

SCHNELLER

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EVS Evangelical Association
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Pilgrims and tourists

Travelling to the holy sites in the Middle East

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Alumni reminisce

Dear Reader,

Tourism – and above all pilgrimage tourism – is one of the main sources of income in the Holy Land on both sides of the River Jordan. It was all the more dramatic for the people living there when worldwide travel came to a halt as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This also affected many church guest houses and hotel management schools. As a result, the funding of entire churches was suddenly called into question.



It was last summer that it was again possible to travel. We asked people in the Middle East who work with pilgrims and tourists how they are adjusting to the current situation. We found a lot of creativity and many new beginnings.

Of course, pilgrimage is so much more than just tourism. This becomes very clear in the biblical contemplation by our Jewish author Johanan Flusser, among others. But we also made some astonishing discoveries while working on this issue. Did you know that there are also pilgrimages from Palestine to Lebanon? Read about this in the interview with Reverend Jamil Khader. And a real scoop – a “scoop” is what Johanan Flusser calls it in the original Hebrew – is probably that the great Jewish thinker Shmuel Hugo Bergman once trained an apprenticeship as a shoemaker at the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem. We have known about Jewish children at the Syrian Orphanage since the rediscovery of the old admission ledgers (see SM 4/2014). But the latest discovery adds a whole new dimension!

By the time you hold this issue in your hands, the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the EMS and this year’s Schneller Festival will have come to an end. We will only be able to report on them in the next issue. But of course, you will also find a lot of news about the Schneller schools and their sponsoring churches in this issue.

On behalf of the editorial team, I wish you a stimulating read and send you warm greetings.

Yours,

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

Uwe Gräbe, Reverend

Going up to Jerusalem

Normally, a contemplation begins with a Bible passage or with a short introduction to a theological issue. However, it is sometime necessary to deviate from this rule, and writing this article on Jewish pilgrimage must be counted among them. This contemplation begins with a “scoop”. In journalism, this is a term used to describe surprising information or a story that has never been read before.

What my cousin Chana Bergman recently told me about her father, Professor Shmuel Hugo Bergman (1883-1975) and the Syrian Orphanage, the first Schneller School in Jerusalem, can definitely be called a scoop. Bergman was a philosopher, the first dean

of the Hebrew University and founder of the National Library in Jerusalem. He was also a member of the leading circle of “Brit Shalom”, a group of people around Martin Buber and Ernst Simon, who came together almost a hundred years ago to stand up for just peace and coexistence with equal rights for Jews and Arabs in the country.

Wanting to clear his head of the stresses he endured while founding a national library, Professor Bergman decided to take up a practical trade. So, he turned to the Syrian Orphanage where he eventually trained as a shoemaker. Undoubtedly, his work as a philosopher and peacemaker, his collaboration with Albert Einstein and his relations with Mahatma Gandhi may have been of far greater importance to human-



What was previously unknown: The Jewish philosopher and university dean Professor Shmuel Hugo Bergman also trained as a shoemaker at the shoemaking workshop of the Syrian Orphanage.

ity than his profession as a shoemaker – if he practised it at all later. Having said that, however, this is precisely what is needed today: obtaining the practical skills that allow a person to lead a life in respect and dignity. I myself am currently involved in the education of people with special needs in Jerusalem and my wish is that Jews, Muslims and Christians can learn together as they do at the Schneller educational institutions.

But let's address the actual topic of this issue: pilgrimage. The same Jerusalem where Bergman once founded the National Library and learned the shoemaking trade at the Schneller School has been the goal and dream of pilgrims for centuries or even millennia. A pilgrimage fulfils the mission of people who believe in their God and want to put this faith into practice. It is love for the Creator and devotion to a specific place where a person can give thanks for all God's gifts. Therefore, it was customary in the past to bring a sacrificial animal or another gift.

God himself commanded our father Abraham to leave his land and home to move to a place he would show him.

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.’” (Genesis 12:1).

Abraham sets off, very lonely and feeling he has lost his homeland. In fact, he was the first pilgrim to go to Mount Moriah, which is recognised today as Jerusalem. After a three-day journey from

Beersheba, he reached this mountain; the same one on which, according to Jewish tradition, he was commanded to bind his son Isaac to an altar. All of Abraham's biological children, Jews and Muslims alike, hold this mountain as sacred. We hope it will one day become the mountain of peace. It is written in the Torah that Abraham will become the “father of many nations”. And indeed, the descendants of Abraham's sons Isaac and Ishmael, although they each went their own way, still share many beliefs, values and traditions today, including some commandments relating to pilgrimage.

For me, Jerusalem is my home city, the place where I feel at home. My parents once came as refugees from Europe – to the city towards which the Jews already raised their eyes some 2,600 years ago, as they ascended as pilgrims to the First Temple, and later to the Second Temple. Pilgrimage is a physical, spiritual and emotional act of personal and collective devotion to God and contains a unique so-

Dedication

The author wrote his text in grateful memory of Karl-Hermann Blickle (1950-2022) as well as his numerous pilgrimages to Jerusalem and would like to dedicate this contemplation to him in the Schneller Magazine.

Karl-Hermann Blickle was very committed to promoting mutual understanding between Jews, Christians and Muslims, especially among the most vulnerable in society. Mr Blickle has always supported the work of the Schneller Schools and the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

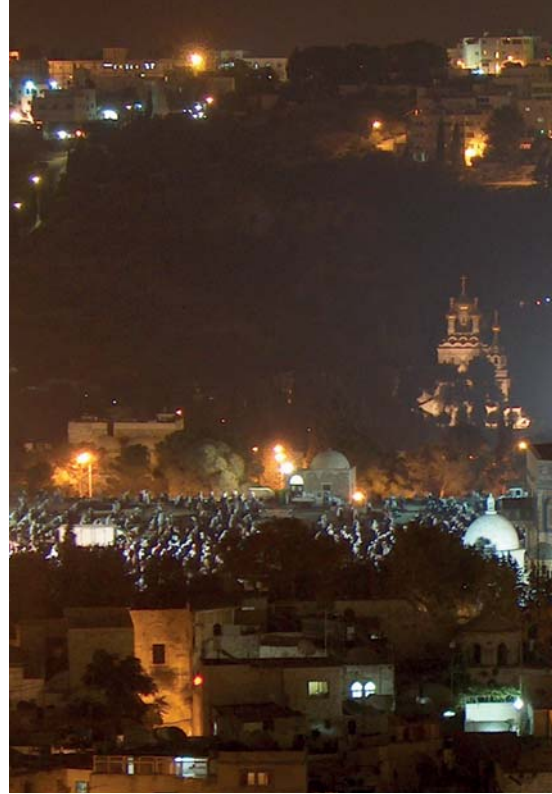
All of Abraham's children, Jews and Muslims alike, hold this mountain as sacred. May it one day become the mountain of peace.

cial component. Together, the people who were liberated from Egypt give thanks to the Creator of the world.

The three annual pilgrimage festivals in Judaism are Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Feast of Weeks or Pentecost) and Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles). They are called Regalim ("Feasts of the Feet") because they carry out the commandment (mitzvah) to go up to Jerusalem on foot on these three holidays. Burnt offerings and ceremonial sacrifices were once offered. At the same time, such feast days are closely related to the seasons. For example, on the last day of Sukkot towards the end of summer, prayers are offered to this day for rain so that pilgrims can return to their homes before it starts raining.

According to the Torah, the pilgrim festivals are a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt. Therefore, there is a deep social component to these holidays: remembering the vulnerable in society, the converts, the poor, the orphans and the widows, just as God remembered the Israelites who were in slavery in Egypt.

At Sukkot, we read in the book of Zechariah the prophet's prophecy that after a terrible war in Jerusalem, some of the fighting nations will lay down their arms



Uwe Gräbe (2)



A Jewish pilgrim in Jerusalem: A pilgrimage expresses a person's love for the Creator and devotion to a specific place where a person can give thanks for all God's gifts.



and they will go up to Jerusalem every year – on a kind of pilgrimage *“to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the festival of tabernacles.”* (Zechariah 14:16).

As a small child in Jerusalem, I always listened to this reading full of eagerness – it was a firm promise that one day we will be able to celebrate Sukkot as a holiday of brotherhood with all these nations. At the same time, the prophet warns that the nations who do not go up to Jerusalem will be punished by the Creator: *“...there will be no rain upon them.”* (Zechariah 14:17).

For all of us as children of Abraham, I wish we can hold on to the vision of a joint pilgrimage. And perhaps, something of this will be fulfilled in today’s complex reality through the pilgrimage of Jews, Christians and Muslims to Jerusalem. So,

let us pray together to our Heavenly Father that this development may grow even stronger and that mutual understanding and peace may grow during the pilgrimage between all the children of Abraham in the world. Thus, together we will overcome all strife, as it is said: *“On that day the Lord will be one and his name one.”* (Zechariah 14:9).

Johanán Flusser studied veterinary medicine, philosophy and sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. As a teacher for special needs, he runs the Israeli charity Achla-Heyanut for families with children with special needs. Johanán is the son of the well-known Jewish New Testament scholar David Flusser and is himself involved in interreligious dialogue.

More than just pious tourism

Pilgrimages to the Holy Land

For centuries, people have travelled to the Holy Land to see the sites of the stories in the Bible. Johannes Zang knows why they are still motivated to do so in the 21st century. In the past few years, he has acted as guide to about 2,000 people visiting Israel and Palestine.

Even as a child, I wanted to visit all the holy sites that I was familiar with through Bible lessons and the Gospels of the church service," says Max Pinzl, a retired Catholic priest in Simbach am Inn. In 1968, he set off for the Holy Land for the first time. Since then, he has gone on almost twenty more trips in the form of pilgrimages and retreats in Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Looking back, he concludes, "The Holy Land is an excellent place for me to learn all about the Bible and it has become a source of strength in my spiritual life."

Sources of strength – is that what people living four hours away by plane are looking for "in the land of the Lord" (the title of one magazine) or "in the land of the Bible" (another magazine)? If so – will they find it?

When looking at travel schedules, one thing is noticeable: Protestant parishes tend to invite people on study, educational or encounter trips; Catholic parishes invites people on pilgrimages, whereby the aspect of "encounter" is also increasingly found there. Catholic groups usually celebrate the Eucharist every day or every other day, whereas Protestant groups usually celebrate communion during the whole trip. Some pastors, priests or group leaders

Protestant and Catholic tour groups like to celebrate services at the "Dalmathia" stone altar near the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish in Tabgha on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.



make a point of celebrating Sunday mass together with local Christians in their church in Arabic, in Jericho or Nazareth, Akko, Bethlehem, Rameh (Galilee) or Taybeh (near Ramallah).

Marianne Fleckenstein from the vicinity of Aschaffenburg boarded a plane for the first time shortly before she turned 80. Destination: Tel Aviv. As a Catholic she still remembers the ten-day "pilgrimage and encounter journey" to this day; when she hears the Sunday Gospel, her memory goes back to the Mount of Olives or the Sea of Galilee. She says she feels a deep sense of joy and gratitude. And Simone Adler, a Protestant Christian from Iphofen, puts it this way: "In so many services, my imagination runs wild like a film – so wonderful and full of blessings!"

Angie B., a Protestant from the Bavarian Forest, relates that her experiences were not at the holy sites. She said she ex-



Johannes Zang

perienced “such special divine moments in the desert” when she hiked for half a day through the Wadi Qelt between Jerusalem and Jericho. She is not the only one who has is more deeply touched by in nature than the holy sites – for others it was the boat trip on the Sea of Galilee. However, quite a few go home rather disappointed or even appalled by the noise, the jostling, the hustle and bustle. This also includes the addiction of some tourists of taking photos and selfies. Women have even been seen posing on the Anointing Stone in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and at the Church of the Resurrection. So, it is pious tourism after all?

As the Protestant pastor Walter Neuenhöffer from Bamberg recalls, this is exactly what it was not, thanks to a sensitive tour guide. His meetings with local Christians and peace activists from both sides “sharpened his view for the people living in Israel and Palestine. He had to change

some of his “inner images stemming from the time of his children’s church services”, but nevertheless, after nine days, he returned with the conviction: “My faith was strengthened by visiting the sites where the stories in the Bible took place.”

On the other hand, Hella Lang was primarily preoccupied with conflicts during and after her trip in the spring. Her thoughts often revolve around the discord she experienced. “As so many people from different cultures met and had to live together there throughout the centuries, perhaps it is precisely because of these ‘sources of friction’ that there were so many conflicts and wars,” she says, thinking aloud. “But on the other hand, it may also be because of the wonderful passages in the Bible. She returned from her trip with a “terrible question”: “Do people only progress through conflicts and problems? Do the conflicts there have to be the same all the time?”

After guiding 61 trips with about 2,000 people, I can assure you of one thing: Very few say “I don’t want to go there again.” Most of them return home fulfilled, wanting to devote more time to their faith and the Bible, or get pre-occupied with the Middle East conflict and join peace and human rights groups whose representatives they met on the trip. Out of a hundred travellers, only one leaves Israel/Palestine cold. The vast majority were infected with the “Jerusalem bug”.

*Johannes Zang
is a journalist and tour guide.*

Palestinians go on a pilgrimage to Lebanon

A parish in Nablus plans an unusual journey

They live where other people from all over the world go on a pilgrimage. In mid-September, a group of Palestinian Christians will go on a pilgrimage themselves – to Lebanon. In addition to old buildings with a biblical connection, they mainly want to meet the “living stones” in the neighbouring country and meet their Christian brothers and sisters who live there.*

For those who understand pilgrimage to mean visiting ancient stones in the Holy Land, the pilgrimage planned by the Anglican parish in Nablus will perhaps be somewhat confusing – after all, they live in the area where Jesus lived, worked and preached 2000 years ago. The well-known pilgrimage sites, to which hundreds of thousands of travellers from all over the world came before the coronavirus pandemic, are virtually right on their doorstep. But Bible history also took place outside the present borders of Israel and Palestine. Syria, Jordan and Lebanon also have places that are important for the emergence of Christianity, such as Jesus' Baptism Site on the Jordan River, Syrian Damascus, where Saul became Paul, or Saida in Lebanon, ancient Sidon, the port from where the Apostle Paul set sail.

But although Saida is only a hundred kilometres away from Nablus as the crow flies, it is much more difficult for Palestinian Christians to get there. The border between Israel and Lebanon has been closed for decades. So, the only option is to take the circuitous route via Amman in Jordan and the not-so-cheap flight to Beirut. This means they have to fill out a

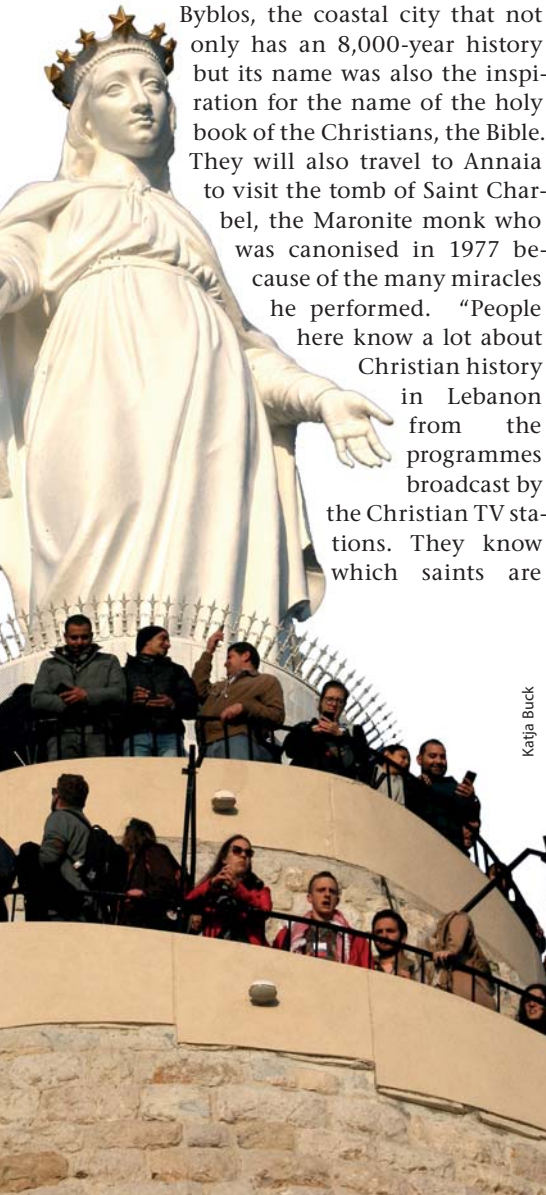
lot of forms beforehand since Palestinian identity cards are often not recognised internationally. Fortunately in such cases, at least the Jordanian authorities issue passports without national identification numbers, but it takes time. And then the Lebanese authorities also demand a visa and this requires an official invitation from the Lebanese side. If you are travelling in a church travel group that can organise all this with partners on the other side, you are lucky.

Jamil Khadir, the parish priest in Nablus, has the necessary contacts. He studied theology in the master's course at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut from 2012 to 2015 and “fell in love with this wonderful country”. However, it did not take much persuasion for him to motivate his parishioners to go on a trip to the neighbouring country in the north. “People know from TV and newspapers how beautiful this country is. And from watching Christian TV channels, they also know the many places that are worth visiting.”

Besides Saida, the group will therefore travel to Harissa, where visitors are welcomed by a 15-ton white statue of the Virgin Mary on top of the hill. The group will travel to the many monasteries in the Qadisha Valley, where

The huge statue of the Virgin Mary in Harissa is a must-see on all pilgrimages to Lebanon.





Katja Buck

Christians have repeatedly sought refuge from persecution over the centuries. The itinerary includes Christian Beirut with its many churches as well as Byblos, the coastal city that not only has an 8,000-year history but its name was also the inspiration for the name of the holy book of the Christians, the Bible. They will also travel to Annaia to visit the tomb of Saint Charbel, the Maronite monk who was canonised in 1977 because of the many miracles he performed. “People here know a lot about Christian history in Lebanon from the programmes broadcast by the Christian TV stations. They know which saints are

venerated there, which miracles took place there.” They want to see these places for themselves, touch the stones and icons and bring back holy oil from Annaia. Not just as a souvenir. “We come from an Orthodox culture. There, things like this really have something to do with faith.”

But pilgrimage is much more than that, says Khadir. “We also want to meet the ‘living stones’ in Lebanon, the Christians who live there today, we want to share in their lives.”

But life has been anything but easy in Lebanon for the past three years. The massive political and economic crisis has led the country into the abyss. Every day, people face immense challenges. “A Maronite priest friend in Lebanon told me how encouraging it is for Lebanese Christians when Palestinian brothers and sisters come to them. After all, our daily lives are also marked by enormous challenges.”

The ties and relationships between the two peoples are many and varied, not only since 1948, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to flee and find a new home in Lebanon. “Being at the side of our sisters and brothers also encourages us,” says Khadir. “We see how they face these immense challenges with their faith and we can learn so much from them.”

Katja Dorothea Buck

*The interview with Pastor Jamil Khadir took place in mid-July. If nothing came in its way, the trip has already taken place by the time this issue is published.

Talking and praying together

Pilgrims should also reflect on the situation at the place of pilgrimage

In May 2022, the Taizé community invited young people to an international ecumenical meeting in Israel and Palestine. More than 300 young adults and seven Taizé brothers visited the biblical sites, exchanged Bible passages, sang and prayed in churches of different denominations and, last but not least, met with Palestinian Christians.

The special thing about international Taizé youth meetings is you take part in other Christian communities for a short time, experience warm hospitality, gain insights into different every day and religious practices and at the same time celebrate services together. We held the typical Taizé daily prayers in Jerusalem, Bethlehem (West Bank), Nazareth and at the Sea of Galilee. So, we practised our faith ecumenically at all these places of pilgrimage. For many it was a spiritual and touching experience to read and talk about the biblical passages there.

For example, it became a physical, sensual and intimate experience to relive in our minds Jesus' last evening with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, as we sat under the olive trees overlooking the walls of the Old City in Jerusalem. Right next to the garden is also my favourite church of the trip: the Church of all Nations, where the church interior is decorated with nothing but mosaic tiles depicting the night sky and night events. As I prayed, I raised my head, let my eyes wander and couldn't help but marvel at



Berthold Werner/wikimedia commons

the beauty and vibes of the place. I could sense the peace that Jesus sought and perhaps found there before his arrest.

The encounter with Palestinian Christians, however, very quickly led to an awareness of the problems of what it means to live, work, raise a family and read biblical passages as a Christian in this country today.



The Church of All Nations on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. This is where Jesus is said to have prayed before he was arrested by the Romans.

The theme of the youth meeting was “Travelling together to sources of hope”. So, based on Bible passages, it was about reflecting on one’s own life situation and the meaning of hope; in Bethlehem, it was mainly about the life and suffering of the people there. They experience discrimination and restrictions from Israel on a daily basis. Many emigrate because of this. I asked a Palestinian Christian we spoke to there why he still stays in the country: “It would be wiser to leave,” he answered me. He then spoke of his children and hardly expects them to live there in the future.

But why stay then? For one thing, he told me about the education and dialogue work he and so many others are doing on the Palestinian and Israeli sides. Examples are “Wi’am – The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center” and “JCJCR – Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations”. They reflect an active hope that grows through cooperation and successes, but which is often rapidly set back by terrorist attacks, for example. Then the trust that has been built up reverts to mistrust.

On the other hand, he is also strengthened by faith in a God who wants and cre-

ates peace. A God who makes hope possible despite everything; the God who comes to people on earth in the form of Jesus Christ and thus connects with them. And then he mentions the third motivation: Jesus’ “homeland” in Palestine. This narrative appeared again and again in different variations and refers to the presence of Christians in the land.

One variation was the fact that the pilgrimage sites were only piles of stones, that Jesus’ tomb was “completely empty” if no living Christianity remained in these places. Arguing with biblical passages and traditions is difficult in today’s largely secular world of nation states, but it presents itself as a counter-narrative to Israel’s land-grabbing settlement policy.

The Palestinian Christians wanted us all to deal with the Middle East conflict intelligently and with sensitivity. For pilgrims, this means educating themselves and, best of all, talking to the people who live there in order to learn the different narratives and to dismantle possible images of the enemy.

Anna Kierdorf is participating in the Study in the Middle East (SiMO) programme at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut.

Sitting on many fences

How the Austrian Pilgrims' Hospice in Jerusalem was saved

When two people quarrel, there is need of a third party to moderate. For some observers of the Middle East conflict, the third party referred to are the Christians of the Holy Land. But it's not quite that simple.

At first glance, the arguments seem conclusive. Primarily, it involves a conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims in which Christians are not directly involved. For their part, Christians would find it easier to be heard by Israelis, to whom they are closer because of their "Western" horizons of thought, and as Palestinians they are ethnically connected to their Muslim neighbours, who they regard as part of their own people.

I have a different view. Christians do not have a role as mediators in this drama. Quite the contrary. They find themselves sitting on many fences. What superficially appears to be an advantage turns out to be a disadvantage. In the opinion of quite a few Israelis, Christian Palestinians are not primarily Christians and "kindred spirits", but Palestinians and therefore a potential security risk. And for more than a few Muslim Palestinians, Christians are not primarily fellow citizens but Christians and a "gateway" for Western (secular) values and behavioural patterns that are traditionally and religiously rejected.

What does this have to do with our subject of debate? As a church guest house, we are not a normal hotel establishment. Most of these establishments were founded before 1948, i.e. before the founding of Israel at the time of the Ottoman Em-

pire or the British mandate. Any special rights stem from these old legal systems and they caught up with us bitterly in the pandemic. Our guest houses only enjoy a temporary legal status which has yet to be defined. The major obstacle on this path is tax exemption for church institutions that many of us have enjoyed enormously over the past few decades. But it can also create problems. Especially during the pandemic, it meant we were not eligible to receive state aid that benefited normal hotel establishments. Neither were we eligible to receive government subsidies from our home country since after all, we are located in a different country.

We had to save ourselves – or go under. Our small but very fine circle of friends in Austria and Germany stepped into the breach for us. Week after week I wrote emails and this even got on my own nerves – the longer it lasted, the more uneasy I became. Every week I had to find a new reason or a new incentive to extract money from our friends at home. It's not easy. It requires creativity and persistence; some called it chutzpah and impertinence. I knew exactly what they meant.

Would you donate to a hotel? Shouldn't a hotel be able to sustain itself or just go under if it can't? I, for one, don't donate to a hotel. But I donate privately to my Pilgrims' Hospice because our house not only has a history, it has tradition. Our house is not in a "normal" city, it is in the Holy City. Our house is not only in the centre of the old city, it breathes the aura of the beginning. From here you go to those places where Jesus taught. From here, a new con-



The Austrian Pilgrims' Hospice is a church guesthouse and not an ordinary hotel.

cept conquered the world. That of compassion for other human beings.

It makes me unspeakably grateful how many friends allowed themselves to be persuaded by us. Through one aspect or another that goes straight to their hearts. From the pool of our addresses, there were exactly 776 friends who supported us through two years of Covid-19 to the tune of € 940,000. To cover running costs and the wages of staff who could not receive state aid. Because that also makes us different from a hotel – in times of crisis, we didn't simply put anyone out on the street. Not us. We take responsibility for the people entrusted to us and get down on our knees.

€ 940,000 from 776 friends of the house. That's an average of €1,211.34 per person. Each and every one according to

his or her means. For a house that sits on all fences and yet never gives up.

When I started my job as Rector of the Pilgrims' Hospice, I paid a courtesy call on the then Catholic Archbishop. I complained to him about what was not working. He smiled and said, "My dear friend, your address is Via Dolorosa. Do you expect the task to be easy there?"

In the shadow of the cross, we often enough feel the depths of human life and human baseness. But in the shadow of the cross we also find the strength to get up again and continue along the path.

*Markus Stephan Bugnyár
is a Catholic priest and has been rector
of the Austrian Hospice of the Holy Family
in Jerusalem since May 2004*

Licence for hospitality

Why the TSS offers training in hospitality and hotel management

Since autumn 2018, the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman has offered a training course in hospitality and hotel management. Previously, the heads of the school's vocational training department had visited several educational institutions in the area and asked what professions would interest young people.

Girls especially said that hospitality was an occupational field they would seriously consider. They also found out that, despite the great interest in this profession, there are no training offers for hospitality and hotel management in the Russeifa region where the Schneller School is located. And finally, they discovered that there was a constant high demand that is continuing to grow for workers in the tourism sector – which is an important sector for Jordan.

The Theodor Schneller School has long had its own guest house and has accommodated many travel groups and single travellers on their tours through the country. Therefore, the infrastructure was already in place for vocational training in the catering and hotel sectors and could be used for training without any problems.

The school only had to install a small training kitchen so that they could apply for a state licence for this new training sector. The purchase of the training kitchen was financed by donations from Germany.

The training programme is aimed at students who have completed at least the tenth grade. And, in the opinion of

Rev. Khaled Freij, Director of the Theodor Schneller School, many of those who sign up for it give their reason that there are so many different job opportunities in this industry and there are excellent prospects for a good and secure income later on. Moreover, tourism in Jordan is an economic sector that is still growing and developing.

Another thing that attracts young people is that the catering and hotel industry cover many facets of social life. It covers food and drink, travel and culture, encounters and exchanges, service and consulting. A person working in this field automatically learns a lot about other cultures. That is why the training programme at the TSS, for example, includes not only Oriental cuisine but also how to prepare Western-style dishes, and this often broadens the horizons of the trainees themselves. After all, none of the classic vocational training programmes, such as carpentry, welding or electrical trades, offer this kind of opportunity.

After they graduate from the training programme, young people can start looking at a wide number of different jobs on the labour market. There are job opportunities for them in the food industry, in hotels and restaurants, but also in bakeries, confectioneries, cafés and other sectors.

It is important for the TSS to keep in touch with its alumni. That is why the school has built up a strong network with all graduates in the catering and hotel industry. Most of them have stayed in the Russeifa region.



EVS/Kerstin Sommer (2)



Preparing food for others can be a great joy – no matter whether the cuisine is oriental or international.

Like everywhere else in the world, the coronavirus pandemic has made a significant impact on the tourism sector. Air travel and tourism came to an almost complete standstill. Earnings collapsed. The consequences were severe for those working in hotels and restaurants in Jordan. Many lost their jobs and no longer had any money coming in. However, when life gradually returned to normal, restaurants and cafés in Jordan reopened and the tourists returned, the TSS used its own network and contacts to help its former trainees find new jobs.

In the meantime, the vocational training heads are planning to expand the training programme and have applied for a licence so that the Theodor Schneller School can also confer a high school diploma in Gastronomy and Hotel Management. Afterwards, graduates can continue their studies at a university and later find

employment in the higher management of hotels, restaurants or travel agencies. A precondition for the application, however, was that the school had to install another teaching kitchen. *The Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* has now donated €15,000 from its annual profit for the purchase of the kitchen.

Katja Dorothea Buck

Where Saint Nicholas once took a break

Beit Jala is a good starting point for exploring the West Bank

The small Palestinian town of Beit Jala has no pilgrimage sites. But it does have Talitha Kumi, the German Evangelical Lutheran school that was once founded as a boarding school for girls by the Kaiserswerth deaconesses in Jerusalem. The school runs a guest house where tour groups like to stay to get a better understanding of the political and religious situation in the country.

Beit Jala is a beautiful place near Bethlehem. The small town is easy to reach by bus from Jerusalem. There are several churches and mosques in Beit Jala, and a saint also left his mark here. Perhaps Jesus and his disciples also visited here once – but the Evangelists have not told us anything about this. So, pilgrims pass through Beit Jala and stop at the neighbouring Bethlehem which is much more famous. Some also find their way to nearby Beit Sahour. There, it is written, the angel appeared to the shepherds in the field. On the other hand, “normal” travelers or pilgrims rarely make it to Beit Jala.

When I was a young man in the country for the first time, I often heard about this place and the German school Talitha Kumi. My first Arabic teacher in Bethlehem (who, by the way, even attended the Syrian orphanage in Jerusalem as a child) was connected to Talitha Kumi and often told me about the school. Today, when I mention the name of my teacher at that time, many remember him and then say:




BMW/Rendel Freude

“Michael Zabaneh! He was my teacher too! And he often played the organ here.”

On the grounds of Talitha Kumi, in addition to the school, there is also a kindergarten, a guest house, a community college where cooks are trained, and an environmental centre of our Protestant partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL).

The guest house in Talitha Kumi was well frequented until the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. Groups met there to exchange news and views and to make their own opinion of the situation on the West Bank. Of course, like everywhere else in the hotel industry, the number of visitors plummeted in March 2020. The drop in overnight stays at Talitha Kumi in 2020 was about 80%. However, as one of the first guest houses on the West Bank, it was already granted permission to receive guests again under hygiene conditions in April 2021. Farid Abudayeh, manager of the guest house, invested a lot of time and money to fulfil the necessary re-



From the guest house, you can see far into the contested country.

quirements: the staff was vaccinated and trained accordingly. Material for disinfection was provided and the equipment for it was installed.

In autumn 2021, NGOs began to use the guest house to a greater extent. Workshops and meetings were held again; initially under strict conditions, which have since been relaxed – as is the case everywhere in the country.

Revenues are still far from the level of the “pre-pandemic period”. But the beginning of 2022 seems promising after all, says Farid Abudayeh. Other NGOs used the guest house in spring. A few single travellers stayed there. So far, there has only been one group trip organised by the Middle East department of the Berlin Mission. But for the second half of the year, several more group trips have already announced their stays.

Let’s hope that more and more travellers and groups will find their way to Beit Jala, like the saint mentioned at the beginning. No less a person than Saint Nicho-

las, who in some parts of the world fills children’s shoes and socks with beautiful things, is said to have lived in a cave in Beit Jala for a time. Legend has it that Bishop Nicholas took a break and stayed here during his pilgrimage to Bethlehem. Outside the small Christian town of Beit Jala, this is not so well known. And no one really knows whether it is true that he lived here in a cave.

But if he did, Saint Nicholas must have had a magnificent view from his cave over the valley, which is today a battlefield between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. Those who want to understand the political and religious situation of the country can take Beit Jala as a starting point for their explorations. As in so many places in Israel/Palestine, it is a place that offers good prospects, but it is also affected by decades of conflict over land and homeland and the right to live freely in prosperity

Reverend Simon Kuntze has been the Middle East Liaison Secretary of the Berlin Mission since spring 2022.

Interest in craft trades and hotel management

The ETVTC in Ramallah offers young people a wide range of job prospects

Since 2001, the Episcopal Technological and Vocational Training Centre (ETVTC) in Ramallah has been inviting young Palestinian adults to try their hand at industrial and skilled trades.

The aim is not only to improve the reputation of blue-collar jobs, but, above all, young people should be shown future perspectives, which are few and far between in this country for political reasons.

We want to encourage Palestinian youths to become creative and productive members of their society by acquiring knowledge and skills in industrial trades, music, art and communication, and by gaining awareness of intercultural issues," says the website of the institution, which has been run by Giovanni Anbar since its foundation. After completing his studies in mechanical engineering in Austria, he returned to his home country in 1996. "It is very important for me to make my contribution to the development of the vocational training system here in Palestine," says Anbar, who, because of his first name, always has to clarify that he is neither Italian nor has Italian roots. "I was born and raised in Jerusalem."

For five years, he says, he worked on a Swiss-funded project to develop the Palestinian vocational training system and a national education strategy. Then, 22 years ago, he was asked by the Anglican Church, to which the Theodor Schneller

School in Amman belongs, to set up the ETVTC in Ramallah. The rooms of the former boys' residential home in the diocese were empty because fewer and fewer boys from the surrounding villages could get to Ramallah due to the blockades caused by the conflict.

Today, more than 350 pupils from different schools in Ramallah take part in the ETVTC's technology programme. They can try out their industrial and craft skills in the workshops and laboratories of the facility. Their teachers use this as a useful supplement to their technology lessons.

For selected students in grades 11 and 12, the ETVTC offers a two-year supplementary programme where they learn basic knowledge in electronics and learn to maintain and repair computers. After



The future catering professionals must be able to cook as well as deal with foreign guests.

graduation, they can then work as technicians in Palestine's growing IT industry or write programs in Java and other languages. "Computer work does not rely on local presence, which makes this line of work particularly interesting for young people in the occupied territories," says Anbar. As service providers, they could therefore take on orders from clients outside the region.

The heart of the ETVTC, however, is the hotel management school, where about 100 vocational students are currently undergoing two years of full-time training in gastronomy and hotel management. "Even though tourism on the West Bank is not very developed, demand for hotels and restaurants is increasing as more and more pilgrims and visitors come to the Holy Land," says Anbar. "Our hotel

management students have great opportunities to find jobs in the best restaurants and hotels in the region after graduating."

One advantage of the vocational training programme is that the ETVTC runs its own guest house. "St. Andrew's" is an integral part of the hotel management school's programme. The students learn through practical work the important aspects of hotel management and how to deal with international guests. And they improve their English skills as it is mainly cultural and music groups, local institutions and non-governmental organisations, partners and friends of the church who come to stay at "St. Andrew's". Church summer camps are held there and international organisations like to house their volunteers and international staff working in Ramallah there.

After all, Ramallah is the political and economic centre of the West Bank. Until 1967, the city, which lies barely 20 kilometres north of Jerusalem, was a popular summer retreat for Arab tourists from Kuwait, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Today, it is the fastest growing city in Palestine with its many museums, art galleries, restaurants and hotels. The Palestinian Authority and numerous ministries, agencies and non-governmental organisations are based here. "Our students learn in an environment that meets the standards expected by international guests," says Anbar. This enormously improves their later job prospects.



ETVTC (2)

The high art of flambéing is also passed on at the hotel management school.

Katja Dorothea Buck

When the church forbids pilgrimage

For many Coptic Christians, pilgrimage is an important part of their lived faith. Time and again, they set out in large groups or alone to monasteries, churches and holy sites, such as the places where the Holy Family is said to have passed on their flight from Herod in Egypt.

Yet they were forbidden to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for a long time. In 1979, the then Pope Shenuda III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, had banned pilgrimages to the Holy Land. This was due to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Like everywhere else in the Arab world, the Coptic Church took the side of the Palestinians. And a Copt therefore had no business going to the Jewish state of Israel as long as the occupation continued – not even as a pilgrim.

After his death in March 2012, however, the first Copts began to defy this ban. Publicly and within the church, the question was repeatedly asked whether the ban on pilgrimages was not outdated. During the Holy Week in 2014, there were already 90 Coptic Christians who went to the Holy Land.

For a long time, a rare sight in Jerusalem: a Coptic pilgrim at Easter.

Shenuda's successor, Pope Tawadros II, finally clarified the situation when he himself travelled to Jerusalem in November 2015 with a high-ranking delegation from his church. Since then, more and more Coptic women and men have fulfilled their heart's desire to pray in the Holy City once in their lives. This year, already 4,000 people have made the journey to Jerusalem during Holy Week. (kb)



Uwe Gräbe

Money for a new electrical workshop

Khirbet Kanafar (EVS). The Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) needs a new electrical workshop. Just like the old carpentry building which developed such severe settlement cracks due to earth movement that massively affected its structural stability, the building in which young men are trained as electricians is also beyond repair.

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools has therefore decided to provide the school with €130,000 for the construction of a new electrical workshop. In the meantime, the Presidium of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) has also approved the allocation of this large sum of money. Work will begin as soon as possible.

Foundation funds for teaching kitchen and gymnasium

Stuttgart (EVS). Once a year, the Board of Trustees of the *Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace* decides what to do with the foundation's income. In July, the board decided that both schools would each receive a sum of €15,000. The Theodor Schneller School (TSS) will use the money for a second teaching kitchen. This will then meet the requirements for the TSS to expand its training programme in the field of gastronomy and hotel management so that young people can also complete a high school diploma there. Graduates can then go on to study hotel management.

€15,000 also went to the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS), which plans to use the money to renovate the Hermann Schneller Hall. Since carpentry training could no longer take place in the old workshop due to structural problems and the new workshop had not yet been completed, the apprentices and their trainers were housed in the Hermann Schneller Hall together with all the machines. Now the hall needs a thorough renovation so that it can soon be used again as a multi-purpose hall for school festivals and sports lessons. The money will also be used to purchase gymnastics equipment.

Claudia Rammelt becomes new chair of the SiMO Board

Stuttgart (EMS/EVS). Theologian Dr Claudia Rammelt succeeds Professor Dr Martin Tamcke in his position as chair of the SiMO Board. Tamcke helped launch the "Study Programme in the Middle East" twenty years ago and has accompanied it over all these years with his expertise and considerable personal commitment.

Upon his retirement, Dr Claudia Rammelt now takes over the chair of the Board. She took part in the SiMO programme herself during her studies and spent a year at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut. Since then, she has been closely associated with SiMO and is also committed in her work with students at the Ruhr University of Bochum to ensure that young theology students experience the benefits of an exchange with Middle Eastern Christians.

Keeping hope alive and making dreams come true

How the Schneller schools give young people a future

“So that they can eat their bread in dignity.” It was with this aim in mind that Johann Ludwig Schneller founded the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem in 1860. Even today, the successor institutions, the two Schneller Schools in

Lebanon and Jordan, still work by this motto. With success, as shown by visits to alumni and to parents of current students at the school. Martina Waiblinger went to visit them.

“I couldn’t have done it without Schneller“

Mohammed Sroujis car repair shop is located in a busy street in Saad Nail, a small town near Chtoura. The street is lined with one repair shop after the other, each

one no larger than a garage. They cannot fit more than one or two cars. He has a lot going on – customers, neighbours and Syrian refugees coming and going,



Martina Waiblinger (2)

“I really wanted my own workshop,” says Mohammed Srouji.



Mohammed Srouji with his two employees Fadi and Mohammed.

asking for a little money. Mohammed is proud of what he has achieved. Even during the economic crisis, his car business is going strong.

He attended the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) and trained in the car workshop for five years, from 2009 to 2014. During this time, he became firmly convinced that he definitely wanted to have his own workshop and earn a living that way. After graduating, he found a job at another workshop for a year to gain work experience. Then he set up his own business in 2015. Bit by bit, he began to build up his own workshop. In the meantime, it is running well and he and his wife earn a good living from it. They got married at the beginning of the year and are now expecting a baby. He is supported by two employees – Fadi has been with him for one year, Mohammed for the past four years.

When we asked if Schneller had something to do with his success, the 28-year-old answers quite spontaneously: “I couldn’t have done it without Schneller. My life would have been different. At some point in time, something finally clicked and I realised I wanted my own workshop. Without Schneller, I wouldn’t have been able to work on my dream in this trade and build such a good life for myself.”

He has good memories of the Schneller School and enjoyed his time there. He particularly remembers the food, learning and especially Christmas time – with the songs, presents and stories. He also remembers the concept of different religions living together, respect for others and that one should enjoy life. And there’s something else: “When I get up in the morning, the first thing I do is make my bed. That’s part of me – everything always has to be tidy. I can also clean and do dishes.”

His father was a truck driver, but has been unemployed for some time. Mohammed has a sister and two brothers. He had no place to study at home and money was always a problem. The Schneller School was a blessing for him from the beginning. Would he send his children there? Basically, yes, but in view of the current transport costs, it’s out of the question. But that can still change. Whatever happens, he wants his children to enjoy a good education so that they can earn good money later on

„Schneller made a big impact on my life“



privat

Rojeh Bou Malha's family can also be proud. Now 38 years old, he attended the Johann Ludwig Schneller School from 1993 to 2002. This summer, he got married in Qab Elias where he comes from. Rojeh has been living in Qatar since 2006 and works as corporate sales manager for the Alman Group. He earns very well and supports his widowed mother, his brother's family and the family where he grew up.

When asked what influence the Schneller School had on him, Rojeh says: "Schneller was very valuable for my life and had a strong influence on me. The education there taught me to be independent and to respect all people despite all their differences. If I hadn't gone there, I probably would have become a soldier."

Rojeh Bou Malha would probably have become a soldier if it weren't for the Schneller School.

„At least the children are well taken care of in all crises“

Adel Taasher (46) and his wife **Rashida** (39) also hope that their children will one day be able to earn a good living. The Sunni family lives in very poor conditions in a bare concrete building in Qab Elias, about 20 kilometres from the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Khirbet Kanafar. For the past year, three of their four children have been at the school's boarding home: seven-year-old Ahmad, four-year-old Khalifa and five-year-old Rajja. The girl is at home today because she has a toothache. One of her teeth has to be extracted. Child number four, one-year-old Khaled, is of course still with his parents.



Martina Waiblinger

Ahmad und Khalifa enjoy being at the Schneller School.



Parents Adel and Raschida Taasher with the two youngest of their four children. Five-year-old Rajja actually goes to the Schneller School already but today she has a toothache.

The parents had heard from neighbours about the Schneller boarding home where children receive education, food and good care. They applied and their three older children were accepted. The fact that it is a Christian school does not pose a problem for them. The married couple is very grateful that their children are now well taken care of during the economic crisis. The father, a day labourer, earns around three dollars a day – before the crisis he received more than ten times the amount. The money is just enough to buy milk and nappies for little Khaled, as well as the bare necessities for food.

When you enter the flat built into the rough concrete structure, you come into a room with two floor mats. Then you go into a small passageway that is used as a kitchen. There is hardly any food on the pantry shelf, just a few preserving jars. Behind it, you come to the parents' bedroom and a toilet with a washbasin. In winter,

Adel Taasher fetches wood from the forest to heat at least one room a little. They get water from the government and have to pay the equivalent of 40 dollars a year for it. They could also receive medical support from the government in the next town, but they have no money for transport to get there. That's why they are so happy that three of their children can eat every day and can learn something. Later the children will be able to work and support their parents. That's the plan. And it fills the parents with confidence and pride.

Martina Waiblinger has known the work of the Schneller schools for decades. She was editor of the Schneller magazine until 2003 and has continued to visit the schools since then. In recent years, she has also sat on the Executive Committee of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS).

A catchy Jubilee tune in many languages

TSS contributes its own music video for the EMS Jubilee

The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) celebrates the 50th anniversary of its foundation in 2022. A Jubilee song was composed especially for the occasion. The song has inspired people in Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, South Africa and Lebanon to join in. Jordan also came up with its own version of the song. Qamar Badwan, music teacher at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) and professional singer, recorded a captivating music video with the children at the school.

Congregations and groups of the EMS Fellowship in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East were invited in the Jubilee Year to put their special musical talents to good use – to sing, to play the guitar, piano, trumpet, drum or any other instrument and to arrange the Jubilee Song in their own special way. They were also asked to send a video of the result back to Stuttgart.

The idea was also taken up at the TSS in Jordan. The music teacher and singer Qamar Badwan, who only started working at the school last year, rehearsed the song with the school children and composed an enchanting choreography for the music video. What appears to be light-hearted and cheerful on the video is actually a small miracle – for decades, there had been no music lessons at the TSS. It was only through a large donation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg that it was possible to offer regular music lessons again.

„Together we are stronger!“ – is how the video sounds in Arabic across the grounds of the TSS. „I was deeply touched by the lightness, joy and obvious self-confidence that the children radiate in the video,“ says Uwe Gräbe, Executive Secretary of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS). The EVS is a founding member of the EMS. He even recognised some of the children in the video, says Gräbe – there was a boy who was regularly beaten up by his father before he came to the TSS. Or the youngster who had to work as a day labourer at the age of twelve to contribute to the family’s income. „It’s incredible how they have blossomed!“

The original version of the Jubilee Song was composed by pastor and artist Fabian Vogt. The EMS commissioned him to compose the Jubilee Song. The result is a real catchy tune with the title „Together we are free“. It is a song about similarities and differences and about a world in which we are stronger together. To make it easier for interested groups to produce their own version of the song, the EMS provided sheet music, lyrics and playbacks for download on their website. Later, a karaoke video as well as a choir and brass band version were added.

In addition to the TSS video, 15 others have been produced so far. The first video came from Kerala, India, performed by 18 students of the United Theological Seminary. The interpretations range from classical to funny, captivating, surprising and touching. They include a choir from



Children from the Theodor Schneller School sing their version of the EMS Jubilee Song together with Qamar Badwan.

Crailsheim, a South African brass band, Indian dancers, soloists, a tile zoom version, children, students, adults and even a deaf group from Indonesia. „Every time we were sent a new interpretation of the EMS Jubilee Song, we were blown away by the creativity and passion with which the performers turned it into their song,“ says Vogt.

The richness emanating from a worldwide Christian fellowship

The range of musical submissions is huge and goes from simple mobile phone recordings to music videos with perfect camera angles, edits and vocals, such as the TSS contribution. But what they all have in common is the joy and pride of enriching the EMS Christian community with their contribution. “The song really sparked off some fantastic responses.

I was particularly impressed by the idea of a young pastor from Indonesia to translate the song into sign language in the music lessons of a Christian deaf community,“ says EMS General Secretary Dieter Heidtmann.

This unique interpretation was also incorporated into the worship materials for the 18th September, the day when congregations of EMS member churches were invited to join in celebrating the EMS Jubilee in a service that spanned the globe. All the videos and the medley can be viewed at www.ems-online.de/gottesdienst – it’s worth taking a look!

Ulrike Pfab is Head of Communications at the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS)

More young people, more women, more personal responsibility

Breath of fresh air at the sponsoring church of the Theodor Schneller School

“God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.” “You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” These Bible verses that inspired the Anglican Synod in Amman from 13 to 16 June 2022 were originally meant as encouragement and empowerment for congregations facing affliction and great challenges. Today, the Diocese of Jerusalem is facing such a situation.

The challenges of the sponsoring church of the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) are enormous. The financial situation is extremely tight; outdated and rigid structures often prevent urgently needed action to be taken. And at the same time the Church is expected to respond to an ever-worsening world situation and the special challenges in the countries of the diocese – namely Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Palestine and Israel. At the Synod in Amman, the new Archbishop, Hosam Naoum, repeatedly urged his Synod members to face these challenges pro-actively and with great humility.

A large number of committees, parish councils and administrative boards of societies and institutions will have to be filled with new members by November. To ensure that this is not just a routine procedure, the Synod was brought forward from

Serving in humility, even if it is at the morning service sitting next to Canon Fuad Dagher at the keyboard. The new Archbishop Hosam Naoum (right) makes his unique mark on the Synod.



November to June. What qualifications should someone bring with them if they take on leadership responsibility in the church? The Archbishop pushed for answers. He wandered from working group to working group, quick to grasp the gist of conversation, always encouraging, but also demanding.

For him, it has everything to do with servant leadership: with integrity, humility but without power. It should simply no longer be acceptable that someone sat on a committee just because their family had a “subscription” to this position of honour for generations, or because they were rewarded with this position for their loyalty to the bishop or local priest. A person running for a post on a committee should first publicly declare what added value he or she wants to bring to that body. When the first committee was appointed shortly afterwards, i.e. the important Standing Committee of the Synod, the choice fell among others on Reverend Khaled Freij,



EMS/Gräbe

Director of the Theodor Schneller School – an experienced pastoral theologian.

For the Synod itself, the job was done properly from the very start. Starting with the next meeting, youth delegates will have a seat and a vote – and no longer have just the function of observers. And the quota of women will be increased from the present of over 40% to 50%. The spiritual ministry is also feeling the new breath of fresh air. The diaconate (the ordination level just below the pastors) will now be opened to women with immediate effect. And mandatory pastoral working groups will be formed to draw pastors out of their solitary existence.

Servant leadership: It is obvious that the Archbishop himself wants to lead by example. He moderates procedures instead of mandating them – and even sits next to the organist during morning prayers to accompany the prayers musically. The question of finances is by no

means ignored. Up to now, earnings from rents have been by far the largest item in the church's budget, followed by donations from abroad. On the other hand, more power should be given to the responsibility of the church's own congregations and institutions. Every diaconal, medical or educational institution and every congregation must make its own contribution to the overall budget. Some congregations and schools manage this well, but others have taken out loans from the church without any guarantee of repayment. There is still a lot of reforms to be made here.

As the Middle East Liaison Officer of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and Executive Secretary of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS), I had the occasion to look at the budget planning and was relieved to see that no financial contribution from the Theodor Schneller School is included in the budget. This is comforting in view of the children from poor and broken families who attend this school and whose families cannot pay school fees.

The greetings and speeches by international partners – from the USA, England and the EMS – primarily conveyed one thing. They were an energetic encouragement to the Synod and its hands-on Archbishop to continue courageously along the path of reform: in all humility, willingness to serve and the certainty that God has not given his congregation a spirit of fear, but of power, love and prudence

Uwe Gräbe

Butter pretzels and falafel, church service and muezzin

Alumni reminisce

Melissa Kohler worked as a volunteer at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman in 2010/2011. She went on to study psychology and is now a mother of three children herself.

When I think of my year at the TSS, I remember many opposites – a hot summer with swimming in the pool but at the same time I’ve rarely been as cold as in the Jordanian winter; homesickness on my arrival and the pain of parting at the end of the school year, the best hummus and fresh falafel and at the same time longing for a buttered pretzel or wholemeal bread; church services and the muezzin – all this is what goes to make up Jordan for me.

I also found the companionship with other volunteers very special. Sharing experiences on site, laughing together, celebrating small successes, consoling each other, surviving illnesses, sharing life and sometimes even rooms, all this brought us closer together. We spent many evenings in our small, shared kitchen and went on trips together. Some of us are still in contact today. My time at the TSS not only brought me good friends, but the work with the children also changed my career aspirations and I am very happy about that.

I always ask myself what has become of “my” boys from back then: the shy Mahmood, the lively Yusef, little Gazim and all the others. Their enthusiasm to watch “Shaun the Sheep” (Disney children’s film) has certainly waned. But I can imagine they still love playing football as much as ever. It would certainly be exciting to meet them all again and tell them over hummus and falafel how they are and what concerns or motivates them.

But before I do that, I would have to improve my Arabic a lot first.

During my year at the TSS, I got to know Jordanian culture and at the same time realised how “German” I am in some ways. The Schneller work still fascinates me today. It is so important to create such places of encounter. Here, children learn from an early age that peaceful coexistence is possible despite the differences in origin or religion. I can only recommend

it to everyone to take part on such an adventure. The only thing is, it’s best to leave the plans you made and thought of in Germany. It’s only when you’re there that you realise what you can get involved in and what the possibilities and limits are. But don’t forget your winter jacket when you pack.



Melissa Kohler – here at the TSS eleven years ago – would like to know what “her” boys are up to today.

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*Great and amazing are your deeds,
Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways, King of the nations!.*

Revelation 15:3



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