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# SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



## IS THERE STILL WAR IN SYRIA?

ABOUT A DEVASTATED COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE



EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools

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Dear Reader,

Is there still war in Syria? This question may sound naive. When we planned this issue early this summer, there had been a long lull in headlines about Syria. The media was focused on other issues. If you had no ongoing contacts with Syrians, you could easily have thought that everything was quiet in Syria. In the meantime, even international politicians had started to consider whether Syrian refugees could soon return to their homeland. But then, when the time of the editorial deadline arrived at the beginning of September, it appeared that a battle was brewing at Idlib.



Against this background, we asked people from Syria and people who were familiar with Syria for their estimation of the situation after seven and a half years of war. None of them would say there was peace in Syria. On the contrary, Syria today is a devastated country with a split population. It is not only the infrastructure which will take a long time to rebuild. It will also require enormous efforts to reconcile the different groups within the population. And not least, there remains the unanswered question regarding the millions of Syrians who have fled from their homeland. Will they be able to return in the medium term? This issue will discuss all of these points.

And finally, we have loads of positive news to report from the Schneller schools. Both the schools are back on track. However, in the small Schneller team in Stuttgart, we had to bid farewell with a heavy heart to Ursula Feist who had worked as assistant at the EVS secretariat for many years. Of course, we wish her all the best and God's blessing in her new job. But it's difficult to lose a colleague for whom collegiality and loyalty came naturally. We hope she will remain in contact with Schneller work and that we will see her again on future occasions. By the way, the next Schneller festival takes place on 11 November (see page 25). We warmly welcome everyone who feels connected to the work of the EVS and the Schneller schools.

I send you many greetings on behalf of the Editorial Team.

Yours

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Katja Dorothea Buck".

Katja Dorothea Buck

## STAYING TRUE TO THE FAITH

Stay true in the faith that is given to you as a gift! Stand firm, do not turn away." This is what John the Visionary of Patmos wrote to people who did not know whether they had a future in their homeland. It had become unsafe since at their home in Smyrna – which is now Izmir in present-day Turkey – they suffered provocation, hardship and persecution. Some of them were even put in prison. Can a person remain true even when placed under enormous pressure? What is it like to suffer from violence as a result of war, persecution and expulsion? Can a person stay true to the faith? And does one have the strength and courage to help build a more righteous future when so much speaks against it?

For these holidays I went to Carinthia in Austria. There is a pilgrimage trail called the "Way of the Book" which was started

by the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. The route leads from the south of Germany through to Carinthia in 24 stages. I walked several of the stages along this trail. Its aim is to remind pilgrims of the history of Protestantism in Austria. For over two hundred years, Protestant Christians living there could only practice their faith in secret. Bibles and prayer books were smuggled from Germany to the brethren of the faith. If anyone was discovered, they had a difficult time. It was dangerous to own a bible. Faith or homeland – many Protestant Christians were faced with this alternative. What kind of future will we have if we stay? What can we expect if we leave? Is there any chance of returning? For Protestants in Austria, it was not until 1781 that the Patent of Toleration granted them the right to practice their Protestant faith freely in their homeland.



Rev. Mofid Karajili holds service in his congregation in Homs

Photo: GAW/Haaks

For me, this story which took place in a neighbouring country is not just history, it is also a reminder. Today, millions of people in the world are refugees and many of them are persecuted because of their belief. Rev. Haroutune Selimian from Aleppo has often been asked whether he would not rather leave Syria and take his family to safety. More than half the

Christians living in Syria before the war have left the country. But Selimian and others have stayed. Out of conviction or a lack of possibilities ... there are many reasons. Haroutune Selimian says, "That's exactly what the terrorists want – for us Christians to disappear from Syria." Together with his congregation, he supports the people who remain – those who want to stay and those who have to stay. It is impossible for anyone to survive in Syria today without help.

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

*Revelations 2:10 (NRSV)*

Haroutune Selimian does not appreciate it when people in the West encourage Christians to leave Syria. "If we Christians disappear from Syrian, the country will not only lose its diversity and the cradle of Christianity will not only lose the Christians. If we Christians disappear from Syria, our country will lose a balancing effect and this should not be underestimated," he says. "Jesus called upon us to spread peace and reconciliation in the world." Yes, peace and reconciliation. That's what Syria needs!

Mofid Karajili is a pastor in Homs. On a visit in October 2017, he said to me, "We have become a better church because of the war. We have learnt the true meaning of keeping to the faith. It means standing faithfully by the side of those who need us – regardless of their denomination or religion. Our duty is to enhance the society in which we live."

The war in Syria has not only reduced towns and villages to rubble and dust. It has destroyed the lives of millions of people. Hundreds of thousands of people are dead. More than one million will suffer permanent handicaps from their injuries all their lives. Eleven million people have been displaced. About 70 per cent of the people who are still in Syria are living in extreme poverty. It is estimated that two million Syrian children and young people have no access to schooling. Syria is a traumatised country!

Mofid Karajili and his congregation have started a project called "Space for Hope". Children of different denominations and religions play, learn and laugh together. "After this war ends, our children must find a way to live together in peace," says Rev. Karajili.

What do Christians need to be able to stay in Syria? Reliable political structures. Clear legal regulations. The right to practice religion freely. And peace and reconciliation! But all this is impossible to introduce by just simply making individual political decisions, says Haroutune Selimian from Aleppo. "Peace and reconciliation have to be cultivated step by step. We have to prepare people's minds and hearts to accept this." We can help our brethren in Syria to carry out this immense and important task.

*Rev. Enno Haaks is Secretary General of the Gustav-Adolf-Werk which supports several Evangelical congregations in Syria*

## DEVELOPING THE VISION OF A UNITED NATION

Dialogue expert describes the first steps towards a lasting peace

Is there still war in Syria? It wouldn't be fair on Syria or its population to answer this question by either yes or no! At the same time, the question arises whether war is still raging in Syria or not. How should war be defined? I base my remarks on the experiences I have gleaned from work in peace consolidation and reconciliation in Syria and with Syrians, both in the country itself and abroad.

The war between Syrians and the war that is being played out at the expense of Syria has provoked one of the worst humanitarian crises which the world has experienced since World War II. In its report of 28 May 2018, the European Community acknowledged that this war continues to have disastrous and tragic consequences for the population. It is a brutal war and has resulted in mass dis-

placement, emigration and uprooting of countless people. Millions of people have been internally displaced. More than 3.8 million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. More than half a million people were killed or have permanent disabilities, in addition to the massive destruction of the infrastructure and buildings all over the country.

The escalation of violence has also led to extremism and hate speech which severely hamper relationships between religious communities (among Muslims (especially between Alawites and Sunnis) and between Muslims and Christians). People who do not agree or who do not think the same way are suddenly branded disbelievers and infidels; there is an unparalleled surge of "takfeerism" (*Editor's note: In Arabic, takfeer means when a Muslim declares another Muslim to be disbeliever.*) which is expressed by the vocal rejection



Photo: Stefan Rammelt

War has been raging for seven and a half years: destroyed tank and destroyed house somewhere in Syria

of others who live their religion differently, resulting in the denial of a person's right to live in dignity in the land of his or her family and forefathers.

We should not forget here that the bloody events which Syria and our region is suffering are not new in the history of humanity; this is not a purely religious conflict between Muslims and Christians or between Sunnis and Alawites; it is rather a conflict between East and West – between the Arab-Muslim world and the Western secular (originally Christian) world. These events can neither be defined as an economic conflict between the backward Third World and the Western world whose roots are embedded in brutal globalisation; nor can it be described as a political conflict between non-democratic Arab regimes and pluralistic democratic Western countries. Syria is experiencing a conflict that is complex both internally and externally: external forces are exploiting internal weakness in order to maintain subordination. It is a complex regional and international conflict that is subjected to political alliances and polarisations.

Is there still war in Syria? If we define war as “hostilities”, we can say that war has ceased in many parts of Syria; a major part of Syrian territory is again under government control and hostilities have stopped. One region that still causes concern is the town of Idlib and the northern part of the country where militant opposition groups from Aleppo, Ghouta, Douma etc. have gone and where they have set up their present stronghold.

Most reconciliation agreements settled in conflict areas between the Syrian government and its allies on the one hand and armed groups on the other have resulted

in the move of the armed groups to Idlib or to the north of the country. After Homs, East Ghouta, Daraa and Qunitara, Idlib is the last of the de-escalation zones set up in 2017. And as long as no political solution is reached, this region could become the scene of the next terrible battle. But even if all eyes are now riveted on Idlib, we cannot say for sure that all the next military actions will be limited to Idlib.

A few weeks ago, armed groups committed an abominable massacre in the province of Sweida that re-ignited all sorts of (ethnic, religious and geographical) tensions that we thought had eased, and was about to spark a new wave of bloodshed in that area. Such a tragic occurrence can flare up at any time anywhere in Syria. We need to rethink our answer on how to define war.

The events which have shaken Syria over the past seven years have produced a number of serious challenges which are just as harmful or even more harmful than “war”. These challenges have greatly affected the bonds within the fabric of Syrian society and have sown the seeds of fear and distrust between neighbors, which is badly endangering Syria's cultural, religious and ethnic diversity.

In light of the above, and to be able to stamp out the underlying causes of a new war, a clear and intelligent vision for the post-conflict era has become an urgent necessity – a vision developed by Syrians themselves and one to which all Syrians contribute to rebuild their nation together – a nation that protects them, empowers them, that gives them the basic feeling of belonging and which guarantees rights and liberties for all.

The first steps along the path to this vision

would contain the following:

- A bottom-up approach to reconciliation, trust building and restorative justice and which also includes efforts at grass-roots level.
- Education and awareness efforts together with religious and all relevant institutions for the prevention of extremism, violent extremism and hate speech.



**Houses must be made habitable again before people can return at all.**

- Efforts to promote a culture of liberties, rights and active citizenship by a continuous dialogue to strengthen national unity.
- Mobilising social capital for reconstruction.
- Preparing for the return of displaced persons and refugees (ensuring their basic needs and coordinating efforts to preserve social cohesion to avoid possible community tensions).
- And the most important is to stop all external interference and help the Syr-

ian population rebuild their country so that they can live together in dignity, a citizenship of equal rights and without fear of each other.

Only when all this has been done can we say that the war in Syria is over and that the country is on the road to lasting peace.

*Rev. Dr Riad Jarjour was born in Aleppo and grew up in Homs. Between 1994 and 2003, he was Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). Today, he is president of the non-governmental organisation Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FDCC) which organises workshops, conferences and dialogue programmes to support people to resolve conflicts non-violently.*



# NEWS FROM KAFROUN

## Transition phase starts at the preschool in Syria

**What is the current situation at the preschool in the Syrian “Valley of the Christians”? You’ll find the best answer to this question on the Facebook page “Kafroun Kindergarten”. Although it’s in Arabic, the pictures and video clips speak for themselves! The project that has been in existence for almost five years is a success story. Now they are actively considering what to do after the project ends in 2019.**

**A**lmost every day, the people running the school post events on Facebook about what is happening at the school. And a lot of good is happening. For example, one video shows how concentrated and still even young children are when they are meditating. It says a lot about the remarkable educational skills of the teachers who, like the children, are all internally displaced persons without exception.

The project officially started in Syria on 1 January 2014 and is fully financed by the international EMS Fellowship and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller schools. After the first project cycle covering the three years of 2014, 2015 and 2016, the EMS Mission Council decided to continue to the project up to 2019.

Admittedly, the project was not always easy to process from a technical viewpoint – and this was not even due to the war situation alone. Reaching a consensus between the participating churches in Lebanon and Syria sometimes proved to be complicated. This is why Rev. Habib Badr (head of the EMS member church in Bei-

rut) handed over local responsibility for the project to a Syrian non-governmental organisation called “Charitable Society for Sustainable Development” (CSSD). The CSSD has close ties with the Syrian Orthodox Church and is practically a branch of the Lebanese “Forum for Development, Culture & Dialogue” (FDCD) headed by Riad Jarjour.

In May 2018, Riad Jarjour, well known in EMS circles as former Secretary General of the Middle East Council of Churches, Rev. Dr Habib Badr and EMS Middle East Liaison Secretary Uwe Gräbe met in Beirut to discuss the continuation of the project. The next school year 2018/2019 will be the last in the agreed funding period. Its purpose is to represent a transition period. Internally displaced Syrians, for whom the project is intended, have decided not to leave their homeland. Most of them come from the region around the partly destroyed city of Homs and they want to return there as soon as possible. In the past few years, they have learnt how to organise and manage a preschool. Could it therefore be possible – says Habib Badr – to hand over the whole project to the people involved so that they can return to Homs and contribute to a kindergarten? Riad Jarjour does not rule out this possibility either. Before the end of 2018, he and Badr intend to prepare a study which will serve as a recommendation for the next steps.

*Uwe Gräbe*

## VOLUNTARY, SAFE AND IN DIGNITY

### The question of the return of refugees

**Since the summer, the international community has been talking about a possible return of refugees. Is this realistic?**

Explaining the war in Syria is complicated. Shortly after it broke out seven and a half years ago, there were many internal drivers to the conflict that were quite quickly fuelled by regional interests, and nurtured through regional and international direct and indirect financial support and military interventions. The violent conflicts between the various Syrian military forces, the continuing foreign military operations and attacks on civilians using chemical weapons have complicated the organisation of the peace process led by the United Nations (UN).

At the same time, the splitting up and radicalisation of the many opposition groups have created isolated regions which are controlled by armed groups not affiliated to the government. They compete with each other, fight against each other and allow radical Islamic groups to flourish. The nature and mechanisms of the conflict in Syria have made the country into a “battlefield” on which international and regional powers are fighting to protect their interests and establish their influence.

This complex situation has led to the worst humanitarian tragedy since World War II. According to UN estimates, more than 400,000 people have already lost their lives. Over 13 million people in Syria



Photo: Stefan Rammelt

Syria has become a battlefield on which different parties are pursuing their own interests.

need of aid and 6.1 million are internally displaced. More than 5.6 million people have fled abroad, mainly to neighbouring countries.

In this context, can we say that Syria is recovering and is now a safe and peaceful country where refugees can return? Actually, the Russian initiative presented by Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump shortly after the summit in July 2018 wants to make us believe this. The initiative intends to bring home about 1.7 million refugees, not only from neighbouring countries but also from Europe, especially from Germany. During a joint appearance with Angela Merkel on 18 August 2018, Putin declared his support for the return of Syrian refugees. At the same time, he warned that Europe could not afford another refugee crisis.

The Russian initiative is the first one of its kind in which an international player has proposed a solution for the thorny problem of the refugees. However, it is doubtful whether this plan can be implemented and especially whether the international community will support it. And this is vital for the plan to succeed. There are three major challenges:

- Is it realistic to speak of a voluntary, safe and dignified return of all refugees **to the original places from where they were expelled** if there is no all-embracing political or peace solution in Syria?

The figure of 1.7 million refugees as announced indicates that not all refugees who decide to return voluntarily may do so but only those refugees who are acceptable to the regime. In addition, without a peace agreement there can be no reliable guarantee to determine the length of time

that returning refugees will have to stay in “transit camps” inside Syria or ensure their safety, in particular regarding an obligatory recruitment into the armed forces.

- The initiative requires significant financing which will presumably be borne by the European Union in particular. However, the EU will only commit itself on condition that the repatriation process is monitored by the UNHCR and based on international criteria to guarantee a voluntary, safe and dignified return.
- The initiative already needs an international consensus at this early stage that should be expressed through a UN Security Council Resolution, which is apparently difficult to obtain, as the international and regional interests are still conflictual.

In conclusion, it can be said that, in the absence of a political solution to the Syrian conflict, the Russian initiative could only be implemented partially, on a small scale and in specific regions of Syria. It is all the more reason to double international efforts now so that Syrians can achieve a just and sustainable peace and then start to build a modern democratic country.

*Michel Nseir is the senior advisor for peace building in Syria at the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, Switzerland. Opinions expressed in this article belong solely to the author and not necessarily to his organisation.*

## TO GO OR TO STAY?

### What Syrian refugees in Germany think about returning home

**They fled from the war in their homeland. Now they live in a foreign country in a foreign culture. But many refugees are hard put to answer whether they will ever return to Syria. There are still too many issues open.**

The sentence is spoken quickly: “Then I’ll just go back to Syria.” It’s often spoken when things do not happen as they should or when refugee workers fail to “help” as expected. But it’s often more difficult than one thinks for a person to answer whether he or she really wants to go back to Syria. For example, many Syrian Christians post on Facebook idyllic propaganda films by the Syrian regime showing lively beach scenes in Latakia with women bathing and men driving jet skis; young people dancing and waving flags at the Citadel of Aleppo; fruit tree plantations with trees heavy with fruit; a “country father” lighting candles at the monasteries of Maalula – pure nostalgia. But the people know very well that the reality looks totally different. Residential buildings and the infrastructure have been destroyed. And even if someone’s own house and the surroundings are still intact, many still do not want to return.

There’s too much uncertainty about how the regime will treat repatriates. Will those who fled from regions controlled by the regime be automatically branded as regime opponents? Will those who fled from the IS, al-Qaida, an-Nusra and all the other Islamists find understanding? According to reports, men will be immediately conscripted into military service when they return to Syria.

As members of a religious minority, Christians in particular deplore the exploitation of religion. “In the past, nobody asked you about a neighbour’s religion. We were all one family,” is the frequent comment. But people have become more religious since the start of the war and this has split the society into ethnic and religious groups. When it comes to this, President Assad can stage himself as protector of the Christians as much as he wants. Most people see very few prospects left for them any more in Syria.

It is only those who intended from the outset to flee the country until the end of the war who are contemplating a return; as well as those who came with many illusions. Many thought they could continue leading the same life in Germany as they did in Syria but at the material level of Europe. Many underestimated the challenges which come with living in Germany. German is a difficult language and the German labour market requires certain professional qualifications. For conservative religious Muslim families, it is also hard to accept exposure of their own daughters to Western “liberties”.

Many who came on their own are demoralised from waiting for their families. There was simply not enough money to all flee together. Or the father consciously took it upon himself to set off on the dangerous Mediterranean-Balkan route in the hope that his wife and children would join him later. But then in the spring of 2016, the German government changed the conditions almost overnight.

Instead of refugee status with a three-year residence period and the right to family reunification, many were faced with only subsidiary protection with a right to a one-year period of residence with no prospect of reuniting with the family.

In the meantime, there is now a monthly quota of 1,000 immediate family members who are eligible for reunification. However, there are thousands of visa applications pending at the German embassies in Syria's neighbouring countries. But those who are still waiting after three or four years while money runs out for the wife and children in Syria, Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon will one day have to face reality and start the journey home. On the other hand, Syrian families in Germany will rather want to stay, if only because of their children's education.

But no matter how long one person or the other ponders the question of returning, the time spent waiting in Germany should be put to good use. This is important both for those who would otherwise lose a valuable part of their lives and for the pending reconstruction of their country. It is not only the German state that should provide incentives or even pressure, if need be. Every one of us can help by supporting a refugee constructively during this time.

*Heidi Josua is a religious education teacher and has studied Islamic studies. She has been working for some time with refugees in her home congregation and in her district as cultural mediator and language teacher. She also works at the Arabic Evangelical Church in Stuttgart.*



Syrian Muslims at a Christmas celebration in 2015 at the state reception centre in Messstetten.

## “DON’T FORGET US!”

### A visit to Christians in Damascus

A portrait of Assad hangs on almost every second house in Damascus, sometimes wearing a suit and tie, sometimes as warlord in uniform, sometimes as Rambo wearing sunglasses together with the Hezbollah leader Nasrallah, or with his father. It’s quite a difficult sight to bear for a visitor from the West but it seems to be completely normal for people who are fighting for survival.

The mood during a tour of the city is subdued. I gaze at empty faces. Only a few women walk around without a headscarf. The houses and streets appear shabby and in disrepair. But my memories of this wonderful city are totally different! In 2010, the city was teeming with life and there was a feeling of optimism in the air – people were curious about visitors from the West and wanted to talk to them in English. Today, hardly anyone speaks this language.

They systematically avoid answering questions about the political situation. When I talk to Syrians about this, I have the feeling that there are two completely opposing narratives about the Syrian war. There is hardly any consensus on whether it is a war or a humanitarian catastrophe, or on how everything started or what the end of the conflict should look like. My questions and objections are rebuffed as western propaganda. Everyone hopes that the country will soon return to peace as a result of the advance of the government army and that the “rebels” will be beaten sooner or later.

On Sunday morning, Rev. Boutros and the community elders gave us a hearty welcome at the church. The singing was full of fervour. After the worship service, several people came to speak to me. Almost every one of them said they had one or several family members in Germany, especially young men who had fled to avoid military service in the Syrian army. They could only return if they “redeemed” themselves by paying a sum of \$8,000 – a tidy income for the state. Even Rev. Boutros has paid this redemption fee for his two sons. One son lives in the USA; the other will soon start working as IT manager on the Seychelles.

What moved me in particular was the fate of an elderly couple whose three



And the President greets everywhere you go – street scene

children were now living in Berlin. They had filed their application for family reunification at the German embassy in Beirut. They also wanted to leave although they knew they hardly stood a chance of ever becoming integrated in the German Society. One mother asked me to visit her son in a Berlin hospital where he was being treated for a bullet wound to his face. The congregations are losing their young people. But nonetheless, Sunday school classes are full of children. The church schools can hardly handle all the applications for places and many of the applications are from Muslims.

From 2015 until just a few months ago, the church and the entire Christian district of Bab Touma were regularly bombarded by “rebel” rockets. A large part of the Evangelical church had been destroyed by 2015. After work on rebuilding was completed, the church was reconsecrated

last year. Money for reconstruction came mainly from the Presbyterian Church in the USA as well as from Germany and Ireland.

The conversation at the lunch table revolved around the future of the church. The NESSL has 19 congregations in Syria and 20 in Lebanon. Many of them support a school. The pastors not only studied at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut but abroad, in Switzerland or in the USA as well. Since 2017, the NESSL is the first church in the Middle East to ordain women. But in times of crisis, the church also sees itself confronted by charismatic free churches which even pay people to come to their worship services, so exploiting the need of the people.

And their need is great. One engineer said that eight years ago, he used to earn \$1,000 a month. Now it's only \$200. At the same time, some prices have risen as much as ten times compared to before the war. The population is completely impoverished. Most restaurants are empty since few people can afford to eat there. And then there are road blocks at nearly every corner in the city, often “decorated” by a portrait of Assad and military-style motivation slogans. Cars are often stopped and searched for weapons. The noise of air planes and muffle sounds of distant impacts can be heard all day long. Peace looks different.

*Dr Almut Nothnagle is Middle East Liaison Secretary at the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW). She travelled to Damascus in Syria in May 2018 at the invitation of the Protestant church in Damascus.*



ene in Damascus

## DIFFICULT SEARCH FOR PARTNERS

**The Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe is expanding its aid to Syria**

**The Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, which is the relief branch of Bread for the World, had long coordinated its aid to Syria from its regional office in Istanbul. In the spring of 2018, the office moved to Amman and intends to expand its Syrian work considerably. But this is easier said than done.**

Since the start of the war in 2011, the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe has sent about 56 million Euro of aid money to the region. Most of this money went to supporting refugees in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. Less than ten per cent of the total sum was devoted to local projects in Syria. "In Syria itself we had little chance of helping directly since we had problems finding the right partners," says Martin Kessler, Head of the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe. "At the beginning, we had no local partner and so we were suspicious when approaching new partners. We are committed to neutrality and refused to support either the one or the other side in the civil war." Even towards church institutions we were sceptical at the start, says Kessler who was in Syria in the spring of this year.

Since 2007, the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe has been working with the local relief organisation of the Greek Orthodox Church (GOPA) in Syria. "Last year, we implemented projects totalling almost two million Euro with them. The chronically ill were supplied with medicines and residential buildings damaged by the war were made habitable again," says Kessler.

Finding new partners is not easy for an organisation of the size of the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe whose project expenditure amounted to 42.9 million Euro in 2017 and 59.6 million in 2016. According to its own statutes, the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe may only cooperate with partners who are independent and politically neutral. Finding partners of this kind in such a divided country as Syria is difficult. The partners must also work according to the principles of humanitarian aid and concentrate on the most afflicted people, regardless of their religion or ethnic affinity. "In the long term, we are basing our projects on a financial amount of about 1.5 million Euro," says Kessler. Consequently, any possible partner should have the capacity to implement aid projects of this size and apply for funding from public donors.

So far, the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe has not applied for any third-party funding for projects in Syria and relies exclusively on donations. The German government which regularly provides the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe with funds to support projects in other countries, already decided long ago to channel its funds for aid in Syria to government regions through the United Nations. "Non-governmental organisations like us can only apply for German government funds for aid projects in regions held by the opposition. However, working in these regions is very difficult for us," says Kessler.

The question of who stands on which side makes the work of aid organisations





Photo: Christoph Püschner/Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe

**Father Alexi (left), Director of GOPA, the relief organisation of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, showing Martin Kessler (right), Head of the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe, and Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel, President of Brot für die Welt, the damage left by the war.**

in Syria extremely difficult. If an organisation works in Assad-controlled territories and also works in territories held by the opposition, it raises the suspicions of the regime – and vice versa. “Of course, we want to help the afflicted in all regions,” says Kessler. Working in territories held by the opposition places the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe before very great challenges. “We must be able to travel to the projects and partners so that we can assess the quality of the aid provided. At present, this is not possible in territories held by the opposition without encountering immense risks.” Nevertheless, the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe provides a smaller sum of money to support people in territories held by the opposition where the people urgently need help.

In the medium term, the relief organisation would like to move its Syria office from Amman to Damascus so that they can build long-term and sustainable relations to partners in Syria. “At the begin-

ning, we always support a project with a small sum from our own funds. When we see that things are running well, we then increase the sum,” explains Kessler. If there is sufficient trust on both sides, we can then apply for third-party funding together. “As an aid organisation, we are obliged to be responsible with donations and third-party funds.” It is all the more important to know the partners well and work closely with them.

The relief organisation is preparing itself for a long-term presence in Syria. “After seven years of war, the country is in a very bad state,” says Kessler. The entire infrastructure is destroyed, not only the water and electricity supplies but also health care supply, the education system and economic structures. “Sadly, there is a lot to do for relief organisations for a long time to come.”

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

## NOT A FERTILE GROUND FOR ECUMENISM

### The effects of the war on ecumenical cooperation

The Syrian war literally caught ecumenism in both East and West on the wrong foot. Even before the war, there was little community spirit among the churches in Syria. And in Germany, the churches find it difficult to deal with the plight of sisters and brothers in the faith.

A good two million Christians lived in Syria before the war. This figure represented about ten per cent of the population. But the Syrian Christians were not a homogeneous group. They may be Greek Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Maronite, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Chaldaen Catholic or Evangelic Reformed, Baptist or Evangelical free churches. It's hard to

imagine a more colourful church landscape. But there are only a few people in Syria who understand themselves as part of an overall unit. The differences in tradition, theology and self-image are too great. Not only is church history in Syria full of examples that it is easier to be separate from others than to join in a common cause. But the Syrian government has even encouraged this trend over decades and has bestowed many churches more privileges than others.

At the outbreak of the war, one would have thought that Christians would be eager to close ranks. But ecumenical togetherness was and still takes place only at parish level. Fortunately, there are good examples of Christians of different



Photo: Stejan Rammelt

The cross has had difficulty staying up on the tower of the Maronite church in Homs. The church was occupied for a long time by the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and used as an ammunition factory.

denominations who join forces when it comes to emergency aid projects. But further up the church hierarchy, there is little ecumenism to be found. The war not only destroyed the infrastructure and killed hundreds of thousands of people, it also split the population apart. Both the various rebel groups and the regime have repeatedly placed Christians in situations where they were forced to choose one side or the other.

In many instances, the war is also threatening the churches' very existence and its self-image. Many Christians had fled and they are not even contemplating a future in Syria after the war ends. On top of that, the voice of the young generation in particular is becoming louder and is questioning the rigid hierarchies within the old churches. Of all things, the churches which filled the faith with life in the cradle of Christianity against all opposition and persecutions for 2,000 years now see themselves faced with the danger of erosion from inside and outside influences. But those who fear for their own existence must first look to their own survival.

The Syrian war caught also the western churches totally off guard. It took a long time for something akin to ecumenical solidarity to emerge towards the sisters and brothers there. There are many reasons for this. For decades, the topic of "Christians in the Middle East" has been paid very little attention in Church educational work. Even at university level, there are few professors willing to address the specialist field of the "Christian Orient". And the number of partnerships between German and Syrian congregations can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Ultimately, most Christians in the

Middle East are Orthodox. And from the start, Protestants have had very few points of contact with this church family.

When Syrian Christians increasingly met with difficulties seven years ago, there were few personal contacts and little knowledge about them. There were even no channels which could have been used to channel financial aid to them as an expression of ecumenical solidarity. Brot für die Welt and the Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe which distribute the major part of church funds for development and emergency aid in the Protestant sector had no partners in Syria before the war and still have difficulties today to find new partners at all (see page 14). In 2016, these two organisations supported projects all over the world to the tune of 278 million Euro. Aid funds for Syria were distributed, and still are, through regional churches, the initiatives of individual congregations or through smaller missions such as the Gustav-Adolf-Werk, the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity or the Christliche Hilfsbund im Orient, to name but a few.

And finally, the various different narratives about the Syrian war have poisoned ecumenism between East and West. Whereas many Christians in Syria declare themselves in favour of Assad because they are less able to imagine a future under rebel leadership, their western sisters and brothers in the faith have difficulty in understanding how it is possible to support a dictator who has been proved to trample human rights underfoot. Understanding is almost impossible on this central issue. For ecumenism, this is anything but fertile ground for growth.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

## SCHNELLER ON THE PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY

**The solar system and new heating systems lower electricity costs**

**The two Schneller schools in Lebanon and Jordan rely on an efficient and environmentally friendly power supply. This saves the schools money which can then be put to direct use in work with the children. An overview.**

**A**t last, it's finished. The start-up of the new solar system at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) had been announced several times. But every time something unexpected turned up. Once there were misunderstandings between the Royal Jordanian Society for Solar Energy and the municipal electricity supplier, leading to delays in the approval process. Then the various persons involved in the project connected technical com-

ponents which were designed for totally different voltages and then wondered why nothing worked. But on 9 May, it was at last possible to press the big button to connect the system to the grid.

The key figures of the project are impressive. The Kirchentag (German Protestant Church Congress) in Stuttgart in 2015 donated funds to the Schneller schools amounting to 100,000 Euro from a collection during the opening worship service which totalled a good 132,000 Euro. (30,000 Euro went to the JLSS for work with Syrian refugee children.) The Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East (sponsor church of the TSS) provided a sum approaching the same amount, plus private donations of about



Photo: EMS/Gräbe

**At last, the solar system is up and running and supplies electricity free of charge.**

4,500 Euro. This made it possible to completely finance the system costing 230,000 Euro without having to take a loan.

Now all the roofs of the dormitory building and day school are covered with a total of 733 solar modules. Cable conduits were installed across the entire site to the existing main distributor room next to the old workshops. The photovoltaic system generates a large amount of electricity which powers all the electrical systems on the enormous campus – from the air conditioning systems, lighting, refrigerators and computers through to the machines in the workshops and the heating system. This saves electricity costs amounting to an average of 9,500 Euro a month – money which can now be channelled to work with the children. Surplus electricity is fed to the public grid. In return, the TSS can draw electricity from the grid at a cheaper rate if ever its own power generation fails to cover its needs.

But the solar system is in no way the only project which makes the TSS more environmentally friendly. Director Khaled Freij has again revived the greenhouses which were once built for a programme involving Iraqi refugees. Large cabbage patches have been planted between the greenhouses in which tomatoes, bell peppers, chilli peppers, cucumbers, aubergines and courgettes now grow. This allows the TSS to cover its own needs with organically cultivated vegetables.

At the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon, energy efficiency has also been a central issue for several years. An energy project was implemented between 2014 and 2018. Its purpose was mainly to improve the heating system and hot water supply, which is an understand-

able priority since winters there are usually bitterly cold on the Bekaa plateau in Lebanon. Rolf Bartel, a heating and power generation engineer from Waiblingen, devoted his time to the project. Boilers were replaced or intelligently combined. New well insulated hot water tanks – so-called buffer tanks – were purchased. Diesel generators and solar systems were efficiently linked and new electrical wiring was installed.

The results are really impressive. The heating costs for the boys' boarding school buildings 1 and 4 and for the church have dropped by 76 per cent. And even the heating costs for boarding school buildings 2 and 3 were 55 per cent lower. Applied to the total electricity used at the JLSS, it means that the amount of heating oil and diesel has decreased by a good 46 per cent than before project start and the amount of electricity used has declined by about 11 per cent – despite the much longer periods during which cosy warmth is provided for the buildings. Now work will start on installing double glazing to improve window insulation and this will further reduce energy consumption. To fund this energy project, the *Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* provided an additional 14,000 Euro and has funded the project with several large sums over the past few years.

*Uwe Gräbe*

## A RAY OF HOPE FOR THE NEXT SCHOOL YEAR

**Johann Ludwig Schneller School re-starts its middle grades**

**Johann Ludwig Schneller School emerges from a turbulent year. Despite the many redundancies and resignations, the school is starting the new academic year optimistically and is teaching the middle grades again.**

The last school year was difficult for both teachers and pupils at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS). It started in September 2017 with a much-reduced staff. Several teachers had to be dismissed since it was no longer possible to finance the disproportionately high salary increases decided by parliament. Although the children in grades 7 to 9 remained at the boarding school, the school bus had to drive them to government schools in the surrounding area. This soon became a logistical problem since weekends at the JLSS fall on Saturdays and Sundays whereas government schools have their school-free days on Fridays and Sundays – Saturday is a normal school day. After a time, it turned out that the level of teaching and treatment of the children at government schools were not up to the level which is taken for granted at the JLSS:

Then the next shock came at the beginning of 2018. In order to gain votes for the parliamentary elections on 6 May, some members of parliament had created even higher paid jobs in the Lebanese army. As a result, five members of the JLSS staff resigned their posts at short notice and took up civil service jobs. Very soon, the social media circulated the news that the JLSS would have to close down.

But the prophets of doom who perpetrated these allegations had not reckoned with the determination of the staff headed by Director George Haddad. With a great deal of patience, they recruited new young teachers at starting salaries which the JLSS could afford. A neon sign was quickly erected at the side of the road on the school site with the words: “The Schneller school stays open!” A few days later, the following slogan appeared in Arabic and English: “The middle grades will also open in the new academic year!”

George Haddad and bookkeeper Rita Rashed went over the figures several times. Indeed, the figures painted a positive picture. After the school was able to pay severance payments and long-standing liabilities with a high subsidy from the EVS and EMS, it is possible to successively re-start grades 7, 8 and 9 with a new young staff of teachers as of September 2018.

*Uwe Gräbe*

## FIGURES

*During the last academic year 2017/2018, a total of 235 pupils were taught at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. 149 of them attended day school; 93 children and young people lived in the boarding school. There were 86 apprentices undergoing vocational training. There is a total of 55 staff members at the school.*

# PUPILS SHOW GREAT INTEREST

## Rhine schools raise funds for children in the Middle East

Sometimes, the fate of children in a far-away land apparently affects children and young people the most. Pupils from Cologne and Weil am Rhein support children of their own age at the Schneller schools.

**T**he Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) continually receives requests from pupils all over Germany. How are children getting on in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria? What difficulties do they have to face in their lives? What does their family life look like? How are they treated at Schneller schools? And, how can we help give the children there good prospects for the future?

For example, two schools on the Rhine have shown special interest in the work of the EVS over the past few months and years. In my capacity as Executive Secretary and Middle East Liaison Secretary, I visited them before the summer holidays. One of these schools is the Steigenbergerstrasse School in Cologne-Nippes. During the past year, the children, parents and staff there raised several thousand euros for the Schneller schools from a sponsored race, Christmas services and many other campaigns. In the same way, the Kant Grammar School in Weil am Rhein devoted its “social day” to school work in the Middle East last year. They children carried out baby-sitting, mowed lawns, sold home-baked biscuits and many other things – all in aid of the Schneller schools which were delighted to receive a large cheque.



Pupils at Weil am Rhein hand over a cheque for the Schneller schools to Rev. Uwe Gräbe (right).

My personal thanks go to the donors at the Upper Rhine and Lower Rhine – and I was able to report about the situation in the Middle East in packed main halls at these schools. My report focused especially on the situation in Syria. The pupils wanted to know who is fighting against whom and why this is still going on after so many years of suffering. It was not always easy to find answers to these questions – especially finding the words to explain the situation to children. But one thing in particular seemed to emerge very clearly: the children at the Schneller schools and at the preschool in the Syrian “Valley of the Christians” have been very lucky. They are allowed to be children, at least where they are now – just like the children in Cologne and Weil am Rhein, who now feel even more connected to their peers in the south.

*Uwe Gräbe*

## URSULA FEIST LEAVES THE EVS

I first met her in Jerusalem in October 2011. She had just started her duties as assistant for the EVS and the EMS Middle East Liaison Desk eight months before. At the time, she was travelling with my predecessor to meet the partners on site. One of them was myself. A good six months later, I met her again in Stuttgart when I assumed the post of EVS Executive Secretary and EMS Middle East Liaison Secretary in June 2012. Ursula Feist was a reliable co-worker who paved the way for me through the bureaucratic administration of our association.



Photo: EMS/Feist

**Always on action for the Schneller schools.  
Ursula Feist at the EVS Church Congress  
stand.**

At the time in Jerusalem in 2011, I felt she was polite and reserved. But then in Stuttgart I found out just how meticulous and persevering she really is. She could rattle off our cost centres and cost unit numbers from the top of her head. She held the organisational reins firmly in her hands at all the General Meetings and Church Congresses over the past seven and a half years. In contrast to myself, she had a thorough understanding of the fine

details when it came to the production procedure for the Schneller Magazine. Above all, she had a firm eye on my (mental and real) filing tray marked “will disappear with patience” – she constantly reminded me that no unpleasant duty disappears by waiting it out – and in most cases she had already organised the arrangements to carry out these tasks in practice.

She will always be remembered by our association members and donors as the friendly voice at the other end of the telephone, a patient person who listens to every problem and then follows it through with determination to the end.

Without a doubt, we will miss Ursula Feist. I am so grateful for the wonderful and friendly cooperation with her. I wish her all the best and God’s blessing in her new job at the Catholic Municipal Deanery in Stuttgart.

*Uwe Gräbe*

## INFO

*Until the post is filled, please address your queries on donations and donation receipts to Mrs Huber (huber\_c@ems-online.org, tel.: +49 711 636 78-27.*



## “... THERE WILL BE YOUR HEART TOO”

This was the slogan of the 33rd German Protestant Church Congress in Dresden in 2011. At the time, I was responsible for the first time for organising our Church Congress presence in my capacity as Liaison Secretary of the Middle East desk of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and at the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS). At that time, I had no idea that these words from a song would acquire such a special meaning for me. At the end of summer 2018, I will be preparing for a new professional challenge. Even though I am curious and really looking forward to the new opportunity that lies before me, a part of my heart will always be connected to the Schneller schools and Schneller work.

Compared to the 158-year history of the Schneller schools, seven years are only a very short time. But they were enough for me to realise the immense value of the association's work in support of the two schools. And it's not merely a question of providing the funds. What amazed me more was the commitment with which the Executive Secretaries, Executive Committee members, volunteers, members and donors supported and promoted the schools in totally different situations. I was always glad to support the full-time and voluntary co-workers in their duties which were not always easy. I hope I was able to contribute to reducing many a mountain of tasks or even prevent one from arising. In any case the successful completion of projects was more than enough reward for the peak loads and

difficulties which of course always occur when different institutions work together across national and cultural borders.

And most of all, “my heart” will stay with “my” donors” and EVS members who grew so close to my heart through all the years, as well as the many volunteer helpers who gave me their strong and selfless support at the Church Congresses in Dresden, Hamburg, Stuttgart and Berlin and at the annual EVS General Meetings. I would like to take this occasion to thank them all again from the bottom of my heart!

It will also miss very much the wonderful and very trusting collaboration with EVS Executive Secretary Dr Gräbe and Schneller Magazine editor, Katja Dorothea Buck. Whether it was during our joint editorial meetings or in everyday work, I always felt accepted as a full member of the team, even if to my regret I was unable to contribute to the work through my lack of background knowledge on theology or the Middle East. It was a great joy for me to be allowed to assist in this small but great team. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the two of them.

Now I hope that a successor will soon be found for the post of the assistant. I would be delighted if you could show her or him the same trust as you have shown me.

*Yours, Ursula Feist*

## EMS GENERAL SECRETARY ABSTAINS FROM SECOND TERM OF OFFICE

**Stuttgart (EMS).** At the Mission Council's meeting of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) in June, the General Secretary of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS), Reverend Jürgen Reichel, announced that after six years as General Secretary, he would not stand for a second period of office.

After the EMS went international in 2012, it became a generally well-known example of how to make mission credible in a globalised world, said Reichel, who is pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria. The internationalisation of work methods and programmes had been successful, he continued. He was extremely grateful for the full confidence which he received from the Executive Board which had supported him during these six years. But after careful consideration, he had come to the conclusion that this would be the right time to pass the baton on. He now intended to set himself new goals for the remaining seven years of his professional career.



Photo: EMS/Waltz

During his period of office, Jürgen Reichel steered the EMS onto a sustainable future track.

During his six years of office, Reichel started many innovations at the EMS and steered it along a sustainable course. In Reichel, the EMS loses a competent, acknowledged and highly committed specialist in the field of mission work.

## SMARTBOARDS AND DOUBLE GLAZING

**Stuttgart (EVS).** In July, the Board of Trustees of the *Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* decided to support the Theodor Schneller School with a sum of 16,000 Euro. This is to purchase a smartboard and the associated peripheral equipment for the day school. The Johann Ludwig Schneller School receives 14,000 Euro to buy double glazing, among other things (see page 20).

## SAFE THE DATE

### International consultation

*For the sixth time, the Study Programme in the Middle East (SiMO) and the association "Friends of NEST" are sending out invitations to attend an international consultation. It will take place in Göttingen and in the Coptic Monastery of Brenkhausen (Höxter) from 24 to 27 April 2019. The meeting will discuss how current political and social developments impact the witness of the churches. Speakers from Lebanon and Germany will examine the central issue whether is it not time for a spiritual rebuilding. Please contact Rev. Dr Uwe Gräbe for registration forms and further information at [graebe@ems-online.org](mailto:graebe@ems-online.org).*

# CORDIAL INVITATION TO THE SCHNELLER FESTIVAL 2018

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) is inviting all members and friends to the Schneller festival and the EVS General Meeting which will take place at the Constance Church of the Protestant parish of Ditzingen, Münchinger Str. 2, 71254 Ditzingen, on **Sunday 11th November 2018**.

## Agenda:

10:00 Festival service (sermon: Rev. Traugott Plieninger)

11:15 Public General Meeting, with coffee/tea and biscuits, with news about the Schneller schools in the Middle East, reports by the Chair, Treasurer, resolution to approve the 2017 annual financial statement and ratification of the Executive Board. In addition, a new Board of Trustees of the *Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* will be appointed.

After a snack lunch, **Mirko Schilbach, Head of the Department for Fragile States from the German Foreign Office**, will hold the keynote speech at 15:30. The meeting will end at about 17:00.

EVS members will receive a written invitation in advance. The best way to register is by mail to [evs@ems-online.org](mailto:evs@ems-online.org); of course, you can also contact us by phone, post or fax.

## How to reach us:

You can reach the Constance Church by taking the S-Bahn S6 or S60 in the direction "Weil der Stadt" or "Böblingen" and get off at the "Ditzingen" station. It takes 18 minutes by metro from Stuttgart. Then walk about 5 minutes from the station to the church/parish centre. Please note that there is limited parking in the direct vicinity of the church. There is a car park in Gerlinger Str. 3 - 5 from where there is a handi-capped access to the church and the parish centre.



## NO TRACE OF NATIONAL-SOCIALIST IDEOLOGY

### Dealing with the legacy of the Nazi era at the Schneller schools

**This will be the last time we mention the topic which has followed us for three issues of the Schneller Magazine: The Schneller schools and National Socialism.**

Shortly after the copy deadline for the last issue, I had the good fortune to have a fascinating mail exchange with one of the Germans in Palestine who was interned by the British authorities in the Tatura camp in Australia in 1941. At that time, he was a child. In 1946, he was confirmed in the camp by Hermann Schneller and after his release, he has remained with his family in Australia to the present day. His elder sister was present when Hermann Schneller delivered the controversial sermon on 6 May 1945 and about which hard evidence on its historical authenticity has so far remained elusive. My correspondence partner would prefer not to be mentioned by name. He was one of Hermann Schneller's pupils at the Australian camp for five years. He learnt music and religion with him and to this day he has kept the manuscripts which his teacher had prepared for the confirmation classes. "There was no political agenda," he writes. Only pastoral care and human welfare. Schneller had written the verse from the Epistle to the Galatians 3:26 for him in his confirmation certificate: "for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith."

As I browsed through the manuscripts for the confirmation classes of 1945/1946, I was amazed at the extent of solid theology Schneller expected from his young pupils at that time. But at the same time,

there is absolutely no trace of an apology for Nationalist Socialist ideology.

The writings in the last two issues of Schneller Magazine have triggered debates on the question whether it would really be worthwhile to write a dissertation on the relationship between the persons responsible for Schneller work and National Socialism. Among historians who have dealt intensively with Schneller history, there are those who have imparted their assessment to me that it is unlikely that any as yet unanalysed sources will ever be discovered. This is an important objection. But there are also those who refer to as yet unexamined archives, for example in London. In addition, it appears to me, for example, that the Hebrew transcripts of telephone calls monitored from the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem and apparently stored in the Zionist Archive in Jerusalem have not yet been really examined.

It could therefore well be worthwhile to systematically compare various themes which were addressed in the readers' letters in the last issue and examine them for their correlations. And if the results are ultimately insufficient for a doctorate thesis, there should well be enough material in my estimation for a master's dissertation or any other form of study.

*Uwe Gräbe*



Riley Edwards-Raudonat, Uwe Gräbe, Kerstin Neumann (Eds.)

**Mission in Solidarity – Life in Abundance for All. Proceedings of the EMS Mission Moves Symposium in Bad Boll 2017**

Vienna 2018, 144 pages, 29.90 Euro

**Stimulating workshop report from the EMS**

The “Mission in Solidarity” anthology summarises several years of a process in reflection and discussion. When the international fellowship of churches and mission societies changed its name from the “Evangelical Mission Society in South-West Germany” to the “Evangelical Mission in Solidarity” in 2012, not only was the name new, the programme was also totally revised. A resolution adopted by the EMS Mission Council instigated four team visits (2015/2016) and a symposium (2017) under the title of “Mission Moves” to exchange experiences and identify joint challenges that arise wherever people are committed to an intercultural “Mission in Solidarity”.

The book is a collection of contributions and reports revealing vivid insights into churches and cultures on three continents. Rima Nasrallah-van Saane describes the Lebanese perspective on global migration, a culture of fear and our entanglement in injustice and sin. She pleads for “mission through networking” instead of “mission through expansion” based on relationships of equality, humility and vulnerability. Theo Sundermeier

analyses different hermeneutic models and strata in the tension between the familiar and the foreign. His aim is to arrive at a relationship of living together based on respect and compassion without relinquishing the question of truth. Benedict Schubert (Switzerland) and Emmanuel Tettey (Ghana) discuss the question of common roots in the 200-year history of the Basel Mission. The two authors describe the lasting challenges of the all-liberating message, the credibility of witness, the meaning in translation of the Gospel into local languages, socio-cultural contexts and the effect of the Holy Ghost as a power of distinction. They both emphasise the role of indigenous female and male missionaries.

The second part of the book is devoted to reports on the four team visits to Ghana, India, Indonesia and Germany. The foremost consideration was to send international teams that not only consisted of “experts”, but included “grass roots” representatives who shared their impressions as “foreign”. Eight key questions dealt with the understanding of mission and Evangelisation, inter-faith relationships, socio-diaconical mission, “Reformation” and “Mission and Solidarity”. The reports reflect cultural difference, for example in majority or minority situations, inter-faith relationships and issues relating to secularisation. They reaffirm “Unity in Diversity” and identify critical questions which Kerstin Neumann addresses in her contribution and in the final communiqué. The book is a stimulating workshop report on “Mission in Solidarity” and contains a plethora of enriching experiences.

*Bernhard Dinkelaker*



Obituaries

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) takes leave of **Prof. Dr Samir Akel** who died in the middle of August at the age of 80 years. Akel was closely linked to Schneller work throughout his life. As a child he grew up in the annex of the Syrian Orphanage in Nazareth and when it was closed in 1948, he had to flee to Lebanon with 13 other boys and two teachers. He lived through the time of upheaval and then the new start in Khirbet Kanafar at the side of Hermann Schneller who became a father figure for him. (For more back-ground, refer to Schneller Magazine 1/2018.) Akel continued his studies to become a teacher in Schwäbisch Gmünd where he met his wife Christel. After several years at the Schneller school in Lebanon, the family finally settled down in Reutlingen where Akel was professor for pedagogics. He always spoke with gratitude and pride about his Schneller roots which were for him the foundation of his life.

In Samir Akel, the EVS has lost a long-standing companion, a highly knowledgeable contemporary witness and a good friend. We will honour his memory with gratitude and respect.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

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.

**Response to Schneller Magazines  
4/2017 and 1/2018**

I would like to express my thanks once again for the link to the Schneller Magazine. Many issues which should be of burning importance to us but are often watered down by our committees and administrations or take a back seat often become very clear in a region of such tension as the Middle East. The title of the penultimate magazine "Life in Fullness" struck me almost like a flash of lightning. Most of us in Western Europe fail to realise that we live in an abundance of material goods. At first glance, the title "Rooted in the turbulent Middle East" appears to us very far away. But in the history of the Schneller schools, the title explains its continuity and even identity – the search for a separate, independent (shown of course by Christ) path in difficult times and constellations. We pastors in Germany can definitely learn a lot from this attitude when we consider what the duties and positions of the church are today. For me your work in the Middle East is vital! For this reason, may I express my warmest thanks!

*Rev. Matthias Neuesüss,  
Höhr-Grenzhausen*

### Response to Schneller Magazine 1/2018

I can only pass on what I have heard about the attitude, adaptation and pragmatic action taken by members of the Schneller family and their senior staff during the Nazi era.

But one aspect which is always forgotten from the Swiss viewpoint is the valuable help provided by the former Swiss Consul in Budapest, Dr Carl Lutz, who saved tens of thousands of Jews in Hungary – several sources even quote up to 60,000 people.

More than a year ago, I personally met the stepdaughter of Carl Lutz, Mrs Agnes Hirschi during a showing of the historical film about the activities of her stepfather. She is always open to supply information personally or to show the film.

To the best of my humble knowledge, it is often forgotten that after the expropriation of the entire Schneller school properties in the region of present-day Israel and after Israel was honoured as one of the righteous among the nations (tree in Yad Vashem), Carl Lutz pointed out that money from the Swiss committee for relief was also invested in the “old” Schneller schools. A sum of money (unfortunately I have no figures) was paid by the State of Israel and this money made a considerable contribution towards the establishment of the “new” schools in Khirbet Kanafar and Amman.

*Walter Rutishauser, Zuben (Switzerland)*

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# SCHNELLER

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

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Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Col. 3:14 (NRSV)



**EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools**