of this part of Syrian Orphanage history.

*Dr Hermann Vorländer, Neuendettelsau*

Thank you very much for the excellent balanced article by Uwe Gräbe about the review of the Nazi period. Referring to the swastika flags in the pictures, it should be pointed out that they were the official national flags after 1933 and replaced the black/red/gold of the Weimar Republic and the black/white/red flags which those loyal to the Emperor still used. So, they were not only the party flag of the Nazis. For example, one could interpret a swastika flag flying in a picture which a five-year old shows me in kindergarten like this: even children of pre-school age were educated as Nazis. The picture would then be slanted or incomplete. One year later, our teacher at school was surprised that I didn't know how to greet others in Germany, namely with a Hitler Salute. None of my classmates didn't know.

Otherwise, in the late 1930s, Hermann Schneller took on a colleague as a co-worker at the Syrian Orphanage. The Regional Church had dropped this colleague because he had beliefs that were too left-wing and in addition he had Jewish relatives. This fact should certainly have been reported to the local Nazi group.

*Dr Hartmut Brenner, Heidelberg*

I was positively surprised by the article written by Dr Uwe Gräbe "A delicate matter which requires research" in the 1/2018 issue and the announcement that further study is planned. My own publications on the anti-Semitism of Ludwig Schneller and his nephews also have this aim. Now I hope that my contributions not only provide the necessary stimulus but also lead to many more stimuli.

*Udo Hombach, Köln*

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Be faithful until death, and I will give you  
the crown of life.

Revelations 2:10



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