

4/2015

# SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



**TOMORROW'S PASTORS AND PRIESTS**  
THEOLOGY STUDENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST



**EVS Evangelical Association**  
for the Schneller Schools

<b>Contemplation: The New Birth of Life</b>	2
---	---

## **TOMORROW'S PASTORS AND PRIESTS**

<b>The path to the ministry in the Middle East</b> How does one become a pastor today in the Near East?	4
<b>Between the fronts</b> A theology student from Syria tells her story	7
<b>Seeing one's situation with different eyes</b> Looking back at an academic year in Beirut	9
<b>Go or stay and the question of martyrdom</b> A visit to the Maronite Seminary in Ghazir	12
<b>Where life is lived</b> How the upheavals are changing the study of theology in Cairo	15

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

<b>What children need to live</b> Advanced training course for educators at the JLSS	18
<b>When „small things“ become important</b> Reports from volunteers at the Schneller school in Amman	20
<b>Schneller tombstone restored</b> Rehabilitation of damaged tombstones in the old cemetery of Mount Zion	22
<b>Reformation on the world-wide horizon</b> 5th International Consultation of SiMO and N.E.S.T. in Beirut	24
<b>From Madurai to the West of Stuttgart</b> New member of the EMS Secretariat staff: Dr. Kerstin Neumann	27

<b>Media</b>	28
--------------	----

<b>Imprint</b>	29
----------------	----

Dear Readers,

Good news from the Middle East has become very rare. Sometimes threatening scenes in the immediate neighbourhood lie heavy on the shoulders of our local partners. A lot of creativity and energy is smothered before it has a chance to sprout. In Jordan uncertainty still reigns on the appointment of a new director to the Theodor Schneller School. It was extremely difficult to achieve any developments at the school recently. And at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon the question remains what education will look like in future. The future of our project in Syria is uncertain. And in Israel and Palestine the freedom of movement of ecumenical companions, who are also sent by the EMS among other organisations, is gradually being eroded as a result of targeted threats.



However we dared to speak of hope in our last issue. This was gratefully received by our many readers. This hope will now materialise in this issue. They still exist: young men and women in the Middle East who opt for studying theology and assume responsibility for their churches. Those who set off on this path know that a post as minister in this region does not necessarily have any privileges attached to it. In many cases it is a Calvary at the side of hard fought-over congregations. But young people still set off on this path, fully aware of what they are letting themselves in for. We would like to address this topic in this issue.

As part of the Schneller family we give our support to these people. In view of the setbacks, we should not give up at all. Instead we should be grateful that we have enjoyed a permanent place in the Middle East for the past 155 years – and will start with reconstruction side by side with our brothers and sisters there as soon as the first opportunity presents itself.

On behalf of the editorial team I wish you a blessed Advent time, a Merry Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Uwe Gräbe". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Uwe Gräbe

## THE NEW BIRTH OF LIFE

**M**erry Christmas! Christmas is a joyful season and a powerful symbol of peace that we hope will come in the future. However, celebrating Christmas has a much deeper sense than remembering Jesus' birthday and surely has a connotation beyond the seasonal sales. Christmas is about faith in the Saviour and about the new life he brought to mankind. It is about Jesus Christ himself, the guarantor of our humanity.

As you may realise, we do not know exactly when Jesus was born. Luke 2:1 says about the time of Jesus' birth, "in those days". Which days? Was it in summer time, as Christmas is usually celebrated in the southern hemisphere like Australia? Or in winter, like the rest of the world celebrates? Or was it in spring time when registration of all people and travelling would be made possible as Caesar Augustus ordered for his census and taxes? The Gospel does not specify a day or a year of Jesus' birth.

The church historians do, however. Church historians in the 4th century decided that the 25th of December was the date of Jesus' birth. Before that, Christmas was celebrated alongside with Epiphany (appearance) on the 6th of January. This made sense since Christmas was a time of God's manifestation to people. Yet, God appeared on the cross and on the occasion of Jesus' resurrection (the Easter Event). This is why Christians in the Middle East call Christmas the "little Feast", while Easter is the "big Feast". You might have also seen the infant Jesus in many nativity icons wrapped in a shroud and his manger like a grave.

In Gal 4:4-5 the Bible says, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." This means that the Bible is not concerned about the time when Jesus was born but about the reality of Jesus' union with humanity. He became one of us, pitching his tent among us. Christ is born at all times, in every moment and era. In other words, the Gospel wanted us to exist and be born in faith rather than merely in history.

Therefore, the essence of Christmas is about our encounter with Christ and about God's meeting with people. God is near to the extent that He took our flesh and blood. He is in complete adherence with mankind. Therefore, Christmas sparks an incredible joy and hope in our hearts, makes us remain in His presence and desire nothing other than His company. Christmas without this meaning would be transient, though a cheerful entertainment that would lead most probably to exhaustion.

We are not alone. The Saviour is with us. God is with us not to oppose the other, but to be near him/her, through our solidarity and encounter with the "little" and afflicted ones. Since Christ is with us, so we are with the other. Christ would remain hidden in Scripture, or in heaven, or concealed in churches as long as He is not born in human hearts. Too many lives have been shattered by the conflicts in our region. Wars humiliate and hurt so many lives. The spiral of violence, suffering and tragedy are in the world, particularly in



Photo: WikiCommons

This Cretan Christmas icon from the second half of the 15th century shows the Baby Jesus wrapped in a shroud.

the Middle East. If we do not show the nearness of Christ, peace will remain concealed.

May the Baby Jesus bring hope and peace to all. Let us never lose courage and have faith in Him to encounter the displaced and the needy. Let us allow our hearts to be touched and warmed by the tenderness of God's love. We need His caress. And remember that Jesus is born in every place where humans love and share their lives. Let indifference turn into intimacy and rejection into hospitality, so we may really be at Christmas and experience the new birth of life.

*Nabil Mamarbashi is pastor of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut.*

## THE PATH TO THE MINISTRY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

### How does one become a pastor today in the Near East?

**The Near East School of Theology is an institution that is today an interdenominational seminary owned and run by churches from the three historic traditions: Reformed, Anglican and Lutheran. Those who study there are normally sent by their church. This has advantages but also creates special challenges.**

**N**.E.S.T. was originally founded by American Presbyterian missionaries and the concept of theological education is still governed by the American Presbyterian notion of preparation for the ministry. To understand how a seminary like N.E.S.T. functions and how students are trained, it is important to know something about the original north-eastern American Protestant idea of pastoral training. Before the establishment of seminaries proper in the late 18th century, training of candidates for the ministry used to take place in the study rooms of the senior pastor in a congregation. One or more candidates would accompany the senior minister on his pastoral visits, assist in worship and attend all pastoral functions, but at the same time they would be studying the Bible, church history, doctrines, etc. It was a combination of theory and practice led by one man – the senior pastor, a kind of ministerial apprenticeship. Obviously, the students in question would be members of that congregation or another - they had to belong to a congregation, and so were being prepared to serve a congregation.

When theological seminaries were founded, they actually took over the tasks

that the senior minister did in his study, but the practical part continued to be done in the congregation and under supervision. The seminary became the “academic” setting. Life at the seminary did include worship, but its centre was not worship. It was expected that students would bring “true piety”, a prerequisite for their being in the seminary. Their piety was nourished there to a certain extent, but the proper place for nurturing piety remained the congregation to which the students belonged and to which they continued to be related. Once the academic studies were completed, the congregation in question would normally ordain its students.

### In the service of the churches

This model still underlies the concept of theological education along which N.E.S.T. operates. The Seminary was set up to serve the local Protestant churches, and so the churches were/are expected to be the main suppliers of students. A specific congregation in a larger church body recommends, through its pastor or church council, a certain individual for theological studies after the pastor had detected “evidence of piety and calling” in an individual, and so encourages and supports that person for a deeper commitment to serving the church.

It is very important to underline that the overwhelming majority of students over the years have come through this process. They are sent by a church; they do not come on their own to study theology and then apply to a congregation or a larger church body for a pastoral position. This means that once a person is



Squeezed in among the motley houses in the Beirut district of Hamra: N.E.S.T.

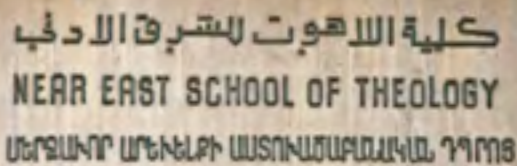
adopted as a candidate for the ministry, the church has effectively committed itself to teaching him or her, covering all expenses, and guaranteeing a ministerial position after graduation.

Throughout the course of theological studies at the Seminary, the candidates' church is constantly in touch with its candidates – accompanying, guiding, and supervising their “field work” (part-time church work at weekends and in summer). Churches differ in their policies on when ordination can take place, but all agree that a seminary degree is a pre-requisite for ordination.

The system described above clearly means that a seminary like N.E.S.T. is

mainly dependent on the supporting churches to provide it with students. Thus, when the churches do not have vacancies to fill in pastoral positions, or when they go through financial difficulties and it becomes too much of a financial burden to support a certain number of candidates for the ministry, or to make a life-long employment commitment to them, student numbers at N.E.S.T. drop significantly. Another important reason for the shortage of students, but also for the low standards of candidates, is that congregations and churches often do not find it easy to “recruit” candidates for the ministry. A young man or woman in a congregation has to be inspired by someone in that church to be attracted to a deeper form of

Photo: Katja Buck



كلية اللاهوت للشرق الادب  
NEAR EAST SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
ԱՄԵՐԻԿԱՆ ԱՐԽԻԵՍԻՍԻ ԱՍՏՈՒԱՄԻԱԲԱՆԱԿԱՆ ԴԻՐՈՑ

Title of N.E.S.T. in Arabic, English and Armenian

spiritual life and church service; this is often lacking

Add to that, a career in the church in the Near East of today is neither economically nor socially attractive or satisfying. It is well known that salaries in the churches in the Near East are among the lowest. “Theology” is one of the worst paid jobs! Socially, a career in the church is looked down upon by most people in society these days; it is considered to be a refuge or way out for those who could not make it elsewhere. Many parents immediately try to dissuade their children from pursuing a career in the church; it is not a socially prestigious career.

### Theology is a poorly paid job

What happens at the Seminary? Normally, students come to N.E.S.T. from conservative backgrounds – both socially and religiously. Usually, committed young men and women expect that going to a seminary would strengthen their faith, enhance their religious zeal, confirm and deepen them in knowledge of the Bible and Christian doctrines, and provide them with the necessary skills to do all that a pastor needs to learn and do. Soon after embarking on their biblical, historical and theological studies they experience a certain alienation. Their “Sunday School” and “Youth Group” convictions are shaken. They are

exposed to new ways of looking at and understanding the Bible and new perspectives on the history of the church and its doctrines. They come to learn about other ways of being an Evangelical

or Protestant Christian besides their own way, and they are exposed to other non-Protestant “legitimate” ways of being a Christian. N.E.S.T. is an ecumenically oriented and committed Seminary. Alienation, crisis, and disorientation are all part of the experience at the Seminary. Eventually most students come to terms with it in some way or another.

The success of theological education at a place like N.E.S.T. that still operates along the model of ministerial preparation in close connection with a church very much depends on a healthy, positive and interactive relation between church and seminary. However, the “success” of a seminary education is mainly dependent on the spiritual and personal maturity and commitment of the candidate, as well as his/her intellectual abilities. N.E.S.T. is a seminary that works best with “pre-given material”. The better the quality of the material, the better the result.

*Dr. George Sabra is President of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut and has worked as a theological teacher for 28 years*



# BETWEEN THE FRONTS

**A Syrian theology student tells her story.**

**Liza Titizian avoids everything that could be interpreted as an exaggeration. Nonetheless her story answers many current questions posed by Christians in the Middle East. The 37 year old has been studying for a master in theology at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut since February 2014.**

A few weeks after she started her courses, Liza Titizian received terrible news from her home town of Kasab. On 21 March 2014, militiamen from the Nusra Front, the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, pushed into the town in the extreme north-west of Syria. They had come over the Turkish border which was only a few kilometres away and had driven out all 2,500 inhabitants. During the battles two people were killed and many were wounded, among them Liza's cousin.

Nobody knew why the rebels selected Kasab of all places. In the past, the small town with its many pinewoods in the mountains above the Mediterranean coast was mainly popular with tourists who came to enjoy the fresher climate in summer. The inhabitants are all Christian, mainly with Armenian roots. After the genocide a hundred years ago, many of the survivors had come to the place. Kasab became a "Little Armenia", says Liza Titizian, whose name also reveals her Armenian heritage. "Armenia is our home country. After the genocide, Kasab became our new home," she says.

But the Nusra Front had now placed this home in jeopardy. Although the

Syrian army won back the town four months later, the occupants had destroyed all the churches, eradicated all Christian symbols and left behind a clear threat. "We came to slaughter you," was the message they wrote on house walls. Only 250 displaced families returned. Liza's family was one of them. "Psychologically they devastated us really badly," she said in few words and refused to speak any more about how she had coped with the issue in the relative safety of Beirut.

The Armenian Christian had come at the insistence of George Sabra, Rector at N.E.S.T. He knew her from her time when she was studying for her Bachelor's degree between 2003 and 2007. After she received her degree, she returned to Kasab and started teaching religion at the Armenian Protestant school. She did youth work and led the children's worship in her parish. But the number of pupils declined year after year. The wave of migrating Christians leaving Syria had already started. Classes had to close and Liza finally gave in her notice. "There are not many of us Protestants and I had the impression that my work was no longer really efficient." But she stayed on in Kasab and earned her living by giving private English lessons

George Sabra advised the intelligent woman many times to continue her theological studies. Two years ago, she then enrolled on the Master's degree course. And if everything goes to plan, she can earn her degree in one year's time. As opposed to her male colleagues, her church will not offer her a ministry after her graduation. Just like most of the other



Photo: Katja Buck

**Education empowers people, says Liza Titizian.**

later share her experience with others. “For me, theology is broadening one’s horizons.”

She has no idea yet whether she will return to Kasab. Originally she had thought about leaving the region completely. But George Sabra had instilled in her the idea of studying librarianship on the side. In that case her present theology course would not merely serve its own purpose. Although Liza is a bit apprehensive of the burden of studying for two degrees at the same time, but the prospect of working in the field of education is quite interesting for her. “Education empowers people and makes societies grow.”

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

Evangelical churches in the Middle East, the Evangelical Armenian Church has not yet ordained any women and therefore they do not receive a scholarship. Liza’s studies are financed by foreign sponsors. “I am studying of my own free will,” says Liza tersely, and then adds that the male ministerial candidates had actually made sure of everything before they had started their studies. A colleague had recently returned to Kasab and was now working as pastor there. “We attend the same courses. We are equals. But when it comes to ordination, we are not.” Theologically speaking, nobody in her church has a problem with ordaining women pastors, but no-one wants to put it into practice. “I don’t want to cause a revolution or criticise my church. But I would like to at least discuss the issue,” says Liza calmly. “I’m not studying to make money afterwards.” She wanted to know more about God and

# SEEING ONE'S SITUATION WITH DIFFERENT EYES

## Looking back at an academic year in Beirut

**Learning about other religions, churches and countries is one thing. Personal experience is quite another. Spending an academic year in Lebanon changes one's viewpoint of one's own country and society. This is what Verena Urban discovered.**

What shocked me most about myself after my study year in Beirut was how much my personal perception of violence, war, need, misery and danger had changed. When we arrived in Lebanon in September 2013, we couldn't believe it when a young Syrian student we had met at the students' residence returned to Damascus because courses at the university were starting there. We just couldn't understand why someone from a peaceful country would want to return to a war-stricken country. Nine months, nine attacks on Lebanese territory and several encounters with the afflicted later, violence, danger and war had faded in our minds to something almost like everyday background noise. We had come to terms with it and adapted. This is probably a purely natural survival strategy. Nonetheless I was astonished how easily and gradually this process had occurred in me. This is not the way it should be. People should not have to come to terms with war, terror, chaos, need, misery and political standstill.

Many of our Lebanese and Syrian friends see no viable future for themselves in the region. There are some who ignore the chaos around them and do "their thing", while others try to emigrate, to the USA, Europe or Canada. When I asked

a young Lebanese man why he was not politically or socially engaged so that he could try to make his own small contribution towards a better future in his country, he answered: "Why me? What has my country done for me? I don't owe this country anything."

When I returned to Germany, I tried to look at my society as a whole from the outside and I asked myself what makes our society what it is and what my role in society was. For many years, I had complained when I had had to wait a little longer at a government office; I had riled against what I considered to be the unnecessary sovereignty of the federal states in German school policy; and I had poked fun at rabbit breeding associations and accordion orchestras. After a year in Lebanon, all these things and many more facets in a society have become what I can safely say that's where I want to live and that I want to do something for this society! In fact I was able to definitely say what my country and this society have allowed me to achieve: an extremely good school education and a university education financed by the scholarship system (Bafög), for example. My country gives me more than just a warm feeling of home, it also gives me a fundamental feeling of safety on which I can build my life.

While I was writing this report, I was preparing for my oral state examination in Evangelical theology. The subjects I had chosen were totally different from those of my fellow students: "Social and aesthetic theories of justice", "Interfaith learning" and "Islam in the Middle East".

Photo: Katja Buck



Part of the SiMO programme is also to discover Lebanon. Verena Urban and her fellow student in the ruins of Tyros, in the background the modern city.

The year in Lebanon had certainly changed me. Now while I was preparing for these exams, I realised why I had chosen to study theology! As the great theologian Paul Tillich had once said, I want to deal with the things that definitely concern us!

As I sat day by day in libraries, our country and my society is facing “the greatest challenge since the post-war period”, as the media often says. What I read in my examination texts and what I experienced in Lebanon helped me to make my own assessment of the situation: the success of our society is dependent on whether we manage to find understanding for other people who are foreign or different from ourselves; whether we manage to avoid making images of foreigners into images of enemies; how we deal with fears that encroach upon us from all sides; whether we can resolve these fears with the knowledge and the exchange of information in authentic encounters and whether we can learn to live with the

remaining differences afterwards. Learning to live with people who are and think differently is a challenge for every one of us.

Dealing with justice theoreticians has taught me one thing: no matter how much we strive as people, there is no such thing as a perfect society which is just for everyone. But this knowledge does not mean we need to throw in the towel right from the start! Quite the opposite! As citizens of this country, we can and must join together and stand up for a just and liveable society, accept our responsibility even if we are repeatedly confronted with the experiences of failure.

My experience in Lebanon with a foreign culture, religion and in particular a disillusioned young generation has made one thing clear to me: that a society is not a self-service shop in any way. Our affluence, stability and peaceful everyday life under law and order should not be taken for granted. I am thankful that I am allowed to live in this country. It moti-



Photo: Urban

Verena Urban on the right with a fellow Canadian student in Sidon.

vates me to want to take part in future in keeping this society one that is liveable for all its members.

*Verena Urban studied in Beirut in 2013/2014.*

## INFORMATION



### SiMO

*The Study Programme in the Middle East (SiMO) allows students to spend a year at the Near East School of Theology (N.E.S.T.) in Beirut. Students learn about the churches in the Middle East, acquire basic knowledge about Islam and are confronted with the opportunities and risks of intercultural and interfaith dialogue. SiMO is one of the few possibilities for students from Germany to learn about the diversity of churches in the Middle East. In the past few years, nearly all the chairs to do with Christianity in the East have disappeared from German universities.*

**Date for final enrolments for the 2016/2017 academic year is 10 December 2015.**

*Contact the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) for more information and enrolment forms:*

[www.ems-online.org](http://www.ems-online.org)

*The circle of N.E.S.T. friends can provide you with contacts to former SiMO students. The circle of friends is a network of alumni who keep in contact with N.E.S.T. and have regular meetings to discuss topics connected with Christianity in the Middle East.*

[www.freunde-der-nest.de](http://www.freunde-der-nest.de)

*„Reformation on the world-wide horizon“ is the theme of the 5th International Consultation between N.E.S.T. and SiMO taking place in Beirut at the end of June 2016. See page 26 for the invitation and more details.*

## GO OR STAY AND THE QUESTION OF MARTYRDOM

### A visit to the Maronite Seminary in Ghazir

It is a steep path up to the Seminary in Ghazir. The ancient respected institution where the Maronite Church trains its priests stands high up in the mountains above Jounieh. The road winds up the mountain from the coast in innumerable curves until the large entrance gate suddenly appears in the middle of a hair-pin bend. After the gate, the only way is to continue on foot. After you have climbed all the steps of the wide stairway, you first have to catch your breath.

For the 152 young men who currently live there, this part was probably the easiest along their path to the Seminary. Preparation for the ministry lasts seven years. During this time, the seminarians live as in monastery. The day is organised into hourly prayers, and life together is structured by clear duties and rigid hierarchies. Whoever opts for the career as priest must know why he has chosen this path. "There are no rational reasons to explain a calling," says Alain Boulos, who has been at the Seminary for the past five years. Before, the 44 year old had led quite a different life. He was head of an international publishing company, had a good income and lived for several years in England. He was married and had two children aged 17 and 8. In the Maronite Church, priests are allowed to marry. "It is a passion for the one who can give my life the greatest sense," explains Alain about his decision which had dire consequences for his small family. His wife and children have to make do with the money which the mother earns as a sec-



retary. "You lose on the materialistic side", says the father, "but you also receive a lot in return." The family is supported by friends. Private people pay for the children's school fees, for example. These People are touched by the fact that Alain Boulos is following his calling. "We experience a kind of solidarity in faith as a family," he says and adds he was very happy that his wife and children had supported his decision.

On the other hand, the parents of Edgar El-Tansi still have difficulty in accepting that their youngest son wants to become a priest. When the young 26 year old

From left to right: The three seminarians Cherbel, Edgar and Alain on the far right with a priest in the Seminary chapel.



informed them of his decision a few years ago, they were shocked. The young man had just graduated from his studies in business administration and the parents saw him in a career in the free economy. "They only gave me their blessing with enormous bitterness," says Edgar. He is pre-occupied by the fact that so many Christians had given up hope of a future in the region. As a priest, he should ask himself the question how he could motivate people to stay on despite all the danger and lack of prospects. "Whoever gives up, takes the first step towards death," he says. The opposite conclusion would mean that staying on meant staying alive.

Apparently, the 26 year old had contemplated this question long ago.

### Go or stay?

Exactly like Cherbel Kharrat, his fellow seminarist. "I know it will not be easy for me if my family leaves Lebanon. But I will stay on." The 29 year old led a normal life as agricultural engineer before he joined the Seminary. Four years ago, he had to take the greatest decision to give a deeper meaning to his life. "My parents were not surprised when I told them of my decision to become a priest. They and my three brothers and sisters all gave me their support." This did not necessarily make things any easier for him. "Expectations just make the responsibility even greater," says the young man who comes from Bikfaya, a town in the Lebanese mountains where Maronite Christians form the majority.

Maronites are the oldest religious community in Lebanon. Their church goes back to Maron the Monk who lived in the 5th century. Since 1445, it has been united with the Roman Catholic Church. Today, there are six million Maronites world-wide. About one million still live in Lebanon and make up about one third of the country's population. As the largest Christian community there, they appoint the country's president according to the Constitution. Otherwise, the Maronites are also strongly represented politically and have long been involved in the country's future for a long time. You must surely have heard of the Christian militia who attempted to safeguard their interests during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1989).

The Rector of the Seminary in Ghazir knows this part of history only too well.



Photo: Katja Buck

**Monsignore Issam Abi Khalil, Rector of the Seminary, was formerly an architect.**

He himself had fought for four long years in the ranks of the militia, admits Monsignore Issam Abi Khalil openly and adds as an explanation that at that time he had not yet been a priest. Originally he had worked as an architect. "I lost my only sister and had to look on as many young people died for no reason at all." At some time or other, he had to face up to the meaning of it all. After a long inner struggle, he decided to become a priest. "The war in Lebanon has taught us a lot," he says.

Monsignore Issam has been Rector of the Seminary in Ghazir for the past 15 years. There have never been as many candidates for the priesthood as today. Among the 152 seminarians are many bankers,

lawyers and doctors. And there is a long waiting list. He has no simple explanation why the priesthood is so attractive. "But I think that it is touching when people really live the Christian faith," he says thoughtfully.

### The question of martyrdom

For Alain, Edgar and Cherbel this is the main question. What does it mean to live faith with all its consequences? Precisely now and today, when Christianity threatens to disappear for ever from many places of the Middle East after more than 2,000 years? The three seminarians broached the subject of martyrdom very directly. This is a topic which they have apparently discussed amongst themselves very often and which is so terribly foreign for Western Christians. "Our church is a martyr church," says Edgar. And Cherbel adds, "The church lives from the blood of martyrs." To avoid any misunderstanding, Alain finally explains to the western visitor: "We want to live and we want to serve life, not death. But if we are forced to bear witness to our faith in death, then we will not hang on to life. We place our trust in God."

*Katja Dorothea Buck*



# WHERE LIFE IS LIVED

## How the upheavals are changing the study of theology in Cairo

**There are more thrilling things to read than curricula. But if you compare the present curriculum of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (ETSC) with those of a few years ago, you will quickly notice one thing: the institute of higher education has completed an historic change in paradigm – and with success.**

**I**n the bustling district of Abbassiya the ETSC seems like a miniature oasis. Once you pass through the forged iron gate, you thankfully leave the noise of the city and the urgent questions about the future of Egypt outside. Life on the small university campus is peaceful and friendly, almost a little contemplative. The red main building with its inviting veranda is a witness to a long worthy tradition. What started as a floating seminary on a house boat sailing along the Nile between Aswan and Cairo in 1863 finally found its permanent roots here in 1926.

Today, the ETSC in Cairo is the training centre for Evangelical pastors in Egypt together with its two annexes in Minya, Upper Egypt, and in Alexandria. At present, 38 young men are preparing for their ministry. Contrary to other countries in the Middle East where Evangelical Christians are only a small minority within a minority, there are about 700,000 Protestants on the Nile representing the second largest church family after the Orthodox Coptic Christians.

Long gone are the times when courses and seminars at the ETSC were contemplative. In the past, upcoming ministers

could be seen bent over scriptures and books during their theological studies. Today, they must often go out for several months into real life. “We want to be closer to the people,” says Atef Gendy who has been President of the ETSC since 2000. In the past, the church focused mainly on the spiritual life of the people. “But God is not only a God of Redemption, he is also a God of Creation who looks after his creations. And He is a God of history,” says Gendy. The ETSC reorganised its entire curriculum several years ago on this fundamental understanding of theology.

For the past few years, social welfare internships have become compulsory for ministry candidates. “We send students to poor, rural areas. There they learn all about the church from scratch again,” says Gendy. They experience what pastoral care really means in orphanages, prisons, homes for the elderly and in projects for drug addicts or street children. “For some this is very hard. They are confronted with things which they never believed could exist in our society, such as sexual abuse of children, for example.”

### Getting out of the study rooms

But it is not only the students who must go out into the wide world. The lecturers must also leave their study rooms regularly. Most Christians in Egypt live in villages and small towns in Upper Egypt. Life there is very different from everyday life in the mega city of Cairo or in urbane Alexandria. Poverty and illiteracy in rural Egypt is much more present and tangible. Religious tensions also occur more frequently in Upper Egypt. “One of our lec-



Evangelical pastors in Egypt receive the theological tools to perform their service in the parishes and congregations at the Evangelical Theology Seminary in Cairo (ETSC).

turers travels nearly every week and gives a talk in one of the parishes. We offer workshops on practical topics such as Sunday school or youth work,” says Gendy. During these meetings, the lecturers learn what people are really concerned about and can then pass this on to the theology students.

Reaching out to the parishes also publicises the work of the Seminary and what it has to offer, such as study programmes for lay persons. Currently, there are 244 students enrolled at the 3 sites, more than ever before. This is a sign of hope for the parishes. In a minority situation, church life is highly dependent on committed and competent parishioners who bear the work load together with the pastor.



**Dr. Atef Gendy  
has been President of the ETSC  
for the past 15  
years**

Photo: Katja Buck

The study programme for lay persons is also ground-breaking in another way. A number of women have enrolled on the courses. The hope that the Presbyterian Nile Synod will finally accede to accept women into the ministry is not quite unfounded. For several years, this topic has been debated and repeated with passion in the Synod and the individual parish districts. Many assume that something will happen when the next generation takes over. And if one day the decision is finally taken to ordain women, the Nile Synod will immediately have many candidates as women pastors at one go. They will only need very little by way of academic training to take up their ministry.

### **Contributing towards the transformation**

The change in paradigm at the ETSC was well worth the effort. The number of students increases every year. Since the year 2000, enrolments have more than tripled. Whereas 15 years ago, there were less than one hundred people enrolled in the various courses, today there are almost 300 students registered. "How can we tell people something about God when we have not researched Him and His character?" asks Theodore, a fourth year student in reply to my question why he had enrolled. His fellow student Amir has already experienced how thrilling this scientific research about God can be. "Actually I

only wanted to become a good shepherd for the people in the parish. Today, I know I can get to know God and myself better by plunging into the expanse of theological studies. When I later become a pastor, I would like to study philosophy on the side."

The shift in course contents may have started before the revolution of 2011 but the social upheavals also gave an additional impulse to the new approach. "We feel greater responsibility for society and we are constantly thinking how we can contribute to the transformation," says Gendy. The seminary offers courses for pastors and graduates on political and social responsibility. The ETSC invites secular lecturers especially for this. The church management need direction about what is currently happening in our society. "But we do not want to be a politicised church. We are not a political party," states Gendy. "We want our people to be serious, responsible citizens capable of setting up civil society structures and explaining to people what their civil rights are."

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

## WHAT CHILDREN NEED TO LIVE

### Continuous training for educators at the JLSS

How can each child receive exactly what he or she needs in a residential home? What do children need to find their way out of difficult behaviour patterns? Educators together sought answers to these questions during a training course at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon.

So you really want to hold it in the great hall, do you?" An educator cannot believe the place I had selected to hold the training course for the eleven colleagues. But which room could be more suitable than the large Hermann Schneller Hall, our sports and events hall?! It is large and cool and offers enough room for body, mind and soul - at least that is what I thought. And then this scepticism... if the choice of room already raises eyebrows, what would the colleagues be prepared to let themselves in for? "Is continuous training at all necessary?" another colleague had asked somewhat irritably.

After a joint Lebanese breakfast, we started with a game which involved memory, group perception and one's own presence. We played a few rounds and it was very uncomplicated and relaxed. Based on the game, I commented on how helpful it was to play such games with children and young people. In the end, being present meant being totally in the moment, in the Here and Now, alert and concentrated.

Today, our "working language" was to be English so at the start we discussed whether there would be any difficulties in comprehension. Two colleagues were pre-

pared to translate into Arabic or Arabic statements into English – just in case I didn't understand. They all relaxed on this issue and I was able to start the actual topic. This focused on basic needs and their significance in everyday education. "What do you absolutely need to survive?" I asked and noted down every statement on a card. I could hardly keep up with writing since this started a lively discussion. Even the initial objections whether the previous need mentioned was actually necessary to survive – or perhaps only important to live...?

Finally two educators then ordered all the terms collected according to their significance. "Food", "health" and "love" were right at the top and "music" and "mobile phone" were at the bottom of the list. We then discussed. Who would order these words the same and who would put them in a different order? One person saw no serious need for "music".

But then one educator chimed in, "I couldn't live without music!" One educator wanted to know what this list would




look like in Germany “What’s really important for you?” he asked. The cultural curiosity and liveliness with which the

child. “This is helpful when dealing with both children and their parents: do not be too quick to judge but first find out and understand the background” was my message. “So then we find out what a child really needs from us.”

One educator related the positive example of a boy who was often frustrated and showed little co-operation. With the support of the educator and the group he was able to achieve amazing success at school. His attitude at the boarding became very positive. Together we discussed what the boy could have been lacking and what he had needed to change for the better. We realised that we had a real opportunity at the home to help the children break through the vicious downward circle.

The course ended with a feedback round which turned out to be highly positive. One educator admitted that she often did not know in everyday situations where she should find the time to think about and give more support to individual pupils – which is a feeling that many who do work in residential homes know only too well. Therefore it is all the more important to take time off regularly and talk to colleagues, give each other support and obtain new impulses through continuous training.

*Dorothee Beck is head of the JLSS boarding home.*



**Basic needs are a central issue in everyday educational situations.**

educators talked delighted me. My “differ-entness” in the role as head of the residential home frequently represented an enormous challenge to my Arabic colleagues.

After the coffee break, the topic turned to the problems that arose when the needs of young children were not recognised. Children learn at an early age to compensate for deficits – but often they then develop behaviours which place us before enormous challenges at the home. Another important question is what role the environment (e.g. parents) play for a

## WHEN “SMALL THINGS” BECOME IMPORTANT

Reports from volunteers at the Schneller school in Amman

After a two year pause, volunteers were again sent to the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman in September. Alexandra Schanz (AS), Dominik Klein (DK) and Anne Ruck (AR) are helping out in the groups at the residential home for a period of ten months as part of the Ecumenical Volunteer Programme of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

### What astonished you most during your first few days here?

AS: I didn't expect to be accepted as member of the residential group so quickly. I belonged to it right from the very first evening. That was great and made the work much easier! Neither did I expect such a totally mixed group of girls between 10 and 13 to get on so well and stick so much together. That includes the educators.

DK: First off, I was shocked at how low the level in the school is. If a pupil doesn't understand simple questions like “How old are you?” after learning English on a daily basis, it is very demotivating. But the positive surprises outweighed the negative ones. For example it was so beautiful to see how well the children felt here and how much they appreciated to be able to learn and live at the Schneller school. I was also impressed at how easy it was to entertain the children and young people. For me it was simply great fun to jump into the pool with 70 other children although most of them could only just keep their heads above water.

### What appears to you to be the greatest challenge when working with the children – apart from learning the language?

DK: Some children open up very quickly and want to talk to me all the time. But others are very introvert and difficult to assess. I hope the relationship gets better when I get to know the language better.

AR: I think the greatest challenge is to have the necessary patience. I work with children aged from four to eight years old. It takes a very long time until they have all finished eating, for example (sometimes I feed them still) or until I can finally put out the light in the evening. Managing 16 girls is easier said than done. You have to be flexible and spontaneous, you have to adapt and still not lose your own personality.

### Is there a child at the home you are specially fond of?

AS: The ten girls in my group come from difficult family backgrounds but they still manage to smile. I've grown very fond of them all as a group. Actually I wouldn't single out any one in particular from the group. But if I had to talk about one child, I would choose a girl from Syria. She's been at the TSS for two years. The civil war in Syria has taken away her father, her home and her friends. Although I can't make myself understood very well, she was at my side right from the start. For me she is a very good example of how strong the personalities of these girls are, despite their young age.

AR: One girl came to the TSS through an aid organisation. She had an empty look



Fotos: Ruck/Schanz



Anne Ruck and Alexandra Schanz with children at the TSS.

in her eyes, didn't say a word and her body was full of scars. But with time she's really blossomed. It makes me happy to see when this child shows me her own cupboard at the home or beams at me when I play "Ride a cock horse" with her. She showed me that we "in the Western world" should really be more appreciative of the "little things".

### Why did you decide to come to the TSS?

**AS:** I find the concept of "Learning to live in peace" very beautiful and the fact that children are brought up together no matter what their denomination or origin - it's so important, especially in the Middle East.

**DK:** I find it important that Christians and Muslims grow up together and learn to respect one another, especially in regions such as the Middle East where tolerance towards minorities and other religions is often restricted.

**AR:** The TSS is making an enormous contribution by accepting children from difficult family backgrounds and sometimes traumatic conditions. I am so happy to be allowed to be part of the team.

*Interviewed by Katja Dorothea Buck.*

## INFORMATION

### EYVP ECUMENICAL YOUTH VOLUNTEERS PROGRAMME



*For more information about the Ecumenical Volunteer Programme, please visit the website of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS):*

*[www.ems-online.org/weltweit-aktiv/oekumenisches-freiwilligenprogramm/](http://www.ems-online.org/weltweit-aktiv/oekumenisches-freiwilligenprogramm/)*

*There you will also find blog posts by volunteers reporting about their experiences.*

## SCHNELLER TOMBSTONE RESTORED

### Rehabilitation of damaged tombstones in the old cemetery of Mount Zion

**On the historical Protestant cemetery in Jerusalem, the tombstones which were destroyed by religious extremists in October 2013 have been restored by the Israel Society for Preserving Historical Monuments. Hardly any of the church representatives expected this to happen.**

The cemetery on Mount Zion is a famous historical site. It is the resting ground for some of the most famous figures that shaped the history of Ottoman Jerusalem in the late 19th century: bishops, consuls, medical doctors, nurses, researchers and missionaries. Among them are Johann Ludwig Schneller, founder of the Syrian Orphanage, his wife Magdalene and their children Theodor, Maria and Benony.

In the past few years, the cemetery, which belongs to the Anglican and Protestant churches, was the repeated target of vandal attacks attributed to nationalist Orthodox Jews, fanatics from a nearby Yeshiva. The worst attack took place a short time ago when in one night 33 Christian tombstones were smashed on the unfenced site. The event was published in cultural, religious, academic and diplomatic circles, but was hushed up in local newspapers with the backing of Mayor Nir Barkat.

Following my call to the Israel Society for Preservation of Historical Monuments, supported by a letter from Provost Schmidt, the organisation took upon itself to organise a restoration project at the cemetery. I was appointed project man-

ager co-ordinator between the Society and the church. Following a thorough documentation of the 33 damaged tombs, a group of workers arrived at the site and completed the work in five days.

Today, the churches announce that they are planning to erect an iron fence around the cemetery - a much needed addition. They are also examining my request to open up the historic site for guided tours.

Christians were totally amazed by the restoration project by the Israel Society for Preservation of Historical Monuments. Normally the Israeli authorities at both governmental and municipal levels demonstrate a profound weakness when it comes to combating hate crimes by Jews against Christians. The burning of the 'bread and fish church' on the Sea of Galilee last month is a horrid result of this political neglect. We are praying for a change in the world's only city of three faiths.

*Dr. Gil Gordon is an architect and urban planner in Jerusalem and has been connected to Schneller work for many years.*





The tombstone of the Schneller family destroyed in October 2013 (right) has been restored.

## REFORMATION ON THE WORLD-WIDE HORIZON

### 5th International Consultation of SiMO and N.E.S.T. in Beirut

Since the 19th century, both the Eastern Catholic Church and Islam have faced particular challenges because of the presence of the Reformation Churches in the Middle East. Social welfare and educational institutions with an Evangelical background and the spread of Evangelical Bible translations into Arabic have brought permanent change in this part of the world. At the same time, the question posed in Germany has been: what is the meaning of the concept of continuous reformation (*ecclesia semper reformanda*) in an increasingly secular and multireligious context?

At an official conference in Beirut taking place from 23 to 28 June 2016, Christians from Western and Eastern Churches and Muslims will be discussing this topic. We sincerely welcome interested people to come to Lebanon.

An Ecumenical, intercultural and interfaith dialogue will ask questions about the "mission" of each of those involved in their regional, social and religious contexts. How do others – Muslims and members of the Eastern churches – perceive the presence and witness of Protestants in their midst? Does Protestantism play any role at all? And if so, how can Protestant Christians fulfil this role today? What duty do they have in each of their societies? And finally, what is a reasonable Evangelical, Ecumenical and interfaith commitment for

peace, justice, reconciliation and solidarity within a context of increasing violence, extremism and war?

The Symposium is directed at students and trainees of theology, Islamic studies, history, political science and related disciplines and all those interested, in particular present students and alumni of SiMO, N.E.S.T. and similar institutes. We are expecting excellent speakers from the following fields of study: Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox churches, Muslims as well as representative of the world-wide Decade of Reformation.

#### Costs:



Participants cover the costs of travel, accommodation (simple middle class hotel or guest house) and part of the meals. We are trying to obtain subsidies, in particular for those without income.

#### Final date for applications:

21 March 2016

#### For more information and applications:

SiMO – Study in the Middle East – a programme organised by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS), Secretariat Vogelsangstrasse 62, 70197 Stuttgart, Tel.: +49 711 636 78 -39, Fax: +49 711 636 78 -45, e-mail: feist@ems-online.org

**The official language at the event is English.**

# SIMO

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

### 5. Internationale Konsultation

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

23.-28. JUNI 2016 – BEIRUT, LIBANON



**SiMO – Studium im Mittleren Osten**  
ein Programm der Evangelischen  
Mission in Solidarität (EMS)

◀ Mehr Informationen  
[www.ems-online.org](http://www.ems-online.org)  
E-Mail: [feist@ems-online.org](mailto:feist@ems-online.org)



Evangelische Mission  
in Solidarität



**EKD**  
Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland

**NEST**  
Near East School of Theology  
Beirut, Lebanon

# WE LOOK FORWARD TO NEW MEMBERS!

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

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

If you want to become a member of the EVS, we will be glad to send you an application for membership. The annual minimum fee for individuals is Euro 25 and Euro 50 for companies and organisations. By making a donation to the Schneller schools, you are supporting the work of a recognised charitable welfare and social organisation.



Vogelsangstr. 62 | D-70197 Stuttgart

Tel.: +49 711 636 78 -39

Fax: +49 711 636 78 -45

Email: [evs@ems-online.org](mailto:evs@ems-online.org)



**EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools**

[www.evs-online.org](http://www.evs-online.org) 

# FROM MADURAI TO THE WEST OF STUTTGART

New member of the EMS Secretariat staff: Dr. Kerstin Neumann

Since the middle of August, Dr. Kerstin Neumann has been the new head of Mission and Partnership at the Secretariat of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) in Stuttgart. The graduate Doctor of Theology succeeds Ulrike Schmidt-Hesse.

It was a formative period for Kerstin Neumann: “The years guided me through a process which taught me profoundly that faith and spirituality are not a purely personal matter but are a decisive part of our presence in a community.” The challenges facing the new Head of Department include Caring for God’s Creation. The concern closest to her heart is to provide help to people who do not even have the means to meet their most basic needs – caused by neoliberal economic interests.

“In Ms Neumann we have found a theologian with international experience,” said Marianne Wagner, President of the EMS Mission Council. “As an international fellowship, the EMS also needs people in its management who are familiar with faith and life in all its different facets. Kerstin Neumann brings her theological, cultural and spiritual experience and this will enrich our programmes. We are looking forward very much to working with her.”

Kerstin Neumann is also delighted with her new post. “Service to people who have been pushed to the fringes of our society for economic, political or religious reasons can be implemented in constructive and creative ways, especially within an international context such as the EMS Fellowship.”

*Regina Karasch-Böttcher*

For Kerstin Neumann, faith and spirituality are not private “but a distinctive part of our presence in a community”.

**K**erstin Neumann is an ordained pastor of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck. She spent the last 20 years in India. She is married to the current Rector of the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary in Madurai, Rev. Dr. J. David Rajendran. There she also lectured in religious sciences and philosophy. She has long given her support to EMS programmes from Madurai.



**Letters to the Editors:**

Contact with our readers is invaluable for our work. We look forward to every feedback, even if it is critical or reflects a different opinion than that of the editors. We reserve the right to edit your letters for space reasons.

**Schneller Magazine 3/2015**

News about the work of the Schneller schools is high on my list of priorities. The new issue is so breathtakingly full of information that I cannot put it down and I will again use its contents at parish events.

*Tabea Dölker, Member of the EKD Synod,  
Holzgerlingen*

I receive many newsletters from all over the world but I think yours is one of the most interesting with its variety of articles and concerns, the human approach to communicating news and the engaging style of communication! I congratulate you for offering a quality piece of work every time. Mabrouk and God bless your ministry for His glory.

*Rosangela Jarjour, General Secretary of the  
Fellowship of Middle Eastern Evangelical  
Churches (FMEEC), Beirut*

**130th Year****Issue 4, December 2015**

Publisher: Evangelical Association of the Schneller Schools within the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity - EMS

Editors: Katja Dorothea Buck (in charge),  
Ursula Feist, Dr Uwe Gräbe

Address: Vogelsangstrasse 62  
D-70197 Stuttgart, Germany  
Tel.: +49 711 636 78 -39  
Fax: +49 711 636 78 -45  
E-mail: [evs@ems-online.org](mailto:evs@ems-online.org)  
[www.evs-online.org](http://www.evs-online.org)

Seat of the Association: Stuttgart

Layout: B|FACTOR GmbH  
Printers: Buch- und Offsetdruckerei  
Paul Schürle GmbH & Co KG, Plieningen  
Circulation: 14.700

Contact address: Swiss Association for the  
Schneller Schools in the Middle East:  
Pastor Ursus Waldmeier,

Rütmatstrasse 13, CH-5004 Aarau  
PC Account 30-507790-7  
CH05 8148 8000 0046 6023 2  
[www.schnellerschulen.org](http://www.schnellerschulen.org)

The Schneller Magazine is published four times a year. The price is included in the EVS membership fee and in the SVS annual fee.

English Schneller Magazine online:  
[www.ems-online.org/en/schneller-magazine](http://www.ems-online.org/en/schneller-magazine)

# SCHNELLER

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) is a member of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

Vogelsangstr. 62 | D-70197 Stuttgart  
Tel.: 49 (0) 711 636 78 -39  
Fax: 49 (0) 711 636 78 -45  
Email: [evs@ems-online.org](mailto:evs@ems-online.org)



**Donations to the EVS:**

Evangelische Bank eG,  
Bank code 520 604 10, Account no. 407 410  
IBAN: DE59 5206 0410 0000 4074 10  
BIC: GENODEF1EK11

**Endowment contributions to the Schneller Foundation:**

Evangelische Bank eG,  
Bank code 520 604 10, Account no. 407 437  
IBAN: DE09 5206 0410 0000 4074 37  
BIC: GENODEF1EK1



The Schneller Schools are dependent on your donations.

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

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



For thus says the Lord: as a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.  
Isaiah 66:13



**EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools**