

SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools

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Room in the inn

The Schneller school boarding homes

ROOM IN THE INN

- 4 **“Because there was no place for them in the inn.”**
Contemplation
- 6 **“The good spirit of God reigns here“**
How the boarding home cares for and educates children
- 8 **“Children enjoy learning here”**
Why parents send their children to the TSS
- 11 **A warm home**
This is what an educator says about the Johann Ludwig Schneller School
- 12 **Turning the flow of a river upstream**
Child protection at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School boarding home
- 14 **Discipline, team spirit and compassion**
Memories of a youth spent at the Schneller School
- 16 **Strictly organised communal life in the spirit of an extended family**
Living together in the Syrian Orphanage 1860-1940

SCHNELLER NEWS

- 19 **The Wendlingen organ resounds in Amman**
Music and peace take centre stage at the 2023 EVS General Meeting
- 23 **The sound of the organ in the Middle East**
Book Review
- 24 **Congratulations to Amman!!!**
An organ workshop at the Theodor Schneller School
- 26 **Trips to the Schneller schools**
- 27 **Ensuring the transparency of our actions**
EMS presents the draft of first sustainability report

CHRISTIANS AND THE MIDDLE EAST

- 28 **Standing together in times of crisis**
The war and its consequences for the EMS
- 30 **Coming together to mourn for all victims**
Plea against dogmatism and armchair philosophers
- 32 **Reader’s letters**
- 22 **Imprint**

Cover: A residential group of girls at the Theodor Schneller School (EMS/Buck)

Back cover: Christmas crib in the Church of St Luke at the Holy Land Institute for the Deaf in Salt, Jordan (EMS/Buck)

Dear Reader,

most of the articles in this Schneller magazine had already been written when terrorists from the Gaza Strip raided Israel on 7 October and carried out a massacre of the civilian population there – a massacre driven by their murderous hatred of Jews that continues a long and terrible tradition. While the war against Hamas still rages in Gaza and more and more Palestinian civilians are becoming victims, we have added two more articles to this issue.



However, the main feature has not changed. “There was room in the inn.” Unlike in the Christmas narrative, which tells of Mary and Joseph having to flee to what was presumably a provisional shelter to give birth to their child in the same way as the many traumatised internally displaced persons in Gaza are now having to do to flee their bombed-out homes, there is still room at the Schneller school boarding homes: room for boys and girls from poor and broken families, orphans and half-orphans, regardless of religion and family affiliation. The boarding homes are the very heart of the Schneller schools in Lebanon and Jordan. That is why the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan is planning to completely refurbish and remodel its boarding home building. So many people have been involved in the planning – including the children and educators at the boarding home themselves. The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools is contributing to the project with substantial funds – together with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg.

People need prospects, hope and a chance to lead a self-determined life. This is just as true for the children at the Schneller schools as it is for the people in Gaza. No-one knows yet what will become of this completely devastated region and its people who bear the physical and emotional scars. But one thing is clear: the situation can no longer continue as it is. It will not be possible to establish a sustainable security – and certainly not peace – by wiping out a population of millions.

So let us continue to stand by our partners in the Middle East. We hope you enjoy reading about the successes of (boarding home) education for peace and mutual respect in this issue. And let us celebrate Christmas together. Especially in times such as these. For there should not only be room in the inn, but also “peace among the people of His favour.”

Many greetings on behalf of the editorial team.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Uwe Gräbe". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Best wishes, Uwe Gräbe, Pastor

“Because there was no place for them in the inn.”

Luke 2:7 (NRSV)

That was something especially moving for me as a child: Mary and Joseph were not given a room for the night. Of course, this was partly due to the way it was portrayed in the nativity play. They wandered through the town and everywhere they went, they were turned away. In the nativity play I took part in, the scene was really drawn out. There wasn't just one innkeeper, there were three of them. Each one of them sent the couple away with rather harsh words. The innkeepers were more like the bad guys. Of course, the roles were played by those who had more or less similar characters in real life. There were many reasons to become upset at this point in the nativity play: – about the behaviour of the innkeepers, about those who played the role and about the whole situation itself: a heavily pregnant woman can't find a bed. So it was all the more fortunate that at least one innkeeper took pity on the couple and offered them a place in his stable!

But when you look at the Christmas saga as told in the Gospel of Luke, you will search in vain for the innkeepers. There are none. Luke merely recounts that Mary wrapped her son in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. He then simply explains why: “...because there was no place for them in the inn.” If you look beyond the text, you will realise that the “inn” is not an inn, a boarding house or even a hotel. There was no such thing at that time. Anyone who was travelling could count on people's hospitality. Strangers were welcomed and given shelter. This

was also the case in the narrative of Mary and Joseph. But the thing was that there was little space in the house where they were taken in, so they found room outside the living space – with the animals. This could have been in a house itself or in a stable near the house.

The image that lingers in our minds is that of the stable. It is firmly linked to the words: “...because there was no place for them in the inn.” Of course, this has a lot to do with the fact that early on, many paintings depicted a stable. The fact that our nativity plays usually include innkeepers is certainly also due to the way Martin Luther translated and interpreted the story. He translated it with the word “inn” and in his time these were guest houses. In a sermon, he tells the story very vividly. He describes the poor stable into which Mary and Joseph are practically forced to stay. And above the stable, he tells the congregation, there is an inn where people eat, drink and celebrate, where people feast and make merry. Luther explains that they overlook what is actually happening, who God is and what God is doing. God comes down in human form; God becomes man; he does not make a glamorous entrance, not as a great world leader. God becomes man in the child lying there in the manger.

Although this interpretation is rather an embellishment of the narrative, it points to a deep meaning of the short sentence in a unique and very fitting way: “...because there was no place for them in the



Figures from the nativity scene in the Anglican St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem.

inn." From the very beginning of his life, the child in the manger is linked in a special way to those who are marginalised. To those for whom there is actually no room.

Who is that? Yes, of course: they are the many people who are on the road and who depend on finding shelter some-

where. People who have left their homeland – for whatever reason, often, far too often, because they don't have enough to live on where they are or have to fear for life and limb. They are also people who no longer have a real home in their homeland because they have to hide in cellars to protect themselves from bombs. They are people who feel that they no longer belong because they are ill and completely dependent on help. And there are many others.

"...because there was no place for them in the inn." This short phrase adds something to the story of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth that people bitterly experience time and again: that there is no room for them. The story tells us that the child in the manger is linked to people who experience this. Those who follow Jesus are therefore particularly close to the hearts of those "who have no room in the inn". And it is good if they see this as a mission – a mission to ensure that there is room in our hostels, churches and schools.

Dr Volker Jung is Church President of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau and was member of the Board of Trustees of the Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace until this year.

“The good spirit of God reigns here“

How the boarding home cares for and educates children

The boarding home is the heart of the Theodor Schneller School. It is here that children from difficult backgrounds can find peace and structure and no longer have to fear beatings. “In an environment like this, they can grow and develop in the best possible way,” says boarding home manager Samer Batarseh.

The sun has almost slipped over the horizon. On the football pitch below the day school, a few boys are still enthusiastically chasing after a ball. Actually, they should already be sitting in their home group doing their homework. But their educator lets them carry on playing. The boys still have too much energy left in them.

Homework time has already started in the girls’ residential group. Amal, Najah and Leila (all names changed) are sitting at the rear table, concentrating on their exercise books. The older girls are seated at the front: Linda, Lina, Hanna, Yasmine and Asma. Their concentration is not what it should be. It seems they have much more important things to do than learning English vocabulary. Like beauty tips, for example. Giggling, they hunch over their smartphones. Puberty is the same everywhere.

Eventually, Miss Maha, the educator, steps in and firmly reminds the five of them to finally start their homework. Her warning doesn’t go down too well.



Before it’s time for bed, there’s a little round of cuddling with the educator on the sofa.

But at least it works. The girls get out their books and put them on the table. The younger ones have already finished. Two of them go down to the kitchen to fetch the evening meal: hummus, cheese spread and a kind of mortadella, served with pita bread and tea.

The tables are quickly laid and the girls eat with Miss Maha. Afterwards, there’s still time to learn some vocabulary for those who weren’t quite up to it earlier. Meanwhile, Najah and Leila get to work on the tiled floor with a broom and mop. When they have finished, they put on their pyjamas and brush their teeth. Then they join Miss Maha on the big sofa in the lounge where they have a little cuddle.

All the girls are in bed by 9 o’clock. From then on, all they do is whisper. Tomorrow will bring new challenges.

Samer Batarseh is still working in the boarding home office. He invites me in for tea and takes time to talk about the children at the school. Take the three brothers, for example. When they arrived seven



Foto: EMS/Buck

years ago, they were aggressive to everyone. Today, they are well integrated and get along with everyone. "If you want to change a child's behaviour, you have to change their environment," says Batarseh. They have an organised daily routine and know they need not fear any violence. "The three of them have changed completely here."

Batarseh is in touch with the parents by phone every week and tries to explain to them how they should handle their sons. A lot has changed there too. "They talk to them much more calmly, they're more polite and respectful."

Or take Ahmed. He is unusually little for nine years old. As a result, and because he always walked around very scruffy, he was bullied at his previous school. His grades were appalling. "Ahmed only started at the TSS this academic year. But he's already top of his class," says Batarseh.

The head of the boarding home then goes on to talk about the girls at the home. They've also had a very difficult time at

home. Take Najah, for example. She has been at the TSS for four years. Her parents cannot read or write. But Najah is one of the best in her class. And she enjoys singing in the school choir.

Or take Yasmine. She came six years ago. "Her mother has the mental age of a ten-year-old. When Yasmine came to us, she had serious problems in school and couldn't get along with the other children. Today, her marks are very good. She is the star at the boarding home. A real angel. Everyone likes her." The head of the boarding home positively gushes with praise. "She helps others with their homework. She gets on with everyone and is liked by everyone."

For Batarseh, the development that Yasmine and all the other children have gone through is more than just an educational success story. "The good spirit of God reigns here at the home. And this spirit can change everything." The fact that Batarseh is allowed to work at this school is something very fulfilling for him – like a worship service. "I love my work, I love this school. Here I see my own abilities and talents flourishing." He doesn't see himself as a manager. "I feel more like a father to the children. I serve them." And then he recalls a Bible verse that keeps coming back to his mind. "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me."

Katja Dorothea Buck

“Children enjoy learning here”

Why parents send their children to the TSS

For **Hussein Al-Barahmeh**, one thing was clear from the start: his children would one day go to the Theodor Schneller School (TSS). After all, they can learn German there. The father of the family had already raved of Germany as a child. His older cousin lived there and kept sending him magazines about the country and its people. “I was crazy about Germany,” he says. Later, he trained in the catering and hospitality industry and went to Germany, where he lived for 15 years. He then worked in Saudi Arabia, Oman and Turkey, but Germany made a lasting impression on him.

His two sons Abdallah (10) and Nashmi (12) have been attending the TSS day school for several years. Since his separation from his mother, his father has been living with them in Marka, a neighbouring village. Their little sister lives with their mother outside Amman. “They are hoping she will move back to Amman soon,” says Hussein Al-Barahmeh. “The boys miss her.”

Financially, the family is not doing so well at the moment. The father lost his job during the coronavirus pandemic. Even after the pandemic, tourism in Jordan has not really picked up again. “Because of the children, I can’t just look for something outside Jordan like I used to,” he says.

He really appreciates that the TSS is clean and tidy. “The children enjoy learning here,” he says and adds, “Hopefully they will learn German well here too. Then they can go to Germany one day like me.” Abdallah can easily imagine that. He



Nashmi and Abdallah Al-Barahmeh with their father

would like to travel and get to know something different. On the other hand, his brother Nashmi, who is two years older, is more drawn to America. But after a moment’s hesitation, he adds, “Yes, maybe Germany too.”

Like all boys of their age, Abdallah and Nashmi like playing football – and the usual computer games like Roblox and Minecraft. And like everywhere else in the world, they do this far too much in their parents’ opinion.

Abdallah already knows what he wants to be when he grows up: a dentist. His cousin is a dentist and he loves her profession. Nashmi, on the other hand, would like to “help people one day. Either as a policeman or as a general practitioner,” says the twelve-year-old. “Better still, study to be a doctor,” is his younger brother’s advice. “Then we can open a private clinic together with our sister.”

Yasmine Barhoumeh (35) lives in the Palestinian refugee camp next to the TSS. There is a very practical reason why her ten-year-old son Rakan goes to the TSS day school. The TSS is the only school that drives its school buses into the camp. “All the other schools don’t because they’re afraid of trouble inside the camp,” says the mother, shaking her head. In the past, that might have been justified. But now? “There’s a prejudice that the camp is full of poor people who are violent. That’s just not true,” she says. The fact that her son has found a place in a school nearby is very useful as Rakan sometimes has asthma attacks. “And then I have to be there for him quickly.”

Yasmine Barhoumeh works at the Arab Bank. She is a devout Muslim. When asked about the call to prayer that is heard from the mosques in the camp as well as on the grounds of the TSS early in the morning, she enthuses about the beauty and mastery of the Qur’an chanting.

The fact that the TSS is a Christian school is not a problem for her. “There are no problems between Christians and Muslims in Jordan. And there are nice people working here. I can call them at any time and ask them for advice. And if they can’t help me, they will find out who else can help me.” The school is getting better every day. “I see that every time I come here. The school’s philosophy is friendliness and respect. I love coming here.”

Every time there is something to celebrate, she is invited to join. “They’ve also asked me if I’d like to work as a teacher my-

self. But I turned them down because I’m not really a teacher.” Compared to other schools, the TSS is known for its good spirit and learning environment. “The children enjoy learning here and they



Yasmine Barhoumeh with their children- Rakan, Hashem und Salma

motivate one another.” The teachers also constantly encourage the children to do their best. “People need safety and a non-violent environment to develop and gain self-confidence,” says Yasemine.

“At the end of the day, we are all human beings. Whether a child becomes a good person or a bad person depends on the environment they grow up in.”

Rakan already knows exactly what he wants to be when he grows up: a military doctor. “Then I can help people and protect Jordan at the same time.” →

Bayan and her husband live very close to the school with their five children. “Our house is very small, but our heart is very big,” says the 35-year-old, laughing and hugging her children. Her husband sells mobile phones; she herself has not studied anything. They barely have enough income.

Bayan married early. Then came the children. Mohammed (14), Jud (13), Zeina (10) and the twins Sanna and Kerem, both six years old. Mohammed goes to the TSS



Bayan with her children Zeina, Mohammed, Sanna, Kerem and Jud.

day school, while Zeina and Jud even live at the boarding home. “I like going to school here,” says Mohammed. His classmates also enjoy learning. They motivate each other. That wasn’t the case at the other school he used to attend. “There, all the pupils were under a lot of stress and pressure and the teachers shouted a lot,” says the 14-year-old. At the TSS, he has learnt to be confident in himself and in his abilities. “Before, I was scared of the other pupils and the teachers.”

It was the same for Zeina. Before she came to the TSS, she had poor marks, especially in English. Now it is her favourite subject. “For me, it’s important that my children learn languages. I always tell

them to try hard, to do well at school and not to end up like me,” says Bayan.

As a Muslim, sending her children to a Christian school is not an issue for her. “My mother also went to a Christian school. We trust the people in charge here. The children learn what forgiveness and good co-operation mean.” Mohammad adds, “There are no big differences between Christians and Muslims.” Of the 28 students in his class, only two are from Christian families. His best friend is a Christian. His sister Jud has also found her best friend at boarding school, Lydia, a girl from a Christian family. Zeina tells us enthusiastically that she was allowed to decorate one of the school’s Christmas trees this year. “And we also celebrated Ramadan together,” she says, beaming.

The children already know exactly what they want to be when they grow up. Mohammed wants to be a dentist. He once had problems with his teeth himself and knows just how important good dentists are. Jud, on the other hand, wants to become an Arabic teacher like her grandmother. As for Zeina, she wants to become a paediatrician “to help children”.

“I always tell my children they should learn a lot so that they can get a good education later on.” She herself regrets that she didn’t do this. However, she has now signed up for a short training course in nursing at the TSS. It is a new training programme at the facility’s vocational college. In just a few months, students learn the basics of nursing care. “Then I’ll be able to help elderly people with their everyday lives later on,” says Bayan.

*Katja Dorothea Buck
recorded the conversations.*

A warm home

This is what an educator says about the Johann Ludwig Schneller School.

The Johann Ludwig Schneller School is more than a school or an institution. It is not like other educational institutions that are only bent on profit or that only cater to affluent families. It is not an ordinary school that provides education and spreads culture – it is much deeper than that. The Schneller School is an edifice of life.

In order to know Schneller well, you have to visit the school and see closely how it raises its students on love and giving. Like a compassionate mother who takes care of her children and keeps them safe. The best evidence of this is the boarding home which houses a large number of students. They are accepted into families that provide them with tenderness, care and kindness. They are the ones who turned to Schneller to extend a helping hand to them.

The Schneller School is almost the only home in the region that accepts children who are in dire need of care, children from broken families and orphans who are deprived of a mother's tenderness or the support of a father. Schneller has become a warm home for all of these people, and despite the difficult circumstances that our country is going through, a stifling economic crisis, this institution is still struggling and striving to protect these children and young adults.

The crisis has affected all segments of society, increasing the poverty rate and leading to a rise in the number of broken

families. Like a strong oak tree, our school still withstands the wind and storms to protect everyone who resorts to it. Yes, out of weakness, our institution creates a strength that connects me to these young people.

The Schneller School is committed to achieving the mission of its founder, which is to accept all children that are in need, provide them with the power of knowledge and prepare them for a sound upbringing that develops their scientific, mental and life skills and abilities so that they become an active human being in society.

Each educator among us is like a helper to these children. He or she is a friend, a supportive father, a caring mother and a guide on their life's path. They extend a helping hand to them with all love, sincerity, and dedication to make this soft dough into a good bread.

Rabab Matta is an educator at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon.

Turning the flow of a river upstream

Child protection at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School boarding home

How can children be educated so that they grow according to their potential? The Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon has been tackling this task for many years.

When people believe in fate and the predestined plan of God for every individual, they absolve themselves from any responsibility for the safety of children. To them, people are mere weak human beings that cannot change the judgement of God or fate. In such societies, children are exposed to all sorts of dangers and abuse.

What is most shattering when a child dies out of negligence or lack of adherence to child safety, how quickly the community forgets the rights of the dead child and it mobilizes itself for the protection of the person or family member who caused the tragic incident. This is due to the belief of QADAA WA QADAR. Educating people about child protection in our community is an uphill struggle that feels sometimes like trying to turn the flow of a river upstream.

Even in JLSS after a continuous effort of seventeen years and threats of serious repercussions, we still sometimes find some vocational students working without safety glasses under the eyes of some trainers. For the last two fun fairs we ended with a child breaking a limb because members of staff monitoring the inflatable games do not do their job perfectly to ensure the safety of children. The only answer was to stop getting the very high inflatable games that require continuous

monitoring. This points out to the fact that child protection is a community task that requires perfect adherence to safety guidelines.

Sadly, in the above cases, the only answer is extreme measures or prohibition. It is much better not to have an activity than having one that will hurt a child. A member of staff who doesn't adhere to rules after repeated warnings must be terminated. The person in charge must have an accurate assessment of the abili-



Child protection policies are taken very seriously at the JLSS so that they can grow up in safety.

ty of her/his staff regarding safety, before making any decision relating to children. When you don't have enough qualified staff in life saving, you should never take children to a swimming pool. When you know that your children get over excited in amusement parks that they stop listening to adult instruction, then taking them to an amusement park is a recipe / disaster. This is very sad, but the saying goes: "better safe than sorry."

The above-mentioned examples are nothing compared to the more serious elements of ensuring child safety in boarding homes in relation to workplace / learning place safety, child abuse, addiction,

bullying, social media trauma, and sexuality. The issue becomes a mammoth task in the context of a very diverse community from the extreme conservative to the most liberal.

The right of the child is to live her/his childhood irrespective of the beliefs of the community while at the same time not deviating so far from that community. This norm is only challenged in JLSS when the child's community teaches violence, militarization, hatred, and disregard to the rule of law, human rights, democracy, gender equality, and the integrity of creation. We need to keep the balance between our positive influence on the local communities and our tolerance of their beliefs.

JLSS has enormous power on parents or relatives when it comes to protecting a child. Their strong need to keep the child at JLSS makes parents and relatives comply with conditions the school imposes in extreme cases of abuse. Abuse must stop for a child to continue at JLSS. In all cases physical abuse at home was completely stopped after meetings with parents or relatives. The way they were brought up is not the right way to bring up their children if it includes physical abuse.

The child always comes before any beliefs or community impositions. His/her safety, personal happiness, education/training, future, role in society, aspirations, and dreams must always be addressed and protected away from any pressures. All this is done in a tactful manner that ensures the normal development and education of the precious persons under our care.

Reverend George D. Haddad



Martina Waibinger

Discipline, team spirit and compassion

Memories of a youth spent at the Schneller School

In 1961, Elias Abou-Eid was 14 years old when he was admitted to the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS). At the beginning, it was a cultural shock for him. But over time, friendships grew and “the overwhelming feeling of love and support”.

When I came to the JLSS, I didn't know German or English. This is why I was placed in class 4. It was a cultural shock to be introduced for the first time to the German way of life, where you learn discipline, team spirit, hard and honest work, punctuality, responsibility, and compassion. Above all I learned about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit as I attended church twice daily where the pastor would read through the scriptures and offer a short sermon and a prayer. I graduated from the school knowing the Bible thoroughly.

There were 3 separate buildings, for boarding and day students. I was assigned to Building 2 with 50 students. The sleeping hall was comprised of double deck beds. Naturally, everyone wanted to take the higher deck. A typical school day started at 6:15 AM. The “Bruder” (brother) would come in, clap his hands and yell “Los los aufstehen” (come on, come on, get up!). Everybody knew what to do next. You make your bed, go wash up and put your clothes on. Then we all line up in front of the dining room where the “Bruder” passes by and inspects our hygiene and cleanliness. Then we had breakfast.

There was a prayer every time we ate. Breakfast comprised of “labne” (drained yogurt), olives, bread and tea or butter with jam, “zaatar” (dried thyme) with olive oil. For me “labne” was a treat. After breakfast we go to the playground for a few minutes to play and chat with our friends. Nabih Barkha was a friend of mine who sadly passed a few years ago. Nabih was a school teacher all his life. He was also a good friend of Hartmut Brenner, the former director, who died three years ago.



Photo from a private album: A board home family at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in the 1960s..

My other friend was Josef Abdouni. He was always the first in our class, very intelligent and competitive. I was always the second. I never kept contact with Josef. Last I heard, he is also in the USA.

Lunch comprised baked beans with meat and rice, vegetable soup and bread. After lunch there was half an hour of playing soccer. At 3:00 PM, we all gathered in

front of the building and “Bruder” Klein would call out names and assign us cleaning tasks. I was lucky enough to get picked up by the school nurse to assist her with the patients. I was responsible for keeping the patient’s hall clean and tidy. I was also in charge of bringing mid-morning snacks to the patients where I would be lucky to snack too. Then we played a little until dinner time. Dinner was made up of butter, jam and bread, olives, sometimes vegetable soup and tea.

The most memorable time for me and other students was Christmas. At Christmas, the school was lit up with decorations, a special meal is prepared and everyone is filled with joy for Christmas gifts and letters from sponsors, sometimes envelopes with a little bit of cash stuffed in them. It was such a great feeling for everyone. Christmas was a special time for me, not just because of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, but the overwhelming feeling of love and support.

During my middle and high school years, I played the church organ during morning and evening prayers and sometimes I replaced Fräulein Lohrman on Sundays. It was a great joy for me. During those years, the Bruder asked me to become his assistant in Building 1. That lasted until my graduation in 1967.

Three school principals throughout my stay at the JLSS stand out. Herr Gehring had just arrived from Germany. He went into our dining room in Building 2 during our Abendbrot (evening meal). He entered with a grim, red face, with Pastor Zabaneh (Arabic speaking pastor). Previously, a few of the school children had been misbehaving badly. Among them was Yussef. He was in the 10th or 11th grades and he

bullied other students, generally causing trouble. Herr Gehring was a big man. As he entered the room, he asked “Wer ist Yussef?” (Who is Yussef). He was sitting in a corner back table. At this moment, you could hear a pin drop in the room. Herr Gehring, with his high pitch voice, looked at Yussef and from the top of his lungs he started screaming: “Du packst



Today, Elias Abou-Eid lives in the USA.

deine Sachen und fahrst mit dem ersten Bus”. (Pack your things and leave on the first bus.) He expelled Yussef on the spot. This was unprecedented in a “Waisenheim” (orphanage).

From that time on, everybody feared Herr Gehring, and respected his authority. He was strict and fair. He taught us pedagogy and was very good at it. I learned a lot from him.

Elias Abou-Eid lives in Phoenix, USA.

Strictly organised communal life in the spirit of an extended family

Living together in the Syrian Orphanage 1860-1940

Everyday life for the students changed over the years from the time the orphanage was founded in 1860 until it closed in Jerusalem in 1940. This time span can be roughly divided into two periods, the era of the founder Johann Ludwig Schneller from 1860 to 1890 and that of his descendants from 1891 to 1940.

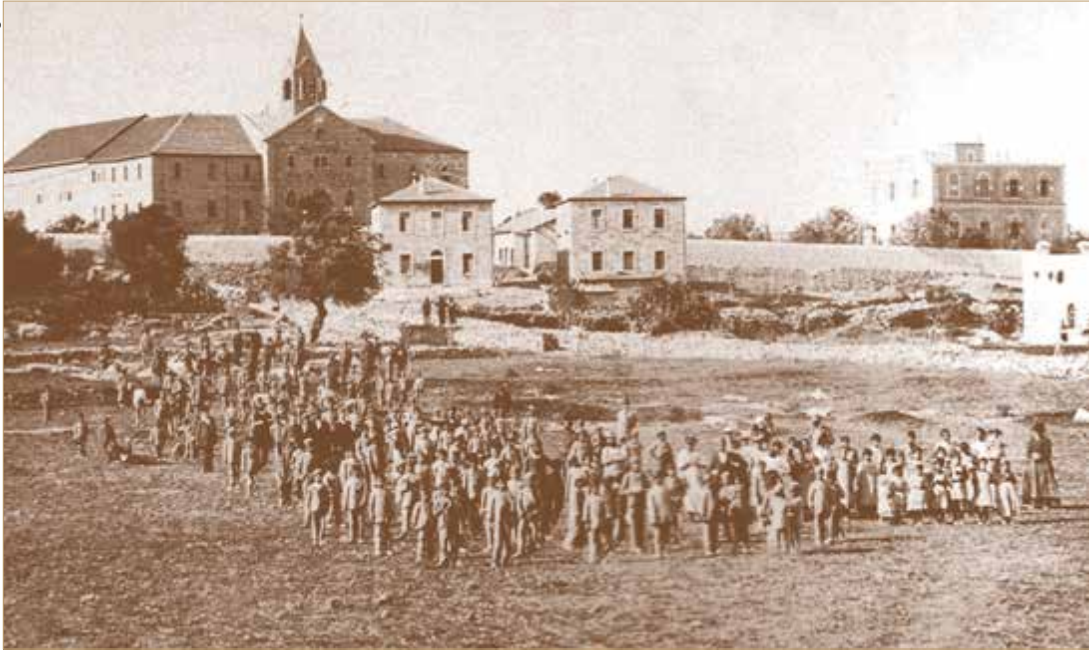
At the time of Johann Ludwig Schneller, the prevailing spirit was one of family togetherness. They lived together like an extended family. They came together for meals, went their different ways for lessons in the morning and afternoon and gathered together in the dining hall for evening meals. They prayed, ate and spent their free time together with their teachers, supervisors and educators.

That changed about 25 years later when Schneller's son Theodor moved into his own home with his family and was later followed by his son Hermann. The teachers and educators were primarily entrusted with supervising the students. They formed so-called "family groups", each under the supervision of a deacon. Children of different ages lived together in these groups, with the older ones having to supervise the younger ones and help them with their homework. The rigidly organised rhythm of everyday life left little room for individual development.

A working day began with an early wake-up call followed by communal singing. Afterwards, the children were required to look after their daily personal hygiene and they had to clean the bedrooms and common rooms under the supervision and guidance of the educators. Together with the adults, the children prepared breakfast which they ate after saying grace. This was followed by morning prayers and more singing. The children then dispersed to do their assigned duties, either in the infant school, the school, the farm, the training workshop or in the household.

At 12 o'clock sharp, they all gathered for lunch which started with saying grace and ended with a prayer. If it was a child's birthday, they were allowed to sit at the table with Johann Ludwig Schneller and his family to mark the occasion. During meals, general announcements were made and any donations made to the institution were read out. At the time of the institution's founder, the students entered their donations in a special book. Anyone who had done something well was praised publicly; anyone who had been remiss was reprimanded. In this way, everyone was informed about the many different tasks at the institution and could take part in all its ups and downs.

Every student had to fulfil a task assigned to them by 3 pm. This was followed by a free period during which the children



Once a month, the students of the Syrian Orphanage went on an outing to biblical sites around Jerusalem and into the countryside.

could play or rest. Until evening meal, small jobs had to be done in the house, the courtyard and the training workshop and the weekly song had to be rehearsed.

Music played a major role at the Syrian Orphanage. In addition to simple singing in the choir, it was mainly the older pupils who formed music groups, mainly playing the trombone and the flute. They also had the chance to take lessons on the harmonium.

In the evening, the students did their homework. Vocational students were given theoretical lessons and students who wanted to become teachers were taught educational theory. At 9 and 10 pm, every-

Guiding principles at the Syrian Orphanage

In keeping with the educational philosophy of the time, the Syrian Orphanage emphasised the virtues of obedience and humility. Life at the boarding home was therefore based on guiding principles that regulated behaviour with one another and with those of higher authority. Some of these principles included:

Be silent in the presence of the Lord and wait for him.

He who exalts himself shall be humbled.

My child, do not despise the chastisement of the Lord.

Humble yourselves to the hand of God, that he may exalt you.



Landeskirchliches Archiv Stuttgart

Children from the Syrian Orphanage celebrating Christmas with a deacon. This picture was taken in the 1920s.

one went back to their bedrooms in an orderly fashion and once again they sang songs.

This strict schedule did not leave much time for scuffles or other mischief. Anyone who behaved badly was summoned to Johann Ludwig Schneller's study to discuss their misbehaviour. This normally resulted with corporal punishment, which was still common practice at the time. The sons of the Schneller families were also physically disciplined, not by their own fathers but by the deacons.

The strictly organised daily and weekly routine was only interrupted by a free afternoon on Wednesdays, group attendance at the German worship service in the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem's Old City, religion lessons or Sunday school for the younger children. Another diversion was the monthly hiking day with visits to biblical sites in and around Jeru-

salem and getting to know nature. These walks fostered a sense of community in a relaxed atmosphere. The highlights of the year were extended hikes lasting several days or a camp on the shores of the Mediterranean.

The students at the orphanage were generously supported by donations from Europe and the USA. Thanks to the Schnellers' hard work, there was never a shortage of food, clothing or teaching materials at the facilities. This is why the Syrian Orphanage, with its branches in Bir Salem and Nazareth, was considered for decades to be one of the best and most important educational institutions in the Holy Land.

Jakob Eisler

The Wendlingen organ resounds in Amman

Music and peace take centre stage at the 2023 EVS General Meeting

It is not an exaggeration to say that the 2023 General Meeting of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) can be described as a unique event. On the same day, the organ was inaugurated in Amman. Three years previously, it was still standing where the EVS met: in the Johannesforum in Wendlingen.

The agenda already hinted that the EVS had something special up its sleeve. In fact, the agenda was turned completely upside down. Instead of starting with a worship service in the morning as usual, the meeting took place shortly before midday at the Johannesforum in Wendlingen and began with the formalities of a general meeting. The worship service was rescheduled for the afternoon, in a way marking the climax and end of the meeting.

The congregation in the Christ Episcopal Evangelical Church in Amman and the Wendlingen congregation were to pray and sing together during a live broadcast – and above all, it was to inaugurate the Weigle organ, which had been shipped from Wendlingen to the Theodor Schneller School in the last few months. The Wendlingen congregation no longer needed the instrument after their church was demolished. As Sunday is a normal working day in Jordan and worship services usually take place in the late afternoon, the EVS had to readjust its agenda. More about the worship service later.

At the General Meeting, EVS Chair Kerstin Sommer reported on important de-

velopments that had taken place over the previous twelve months at the two Schneller schools in Lebanon and Jordan. For example, in spring, a new hangar was inaugurated at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon. It not only provides space for the electrical workshop, but also facilities for servicing electric cars in the future. At the TSS in Amman, a lot of effort had gone into planning the general refurbishment of all the buildings which is estimated to cost €1.3 million. Work on the boarding home buildings was to be started in the first construction phase in the spring. This alone would cost an estimated €900,000. The EVS Executive Board is providing €350,000 and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg is contributing the same amount. The difference of €200,000 will have to be financed through donations.

The treasurer of the EVS, Christian Kißling, gave a detailed and transparent explanation of the association's annual accounts. In 2022, income was just



Linked online over the internet – Wendlingen and Amman congregations celebrate a joint service.

under €900,000 – around 20% less than the long-term average. Donations, collections and bequests in particular fell by more than a fifth to €683,000. This can be explained by a once-off bequest of €250,000 received the previous year. In 2022, the EVS only received €12,000 in bequests. However, Christian Kießling ventured to take a look at the prospects for 2023. There was a clear indication of an increase in both donations and bequests, he said. For example, a bequest of €380,000 had already been received this year. The General Meeting unanimously approved the activities of the Executive Board and adopted the 2024 business plan.

Kerstin Sommer also reported on the Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace, which the EVS set up 13 years ago. Unfortunately, the Foundation was unable to make a disbursement this year because the financial markets had performed so poorly. However, she expects

that next year’s disbursement would be significantly higher. “Then we will also be able to finance larger projects,” she said. Since its establishment, the Foundation has distributed a total of €393,000.

This year, the Foundation’s Executive Board and the Board of Trustees were reappointed as scheduled. Andreas Maurer, Managing Director of the Paulinenpflege and former EVS Executive Secretary, and Markus Schoch, Prelate in Reutlingen, continue to sit on the Board. EVS Chair Kerstin Sommer is also a member by virtue of her office.

Bernd Apel, Jochen Cornelius-Bundschuh, Berthold Frieß, Volker Jung and Erwin Ritte have stepped down from the Board of Trustees. The following members were reappointed to the Board of Trustees by the EVS Executive Board: Musa Al-Munaizel, who has been associated with the Schneller Schools for forty years and who worked as a peace educator at the TSS for several years, and Jutta Herold, who was a volunteer at the TSS in 2012/2013 and has been a member of the EVS Executive Board since last year. The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) appointed Christine Keim to the Board of Trustees. She is a senior church councillor for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg and has been associated with the two schools for many years.



EMS/Buck (3)

Without them, the organ would never have come to Amman: church musician Klaus Schulten (left) and organ builder Gerhard Walcker-Mayer.

The General Meeting unanimously appointed to the Board of Trustees Heike Springhart, Bishop of Baden, Stephan Arras, Provost of the Protestant Church of Hesse and Nassau, and theologian and Islamic scholar Yasin Adigüzel from the



Honoured with the golden Schneller dove: Gerhard and Alexander Walcker-Mayer.



Joscha Quade received an official blessing for his services (between Kerstin Sommer and Uwe Gräbe, on the left Dieter Heidtmann, EMS General Secretary).

Protestant Youth Organisation in Württemberg. The re-elected members included CDU Member of the Bundestag Steffen Bilger, former Federal Minister of Justice Herta Däubler-Gmelin and composer Oliver Schneller, who now represents the fifth generation of the founding family of the Syrian Orphanage and Schneller's work in the Middle East.

Klaus Schulten impressively explained the great importance that music, and organ music in particular, has always had in the Schneller family in his keynote speech

“The sound of the organ in the Middle East yesterday and today. Background facts about the organs at the Syrian orphanage”. The church musician, who is familiar with many organs in the Middle East, not only campaigned for the Wendlingen organ to be shipped to Amman, but has also spent many years researching the organ tradition at the Syrian Orphanage and recently published a book on the subject. (see page 21) He called the organ move a “visionary” project. It was an extremely sustainable investment in culture and spirit. Music was always an education for peace. The organ has made it possible to foster relationships between people in Wendlingen and Amman. The organ was a symbol of understanding, coming closer together and peace. “We are grateful that it can once again be heard in another location for the praise of God,” said Schulten.

This was all made possible thanks to organ builder Gerhard Walcker-Mayer and his son Alexander, who not only disassembled the Wendlingen organ into all its individual parts for transport overseas, but they also spent weeks reassembling the

organ in Amman in the extreme summer heat. In recognition of this tremendous achievement, the EVS presented them with the “Golden Schneller Dove”.

As was to be expected, the horrific war between Hamas and Israel was also a topic of discussion at the EVS General Meeting. After all, many members of the Association are closely connected to the Middle East in many different ways. It was remarkable that discussions on this topic were marked by both their depth of content and great mutual respect.

The joint worship service between Wendlingen and Amman was also coloured by mourning for the many deaths resulting from this conflict. However, it was sad that the organ could not be heard in

the Johannesforum – presumably due to an error in the software settings – and this disappointed many in Wendlingen.

Nevertheless, the 12th of November 2023 will always be remembered as the Sunday on which two congregations in Jordan and Germany prayed together for peace in Israel and Palestine. The prayer of intercession reads as follows: “We pray for all victims of bloodshed, violence and persecution and for all who are in danger in the Holy Land and throughout the world. We pray for all who mourn loved ones who have died in the terrible events of recent months. We pray for all those who preach violence. May their hearts be transformed towards the path of peace.”

Katja Dorothea Buck

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<https://schneller-schulen.ems-online.org>

The sound of the organ in the Middle East

The keyword “Middle East” is unlikely to make anyone think of organs in the region. Therefore, the book reviewed here has many surprises in store. Klaus Schulten, himself a qualified church musician, traces the history of organs at the institutions in the southern Levant initially under the responsibility of the German Protestant Church.

It starts with the organs at the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem which no longer exists today. It ends with the shipment of organs no longer needed in their original churches from Scotland and Württemberg to the Schneller schools in Lebanon and Jordan. The last story alone would be long enough to fill an entire adventure novel. But above all, it shows the importance of church music at these institutions.

The history of the instruments at the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem is also described in detail. Experts in organ building and organ playing would certainly be interested in the descriptions and explanations of the stops and sound concepts of the organs. However, the book is particularly impressive as the author places all this in their historical contexts, so that one can also learn a lot about the trials and tribulations of the German Protestant institutions in the Holy Land. In order to compile the book, the author conducted extensive research in a number of different archives. A great deal of material that was previously unknown or unpublished is presented here for the first time. This well-produced book with numerous illustrations is recommended to anyone with an interest in the history and music

history of the region since the 19th century. Finally, it should be noted that the author has published three CDs with recordings from the Protestant churches in Jerusalem. They are available on his website augustevictoria.net.

Prof Dr Martin Vahrenhorst



Klaus Schulten
Orgeln im Nahen Osten
Das Syrische Waisenhaus
Jerusalem und seine Orgeln
im Spiegel der Zeit.
Erlanger Verlag 2023
ISBN 978-3-87214-581-9
141 p, Hardcover
22 Euro

**The book is only available in bookshops
or online at www.erlanger-verlag.de
but not from the EVS Secretariat.**

Donations: The shipment of the organ from Wendlingen to Amman and its reassembly at its new location cost a high five-figure sum. Many have already donated, but unfortunately there is still a shortfall of a few thousand euros. We therefore kindly appeal once again for donations: :
Evangelischer Verein für die Schneller-Schulen
Evangelische Bank eG
DE59 5206 0410 0000 4074 10
Purpose: Orgel TSS

Congratulations to Amman!!!

An organ workshop at the Theodor Schneller School

Finally, there it is, the Weigle organ from Wendlingen. It stands in the church of the Theodor Schneller School in Amman as if it had never been anywhere else. The sign on the organ console reads: Friedrich Weigle, Echterdingen, 1968. Klaus Schulten conducted an organ workshop in Amman in October 2023. He shares his impressions here.

The trip to Amman in mid-October 2023 had been planned for some time, at a time when nobody knew what would happen on 7 October and after. I made the trip anyway.

Gerhard Walcker had finished the organ in the summer and I thought you can't just say, the organ is finished, here's the key to the console, on the right are the light and motor switches, on the left are the stop keys. Whereas there are quite a number of organs in Jerusalem, even in Beirut, it's a different situation in Amman. My intention was therefore to introduce the organ to all those who play keyboards or piano in Jordan's churches.

First of all, I took a day for myself to familiarise myself with the instrument. I wanted to get to know it and discover it. I wanted to do what you always do when you play a concert, for example: see the organ as a companion, enter into a dialogue with it, find out what I want myself and what the organ wants – and then not only play the music I wanted to play but bring it to life.

It was a very intense moment when I entered the church: I went into the room and was overwhelmed by the sheer height of the organ that even reaches up to the church roof. When you stand in front of it, you really have to say: how incredibly impressive. This organ fits in perfectly well with the concrete architecture of the church and – of course I don't know the old location – it probably sounds even better than before, because the room in Amman is smaller, the organ is positioned at exactly the right place in the church and the sound has great presence.

I admit the organ is even better than I thought. It is probably one of the best Weigle organs made in the 1960s; fortunately, the few basic stops carry very well and are beautiful; and I know of churches in Württemberg that have nowhere near as good an organ.

Hermann Schneller, grandson of Johann Ludwig Schneller and founder of the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem, built the two schools in Lebanon and Jordan together with his brother Ernst Schneller after the war and tried in vain for years to install an organ in the church at the Theodor Schneller School.

Now, 125 years after the first organ was installed at the Syrian Orphanage, this has finally become reality. It may seem to be an irony of history but the organ comes very close to Hermann Schneller's original concepts, all of which are documented. In fact, this organ is even better. Back then,



Klaus Schulten at the Weigle organ in Amman

nobody would have had the courage to simply place an organ in the church nave.

So congratulations to Amman and to all those who had the courage to actually carry out this project. If anything is sustainable, it is this: things can be created – they can develop, and if there is a language of peace, then it is music.

The workshop took place over the following two days. What I found fascinating were the people who attended: I have rarely experienced people with so much respect, openness, interest, self-confidence and amazement, amazement at the things that exist in the here and now. On the other hand, nobody brought any notes with them. Instead, there was plenty of time to explain to the eight participants what an organ is, how to approach it and

how it works with 8' and 4' pipes, the overtones, the manuals, couplers and the special combination buttons... in short, what the whole concept of this instrument is. Above all, how to play or release the keys and how to play hymns.

There was one man there who could read music very well. He turned the pages of one of the pieces in my presentation with great confidence. The others would really need the opportunity to take proper keyboard or piano lessons first. But almost all of them play somewhere on Sundays.

All in all, it makes you marvel at the sense of gratitude of the local people, the amazement at what an organ is and can do – and compare it with the situation in our country, where people tend to no longer need organs at all... and to replace the great choral tradition of our Church with arbitrariness – whatever sounds and words are needed are enough.

Gerhard Walcker has done an outstanding job with his immense experience, skill and patience, and the organ is as good as new. He deserves our enormous gratitude and recognition. It would have been irresponsible to destroy such an organ.

Klaus Schulten

Inauguration: Church musician Klaus Schulten will present the organ at a dedication concert on 21 April 2024 in Amman. Please see the following page for an invitation.

Trips to the Schneller schools

In spring 2024, there will be two different opportunities to travel to the Schneller schools in the Middle East, depending on the political situation in the region. Unfortunately, the fact that the two trips will be at the same time was unavoidable.

Trip to the inauguration concert of the organ at the Theodor Schneller School

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) and the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) invite all those who are interested to an inauguration concert of the Weigle organ at Christ Church Amman on Sunday, 21 April 2024.

The German church musician Klaus Schulten, together with the director of the TSS, Rev. Dr Khaled Freij (readings), will present the instrument in a dialogue be-

tween sounds and words under the title of "Music for Peace". This will be followed by a festive reception when the TSS choir will sing under the direction of Jordanian music teacher Qamar Badwan. There will then be an opportunity over dinner to socialise with the people who support the work at the TSS, including the children.

For those travelling from Germany or Switzerland, the EVS is planning a small tourist package together with a travel agency for the time between 18 and 24 April 2024. Anyone interested should contact the EVS Secretariat at evs@ems-online.org for further information on conditions, cost and accommodation.

Trip to Lebanon with a visit to the Johann Ludwig Schneller School

Under the guidance of EVS board member Anselm Kreh, the Limburg-based tour operator Tobit is offering an eight-day plane trip to Lebanon from 20 April to 27 April 2024.

Besides seeing the sights in Beirut, Byblos, Anjaar and Sidon, the itinerary also includes a visit to the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. The cost is €1,445 per person in a double room.

For more details: www.tobit-reisen.de or send an email to info@tobit-reisen.de



Gerhard Walcker

The former Wendlingen organ in its new home at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Amman.

Ensuring the transparency of our actions

EMS presents the draft of first sustainability report

In order to make its work even more sustainable, the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS), to which the Schneller Association belongs, has started the introduction of the EMASplus management system. The first sustainability report is due to be published in spring 2024.

“Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?” (Isaiah 58:7). The EMS has responded to this call with many projects and programmes since its foundation in 1972. Many of the objectives of this work coincide with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations.

EMS has joined the EMASplus sustainability management system to make its own actions even more transparent and to review them in terms of economic, environmental and social factors at regular intervals. EMAS is the abbreviation for “Eco-Management and Auditing Scheme”. The special thing about EMASplus is that social and economic factors are also included in the certification alongside environmental aspects – that’s what the “plus” stands for. The first sustainability report will be certified in spring 2024 and then published. The certification is valid for a period of four years. After that, there will be a re-assessment at regular intervals.

The report describes where EMS currently stands in terms of the use of its resources, the quality of its financial investments and as an employer. Much of the

data describes the situation at the Stuttgart Secretariat. However, the carbon footprint of the many air miles in support of the work of international committees is also taken into account. At this stage, the multidimensional nature of the sustainability issue comes to light: how can regular dialogue be maintained and enhanced, and how can emissions be avoided at the same time?

However, the report does not stop at the current situation, but also identifies specific measures for the future. These include “gender-sensitive budgeting”. The aim here is to implement more gender equality with the aid of budget planning. Through project work, this attitude is then passed on to member churches and this will lead to greater awareness there.

“The EMS is committed to social justice, peace and the preservation of the Creation. A standardised sustainability report makes a decisive contribution to the transparency and credibility of our commitment. We chose EMASplus because it has proven its worth for many church organisations over the years,” says EMS Executive Secretary Rudolf Bausch.

Joscha Quade

Standing together in times of crisis

The war and its consequences for the EMS

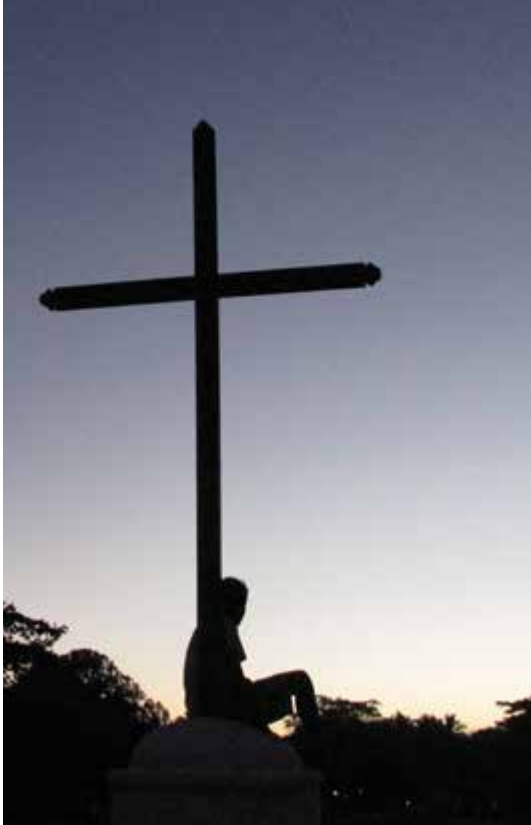
How will we ever be able to talk to one another after this cataclysm ends? Once the present maelstrom of terror, war, violence and hatred in the Middle East has come to a stop; once our ideological proxy wars on Europe's streets have abated; once all that is left are ruins – ruins of destroyed homes, destroyed lives and destroyed souls – how can we ever look one another in the eye again?

For one of our EMS member churches, this war, which began with Hamas' inconceivable terrorist attack on Israeli children, parents and grandparents on 7 October, is not a remote fantasy. The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem runs the Anglican Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza. By the end of October, this facility had been hit twice by rockets. On Saturday 14 October, it was an Israeli missile that severely damaged the brand new cancer diagnosis department, wounding four staff members. And on Tuesday 17 October, it is fairly certain that it was a misfired Palestinian rocket that exploded over the hospital's inner courtyard, killing many people who had sought refuge there. The director of the only Christian hospital in Gaza, Dr Souhaila Tarazi, has survived five wars here. This one is by far the worst.

The EMS Fellowship is also affected by the current catastrophe in other ways. Many young volunteers who were forced to leave Israel and Palestine had to travel through Jordan and the Theodor Schneller School there. Due to the eco-

nomie and political crisis, the boarding home of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon is already full to capacity with children and young people from very poor backgrounds – now missiles are striking not too far away; Lebanon is being gradually drawn into the war. Our theology students, who were sent to the Near East School of Theology in Beirut (NEST) by the EMS, had to interrupt their academic year due to government travel advisories.

After this war, will our Palestinian partners still be able to speak with any impartiality to leaders of German churches who have publicly announced their commitment in their statements "We stand with Israel!"? And vice versa: will Jewish Israelis still want to continue a dialogue with Christian partners who have played down Hamas' terror and fantasies of annihilation against the Jewish state as a consequence of Israeli occupation? The centuries-old, murderous anti-Semitism does not need an occupation to justify its hatred – it will always blame "the Jews" or the Jewish state for all its misfortunes. Just as the fight against anti-Semitism is a constant challenge, the other challenge is to finally find more intelligent solutions to Israel's security problems after this war than locking up an entire population. The deeply traumatised people of Gaza need opportunities to development, respect for their human rights and well-defined prospects that have been denied them for far too long.



Our faith must withstand the test, especially in times of crisis.

As an international fellowship, we at EMS stand together in such situations of crisis. We pray for peace in Israel and Palestine, for our brothers and sisters on the ground and especially for those at the Ahli Arab Hospital. A particularly impressive sign of solidarity came from the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) at the end of October. They donated a sum of €20,000 which has been channelled through the EMS to the hospital in Gaza. At the same time, our Korean brothers and sisters have launched a prayer appeal for Israel and Palestine. Perhaps we will succeed in maintaining good relations with all sides in this conflict and making a contribution to peace, at least within the EMS Fellowship.

Uwe Gräbe

Guidance for congregations



In mid-November, the Evangelical Church of Westphalia published a guide with basic information on the “ Hamas terror attack on Israel – the war in the Middle East and its consequences”.

called “Holy Land”, which is also of central importance to us as Christians”. The 14-page booklet makes it clear why it is important to take a close look right now and not succumb to the temptation of “comparing injustice with injustice or taking sides and ignoring the suffering, worries and fears of others”.

PDF-Download: www.oikos-institut.de/der-terrorangriff-auf-israel-und-die-folgen/

The authors’ aim is to provide church congregations with a guide to help them “remain in a double solidarity with people in the so-

Coming together to mourn for all victims

Plea against dogmatism and armchair philosophers

We cannot prevent the hatred, violence, killing and death in the Holy Land. But what we can do is ensure that the rifts in this country do not become even deeper. The precondition for this is to simply trust the other person to also want peace for the people of Israel and Palestine.

When hundreds of terrorists from the radical Islamic group Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October, it came as a terrible shock. There had not been such a massacre of Jews since the Holocaust which no power in the world could have prevented. The conviction that the state of Israel was a safe home for the Jewish people – persecuted and humiliated for thousands of years – was shattered in a matter of a few hours – mowed down and massacred by a horde of ideologically misguided young men.

In the meantime, we must also realise that never before have so many Palestinians had to die in such a short time in this conflict. Since 1948, more money and energy has been channelled into the search for a solution than in any other conflict in the world. No other conflict has been prayed for as much as this one.

By now at the latest, all those working for peace and reconciliation in the Holy

Land should pause for thought. Something must have gone fundamentally wrong in the past 75 years. Why is the world facing such a bloodbath after all these efforts, after all the prayers for peace?

But there are very few signs that people in Germany are stopping to reflect on this. While families in Israel mourn their murdered relatives and anguish over their kidnapped children, mothers and fathers, while people in Gaza have to reckon every minute that it could be their last, the same old familiar debates continue here in Germany. Only more bitterly than before.

People are quickly put under general suspicion if they formulate things a little differently, weigh them differently or perhaps even interpret some things differently. What about asking questions for clarification, listening or analysing the other person's point of view? Why waste time on all that? Now is the time for unequivocal commitments. A working group that has campaigned for Palestinian rights for decades is summarily labelled as Hamas-affiliated and anti-Semitic because participants (not speakers!) at its rallies had shouted "Free Palestine" (not "From the River to the Sea!"). Witch hunts are launched on Facebook as soon as anyone thinks about the human misery on both sides. This is said to be relativising Hamas' terror. Or people are asked to explain why they liked a post by Mitri Raheb, the in-

ternationally renowned Palestinian liberation theologian from Bethlehem, on 7 October.

A retired Protestant theologian has even set himself the task of asking everyone who asks him on Facebook to show more empathy with the Palestinian civilian population to see what they wrote about the Hamas massacres on Facebook on 7 October. He would discover “interesting things” there, he whispers to the virtual public.

Thousands of innocent people are dying in Israel and Palestine, and in Germany there is obviously nothing better to do than to make bland comments on this horrific war from the comfort of an armchair, naturally with the claim to exclusive sovereignty of interpretation.

This mud-slinging polemic is a total sham. Our comments and analyses, whether they are printed in newspapers or posted on social media, have no influence whatsoever on developments in the Middle East. There are no fewer bombs falling on Gaza just because someone is shouting “Free Palestine” in market squares. Nor does it contribute anything to Israel’s security if the very justified call “Never Again is Now” is shared en masse on social media. We must finally admit to ourselves

that we are completely helpless in the face of the slaughter in the Holy Land.

What we can influence, however, is the culture of debate in Germany. How we talk about the war between Hamas and Israel has an impact on how we live together in our society. Those who are concerned with being right will only deepen the rifts. Anyone who condemns all those who do not think exactly like themselves as “anti-Semitic” or “one-sidedly in solidarity with Israel” is missing the opportunity to find intelligent comrades-in-arms in the fight against anti-Semitism, racism and Islamophobia.

It is not necessary to agree on everything in order to embark on a common endeavour. The lowest common denominator would already be enough. And that could be to start mourning for all the people whose threads of life have been brutally cut off since 7 October. Finding a form of expression for this could be the duty of the religious communities. Only when everyone recognises each other’s suffering will peace have a chance, not only in Germany but also in the Middle East.

Katja Dorothea Buck



*Comment on SM 3-2023
„Plea for diversity“*

Many thanks to the editors of „Schneller“ magazine, especially to Katja Dorothea Buck. Hardly any other publication does more justice to the religious, cultural, ethnic, political and historical diversity of the Middle Eastern context than this magazine, in particular the 3/2023 issue, which once again mentions the Christian concerns of Palestinian liberation theology.

I would like to make a few additional comments on the subject of the Templers: they certainly carried out important development work in Israel/Palestine, as the Israeli professor Alex Carmel testifies in his publication „Christians as Pioneers in the Holy Land“.

But it is also important to mention what was the real driving force behind their mission. Here are a few quotes from their magazine „Süddeutsche Warte“, published from 1845 onwards. As early as 1848 it says: „Since they (the Jews) were now sinking into impurity and sin and desecrating the land, they were driven out, as had been previously determined... no one else can belong to this holy people except those who receive new life from the blood of Christ.“ In No. 13 of 30 March 1854: „We have in our midst the Jews. They are not the people of God, as some falsely call them, but according to Ezekiel they are the dead remnants and ruins of the

people of God... We, on the other hand, who believe in Jesus and endeavour to keep his word, have a certain right to belong to the people of God... The Jews, as long as they do not want the Messiah, do not have this right.“ Page 81 then reads: „Israel must first be converted before they enter their land.“ „But why has God not yet sent this salvation? The obstacle cannot be sought in God, it can only lie in the condition of the Jews, in their deviation from their destiny and task.“

It should also be mentioned that some of the Templers broke away from the Württemberg regional church as early as 1859. Particular reference should be made to the publication on this subject by Andreas Maurer.

Ulrich Kadelbach, Stuttgart

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this issue of Schneller Magazine with its current focus on diversity. Diversity means recognition, acceptance and integration. We were all born as God's children, created in his image, even if we feel we belong to different cultures, denominations, groups or other communities, whether we were born into them or have freely chosen to do so. We all represent thoughts and positions that are sometimes similar, but also sometimes contradictory. Diversity is a positive force for co-existence and peace on earth.

Aziz Shalaby, USA

Many thanks for the interesting new issue of the Schneller Magazine. I was also pleased to read your article on the Sabeel book „This is where we stand – A Sabeel Reflection on Antisemitism“ The German translation of the book is expected to be published by Aphorisma-Verlag in January.

Ernst-Ludwig Vatter, Aichwald



*We saw his star when it rose
and have come to worship him.*

Mt 2,2



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