

2/2016

SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



A WOMAN'S VIEW OF THE CRISES
COURAGEOUS, STRONG WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST



EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools

Contemplation: “Life in abundance for all” 2

COURAGEOUS, STRONG WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

With courage and tenacity 4
A Yesidi woman, a Syrian woman and a Palestinian woman

When mothers raise their voices 6
Reflections on women in interreligious work in the Holy Land

“I live through my children.” 9
A Syrian mother relates how the war has made her strong

“When you help a mother, you help the family as a whole.” 12
Izdihar Kassis about her work with women in refugee camps

Women and children are particularly vulnerable 15
How the Johann Ludwig Schneller School is helping refugee mothers

NEWS ABOUT THE WORK AT THE SCHNELLER SCHOOLS

News 17

When children can smile again 19
Children at the preschool in Wadi al-Nasara

CHRISTIANS AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Viewed from a distance 22
Review of a time spent as ecumenical accompanier in Bethlehem

News from the Middle East 24

Letters to the editor/Imprint 29

Dear Readers,

it was 1988. Shortly after I first arrived in the Middle East for an academic year, I met Rana Khoury in Bethlehem. The young woman made the conscious decision to return from the USA to make her contribution towards building up the Palestinian civil society. She talked enthusiastically about the social role that Palestinian women had assumed after so many of their men had been imprisoned at the start of the First Intifada. In 1995, Rana brought out her Master's dissertation, which was the first publication by the International Center of Bethlehem. In it, she analyses how many women were ultimately pushed out of their jobs in the public domain. Today, Rana is Vice-President of the Diyar Consortium in Bethlehem.



At the end of 2014 I met Loyal Jarrouj in Syria. Her comfortable life as a bank employee in Homs was destroyed by the war but still she managed to “start anew” in Wadi al-Nasara, which is known as the Valley of Christians. There she worked for a minimum fee as bookkeeper for our school project caring for the children of Syrian internally displaced persons. “I must be strong, for my son,” she said. Meanwhile, she has given birth to her second child and Loyal continues to fight for her family.

Between these two moments, I had so many encounters with Palestinian, Israeli, Syrian, Lebanese and Jordanian women whose creativity and tenacity raise hopes in a region which is marked by so much violent destruction. Jewish women from the Jerusalem Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations also belong to this group, just as much as Christian and Muslim women who are jointly developing civil society perspectives in Beirut and Amman. Some of these women have a chance to speak in this edition.

In addition we bring you the latest news about Schneller work and one of our ecumenical companions from Bethlehem looks back on his assignment there.

The editorial team wishes you a relaxing summer and pleasant reading.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Uwe Gräbe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters being larger and more prominent.

Uwe Gräbe

“LIFE IN ABUNDANCE FOR ALL”

W e all know the Golden Rule, don't we? It has been handed down to us in a wonderful short story taken from the Babylonian Talmud. The story tells about two Jewish sages who lived at about the time of Jesus. One day, a young man came to Shammai and said he would accept Judaism only if Shammai were to teach him the Torah while the sage stood on one foot. Shammai was angry and sent the young man away. The young man went to Hillel and confronted him with the same request. Hillel replied simply and concisely: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation of this. Go and study it!”

In this story about loving your neighbour, the reference to self immediately catches the eye. Hillel the sage constantly stresses the importance of regarding oneself as part of the whole. His interpretation of the Golden Rule places an interesting importance on the issue of how we regard ourselves. And this reflects on our relationship to other people in a wonderful way. Hillel writes, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?”

When the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) decided on its own internationalisation during an intensive reflection process in 2012 and finally adopted a new constitution, the discussion centred around two core interests: “common witness” and “mission in solidarity”. Since then, EMS programmes have defined the conditions that all partner churches are full members with equal rights and all activities take place in mutuality. The

image of a network describes this model very well. However this network not only has one central point like a spider's web. Rathermore, the member churches can create mutually supportive relationships like the threads in a fishing net. “In a network like this, every central point is at the same time the periphery of the neighbouring centre.” This is how the Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako formulated it. Naturally this also applies to the work of the Secretariat in Stuttgart.

Under the slogan “Life in abundance for all”, the EMS defined a new focus in November 2015 to shape the work of the association up to 2019. Four activities will provide very concrete methods to reflect and put internationalisation into practice. Three of these activities have already been pursued by the EMS in the past: a worldwide Bible project, the Youth Network and international team visits. But this time, they will take place under the mantle of critical common self-reflection. Where are we as an international association of members with equal rights? How do we bring our diversity into the fellowship? What are the aspects of cooperation in concrete terms when it comes to shared responsibility leading to a common witness of God's action in the world? What does “Mission in Solidarity” mean for us as an international fellowship?

What is new this time is that EMS project work is integrated in this focus. Here too, the aim is to share our funds, strengths and specialist skills in joint responsibility.

The network of relationships through internationalisation clearly shows us our



Photo: EMS/ Corinna Waltz

Part of the EMS Focus 2015-2019 “Life in abundance for all” is also an international Bible reading project.

international affinity. However, they go far beyond all attempts at intercultural learning and the mere acceptance of diversity. We learn through exchanges that we are dependent on each other, that we always live in relationship to others and in fact we can only live in this way and never for ourselves alone.

A life of diverse mutual dependencies must be rehearsed. This needs a continuous learning process about how we are intermeshed in God’s Creation in a network of life. The discipline required for being human in solidarity must be constantly practised until it becomes habitual. The focus up until 2019 intends to encourage members to act in this way as a single entity, acknowledge interdependencies and translate this into action based on solidarity, also in common spiritual prac-

tice: now, together with others for all who need our solidarity, and also for ourselves.

Dr. Kerstin Neumann is Head of the Mission and Partnership department at the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

WITH COURAGE AND TENACITY

A Yesidi woman, a Syrian woman and a Palestinian woman

Women are particularly vulnerable in times of war and conflict. Many grow in the face of such challenging situations but also excel themselves. We should listen to their voices, says Viola Raheb and names three examples of exceptionally courageous and visionary women from the Middle East.

No matter where you look in the Middle East today – whether it is in Palestine, in Iraq, in Syria, Egypt or in Tunisia – the lives of people are marked everywhere by crises, wars, destruction and death. Apart from the peculiarities of each conflict, the underlying desire in all these countries is nothing else than peace, safety and human rights. It is precisely these issues that are inseparably connected with women.

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations adopted Resolution 1325 on the protection of women's rights in conflict regions. It demonstrates the particular impacts of conflicts on women, their special vulnerability, and it emphasises the indispensable contributions made by women in peace efforts and peace negotiations, through to reconstruction.

In the midst of all the madness which people in the Middle East must suffer today, thousands of courageous women do their utmost every day to achieve an end to the violence and more solidarity in the world, despite everything and to spite everything. This ordeal takes completely different forms. It demands a very high personal price and frequently finds very little appreciation, if at all. So please allow

me to introduce three women who are making such a contribution.

In December 2015, Nadia Murad Basee Taha, a young Yesidi woman from Iraq, went before the UN Security Council and reported on the fate of abducted Yesidi women. 21 year old Nadia was herself kidnapped from her village in Sindschar by the Islamic State in August 2014 and was held hostage for about three months, during which she was kept as a sex slave. This young woman found the courage to share her cruel fate with the international public so that other women can be helped. In an interview, she said disenchanted, "At this present moment, girls and women are being sold and raped. But people's consciences are not awakened and there is nobody to set these women free." The Iraqi government nominated Nadia Murad Basee Taha for the Nobel Peace Prize in January 2016.

Another example: In those days it was my privilege to meet a young Syrian woman who had been imprisoned for her non-violent political action and raped in prison. Now she is fighting for peace, human rights and freedom in Syria. With tears in her eyes and marks of her maltreatment still on her body, she said in a trembling voice, "I forgive the person who did this to me so that my people and my country may have a future!"

Finally, I would like to name Hanan al-Hroub. The Palestinian primary school teacher from the Dheisha refugee camp was the winner of the Global Teacher Prize 2016. In the midst of the occupation and misery, she opens up children to a differ-



Viola Raheb is a Palestinian peace activist and theologian. She grew up in Bethlehem as daughter of an old established Palestinian Christian family and today lives in Vienna. Many know of Viola Raheb as the author of books such as “Geboren zu Bethlehem” (Born in Bethlehem) (2003), “Nächstes Jahr in Bethlehem” (Next Year in Bethlehem) (2008), “Zeit der Feigen” (Time of the Figs) (2009) or her audio book “Zugvögel” (Migratory Bird) (2010).

“Countless women make their contribution towards peace, safety, human rights and justice in times of crisis,” said Viola Raheb.

ent perspective of the future, one of non-violence and peace education. The 43 year old mother of five children constantly reminds her pupils that knowledge and education are creative resistance. The Varkey Jury selected her from 8,000 co-nominees for the Global Teacher Prize, which was awarded for the second time in 2016.

“Countless women make their contribution towards peace, safety, human rights and justice in times of crisis,” said Viola Raheb. All of us have the task to give them a choice, to make their work visible, to honour and support them. Their work should not be stifled.

WHEN MOTHERS RAISE THEIR VOICES

Reflections on women in interreligious work in the Holy Land

Many years ago, when I first started working in the field of interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding, I soon became interested in the intersection of gender and peace. My first experiences of mixed dialogue groups were frustrating. The discussions were frequently intellectual and to me often seemed to miss the point. I found myself feeling that something was lacking.

And it didn't take me long to feel that I might find what I was seeking in an all-women's dialogue group. And indeed, that first women's dialogue process was transformational – rather than intellectual sparring and debates, as women we were looking to build relationships and our conversations touched on every aspect of our lives. As we shared personal experiences, we became connected in ways that would never again allow me to see Palestinians as my enemy. My long journey into challenging many of my fundamental understandings of myself and my place in the world had begun.

Today I still believe in the power of women to create change. Not because I believe that women are biologically more inclined to make peace, but because I believe that women can use their experiences of marginalisation to understand the experiences of other marginalised groups. Women are also generally socialised to develop skills and qualities that serve them well in peace-building processes: skills of networking and listening; skills of empathy and care; skills of valuing relationships and human life.



Photo: JCJR

"We can help build equal, just societies which will treat all human beings as the children of God," says Sarah Bernstein, Director-General of the JCJR.

On the other hand, it should come as no surprise that in a society so dominated by violent conflict, women still have to struggle to play an equal role. Although in some respects Israel seems like many other Western societies, and one might be forgiven for thinking that women have equal status to men in most aspects of Israeli society, the reality is that the ongoing centrality of the military in almost all aspects of Israeli life means that Israeli society is deeply gendered. Although Israeli girls serve in the defence forces, the vast majority of them do so in non-combat roles and understandings of masculinity and femi-



Photo: JCJR

Colourful, young, mixed – interfaith peacebuilding at the JCJR

ninity are still shaped by the army. Women attempting to speak on issues of peace and security are belittled and their opinions discounted – after all, they haven't fought in any wars or served as generals in the army. As if security is purely a matter of military might and retired generals are most suited to help us reach a peace agreement.

The one way in which it is more legitimate for women to raise their voices in calling for peace is as mothers. Here in Israel, the Four Mothers' Peace Movement* was instrumental in changing the tide of public opinion and forcing the withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. So why has no mother's peace movement emerged

calling for an end to the ongoing violence and demanding a political solution to our situation?

The answer, I believe, is that motherhood is a force that can be turned in different directions. Some mothers call for a cessation of violence in order to defend their children, other women are at the forefront of reactionary and militaristic movements. Just as religion is a force that can be utilised in the service of different ideological stances, so too mothers raise their voices across the political spectrum. As a mother, I want to defend my children – yet there are many possible paths which may seem to answer this need – and my priority may indeed be to defend my chil-

**Editor's note: The name Four Mothers' Peace Movement refers to the four Biblical figures of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel. The Israeli protest movement which gave itself this name was founded by mothers of soldiers who died in a helicopter crash who were serving during the Lebanon war in 1987.*



A JCJCR delegation on a solidarity visit to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III in Jerusalem.

dren even at the expense of destroying others. When we are overcome by desperate fear for our own children, it is hard to worry about the “others” and her children.

Additional challenges face women involved in interreligious peacebuilding as the religious hierarchies here exclude women almost entirely – and therefore it is difficult for a woman to engage religious leaders in dialogue. Perhaps it is therefore no coincidence that our organization (JCJCR), the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations, though not a women’s organization, concentrates on grassroots educational activities, paying particular attention to the teachers (mainly women) who shape the next generation.

We understand that peace is about much more than the absence of war – and together we can – and must – heal the hatred that threatens to engulf us and help build more equal, just societies which will treat all human beings as the children of God.

Dr. Sarah Bernstein is Director-General of the JCJCR. She has worked for interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding for many years. The JCJCR brings Jews and Christians in the Holy Land together. In a self-description of the organization, it says “The year 2000 was the first time that a Jewish majority, which was aware of its strength, came together with vulnerable Christian parishes which have a long history of living as minorities.”
(www.jcjr.org)

“I LIVE THROUGH MY CHILDREN.”

A Syrian mother relates how the war has made her strong

“Being a young woman in the middle of the Syrian crisis made me value the role of women in making a difference to their families’ lives”, says Layal Jarrouj who fled from Homs four years ago and has not been able to return since.

Allow me to share with you some stories about myself. I’m a 31 year old woman. I got married nine years ago to the love of my life and we had many dreams and ambitions to look forward to. I have a son, 8, and a baby girl, 10 months. I was a banker and my husband was a lawyer. The Syrian crisis began and our life turned upside down. I kept going to work - in spite of the danger - for 11 months to keep my job and make a living. No-one imagined that the crisis would continue for five years.

I used to kiss my son good-bye every day before going to work, not knowing if I would make it to home alive. Our bank was in the middle of Homs city and that area witnessed many terrorist actions, riots etc..... I will never forget the scene of nine dead bodies lying in the street which was 150 meters from my house. My son, who was three at that time used to sleep under the sofa terrified from all that bombing and shooting. He said crying “Mammy, mammy, make them stop!”. I used to lie next to him on the floor, holding his small shaking hands and telling him that everything will be ok. The truth is nothing was ok! He could see the fear in my eyes but I tried to pull myself together and be strong for him. I had mountains of pain upon my shoulders but I tried my best to be the per-

fect and supportive mother and wife.

In February 2012 we were forced to flee our home after terrorist groups entered our neighborhood and the situation became life threatening. Our direction was Mashta al-Helou, about 70 km from Homs. At first we celebrated our survival but later we knew that a new journey of challenges was waiting for us. The management of the bank I worked for asked me to move to Damascus as our branch in Homs was completely closed. They offered me a higher position and salary. It took me seconds to say no as I couldn’t place my son in danger. He already had enough of fear. I forgot all about myself, my dreams and plans for the sake of my family’s safety. So basically I lost my job and I was proud to put my family as number 1 in my schedule of priorities.

I had the chance to work with some NGOs. Then I worked in a preschool project of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) in Wadi al-Nasara. Now my husband and I decided to move to another place to find better options.

To be honest, there were times I was desperate, weak and hopeless. Dealing with all the losses of properties and jobs, displacement and FEAR of the unknown wasn’t easy. Every time I look at my kids I know I must be strong for them. I live for them or rather I live through them and I would do anything for them. I’m trying to do my best for my family. I’m trying hard to give, support, protect and choose what is appropriate for them, not because I’m a super woman but because I’m a mother in war time.

Photo: EMS/Gräbe



Loyal Jarrouj in conversation with EMS General Secretary Jürgen Reichel.

I can tell you about working women in Syria, the majority of them are going to their jobs in spite of the suicide bombing, car explosions and the absolute danger. Especially doctors who are ready to do the impossible to serve patients and injured people whenever and wherever. My mother is one of those doctors.

I had many conversations with university female students who are risking their lives by going to the universities. Many universities were attacked by bombs, shells, missiles or car bombs. Many students were killed or injured but still students are determined to continue their studies in order to achieve their goals in rebuilding beloved Syria and upgrading the role of educated women, not allowing war to stop them.

Our culture in the Middle East gives men more power, more benefits and more privileges. But I can tell that after five years of war, violence and sufferings; women stars are shining. Women have proven that they can sacrifice, work hard and endure hard times like men or even more. Through the crisis, women have played an effective role in politics, media, educational and social fields. At last, women have a combination of softness and strength at the same time. They know when to use each one of them. A woman wipes her tears in one hand and gives power in the other. Go ahead women!

Loyal Jarrouj worked until recently as bookkeeper at the EMS preschool in the Syrian Valley of Christians.



Children at the preschool in the Valley of Christians are also frightened of bombs and rockets.

“WHEN YOU HELP A MOTHER, YOU HELP THE FAMILY AS A WHOLE”

Izdihar Kassis about her work with women in refugee camps

“One consequence of the war is that many women have founded charity organizations,” says Izdihar Kassis from Zahle (Lebanon). The wife of the former director of the Johann-Ludwig Schneller School has herself founded the organization “Together for the Family” which focuses its work on refugee women.

Only men are often featured in press reports about the crisis in the Middle East. Where are the voices of women?

With regards to the voice of women in the Middle East, they do have a voice but it is typically in the background. Their voices are in many cases echoed by male representatives. I relate it to the similar situation in North America, where compensation varies dramatically between men and women working the same job. It’s magnified in the Middle East due to culture, and it has a lot to do with traditional Middle Eastern values.

Are women more affected by the war than men?

Both men and women are affected differently by the war. Young and grown men are affected by the war in the sense that they are forced to fight or put in positions where they are required to defend their homes and families. Many of them have lost their lives. In addition, men are typically the breadwinners and as such, there is the added pressure to provide for their families. Women are affected greatly also. Many of them have lost their husbands, or have husbands who are not able to work and provide for the family. Many women

are left with the responsibility of raising a family, providing the basic necessities, etc. Additionally, many of the women and young females are emotionally scarred and are not able to deal with the trauma. In particular, mothers, who also have to deal with children traumatized by the war.

Can women play a particular role in times of crisis?

As a woman, I have found that I am able to walk into the tents of these families with ease, I am able to hold meetings and gather young girls and women into one tent where we can communicate and discuss several issues affecting them. Culturally, as a male, this would be difficult or near impossible. Also I believe women have the ability to play a very important role because most don’t work and are available to give their time and energy towards helping one another. For example, currently in Syria, there is an organization called Generation Above Crisis (one of our partners). This was formed by several Syrian women in an effort to utilize their time effectively by helping those affected by the war. As a result of the war, many other charitable organizations were formed by women.

Please talk a little about your work for and with women.

From the time we left Schneller, my husband, Riad Kassis became an international director. In an effort to continue the important work I had started with families while we were in Schneller, myself and a group of leaders founded TFF (Together for the Family) with a special focus on women, children and teens. We founded this



Photo: TFF/Kassis

Izdihar Kassis pays regular visits to women and their families in the refugee camps.

with the intentions of serving these groups prior to the war in Syria. Due to the influx of refugees in Lebanon, by default we found ourselves helping Syrian refugees – in particular the women and children. Our ministry chose to concentrate on the women because we believe they are the core and nucleus of the family. By helping and supporting the women, we believe we are essentially helping the family as a whole. We shifted our focus to the children who were being born in Lebanon; some in tents. Finally, helping traumatized teenagers by providing access to therapy, retreats and conferences.

What can women contribute that men cannot?

As mentioned before, they contribute greatly by using their spare time and helping one another. Emotionally, she contributes more to her family and those around her. I am constantly amazed by the women in this war and their courage and strength and at their ability to hold it together given their circumstances.

Do you think that women are better problem-solvers than men?

Generally, women are more calm, less aggressive and less assertive. So, yes, I believe they are better problem-solvers as they approach their conflicts with the intention of resolving. For example, most



Photo: TFF/Kassis

What do children and young people need to cope better with life as a refugee? Izdihar Kassis at a meeting in the camp.

of the male leaders in this part of the world (in particular male, Arab leaders) refused to accept refugees in their countries. Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel stood out for all of us as she was the only leader among them all trying to find a resolution to the refugee situation.

After World War II, when the majority of men of a particular age were either dead or prisoners of war, women in Germany were forced to assume sole responsibility for their families. That changed their role in society drastically. Do you think that women could also play a different role after the war in Syria ends?

One would like to think that we would have the same outcome as after World War II where women became more independent, self-sufficient, more responsible, etc. However, having said that, I believe as long as the Middle East is a male-dominant society - this may prove to be difficult.

Interviewed by Katja Dorothea Buck.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE

How the Johann-Ludwig Schneller School is helping refugee mothers

Since the Syrian Orphanage was founded 156 years ago, the Schneller schools have spent all their strength and resources to help orphans and provide them with an education. Whenever war and crises ravaged the Middle East, the schools even gave special help to those suffering from persecution and poverty. This is just as true today as it was in the past.

Ten per cent of residential places at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Khirbet Kanafar today are taken by Syrian refugee children. Meanwhile, 35 Syrian girls and boys are fully integrated in life at the school and are provided with everything they need.

But that is not all. As a result of the steady growth of the refugee camps in the direct vicinity of the school, the school director, Reverend George Haddad, asked the question what would become of the women and mothers who sought refuge in Lebanon without their men and husbands. Many men have died in the war, are missing or imprisoned. Even divorced women have a difficult status in Arab society where the man normally looks after the family. What does it mean for single mothers and their children to live in a camp which consists of makeshift huts and tents, with no perspective and without any support from a large family of relatives?

To help these women, the JLSS started offering single refugee mothers a three month vocational training programme two years ago. This would help them to



Photo: JLSS/Haddad

Women at the training course for single refugee mothers

learn skills in the tailoring or hairdressing trades so that they could earn a living for themselves and their children. The first course was so successful that the JLSS has continued to offer them ever since. In the meantime, it appears that half the women manage to make enough money for themselves and their children at the end of the course. The other women can at least earn a little extra money on the side.

Sometimes however, there is still a need for support in other areas. One woman attending the hairdressing course was diagnosed with breast cancer. Not a single NGO, not even the United Nations was willing to bear the costs for the operation and the follow-up treatment. Apparently, when she registered in Lebanon, there was an irregularity for which nobody felt responsible. Through the support of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS), the money needed for the operation was found and



Photo: EMS/Gräbe

Children at the refugee camp

she underwent the operation at the Hariri Hospital in Beirut during the Christmas holidays.

Luckily the doctors found out that the cancer was still in a very early stage. It was also a stroke of luck that the operating surgeon declined to take any fee. This reduced the operation costs considerably so there was still enough money left over to pay for the follow-up chemotherapy. "We can only give thanks to God that the money for the operation and treatment found its way to the women," writes George

Haddad, director of the JLSS. He was very grateful to the German partners, the EMS and the EVS, that they provided their help in such an uncomplicated way. "We were all very relieved that the woman is now recovering and that her prospects are good. Her children have lost their father. What would have become of them if their mother had also been unable to look after them any more?!"

Katja Dorothea Buck

ONLINE INFORMATION

Reverend George Haddad has produced a presentation about the training programme for single refugee mothers. View it at

<https://sway.com/yhCVWz138vMFB8xg>

You will also find more information on the project on the Johann-Ludwig Schneller School website.

http://www.schneller-school.org/single_mothers_program_2015_2016.aspx

LOW OIL PRICES AND WEAK EURO

Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS). The low price of oil has produced noticeable effects for the children at the Johann-Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS). During the heating period, the school was able to increase the number of hours when classrooms were heated during the day. The residential homes were also heated in the evenings and at night. "We were even able to heat the rooms in the early morning hours for the toddlers," said Reverend George Haddad, director of the JLSS. Besides the low oil price, there were also very positive effects on the modernisation of the central heating system. "At last we have a modern, efficient and economical heating system," said Haddad delighted.

Nevertheless there are still many concerns about the planned massive increase in teachers' salaries. If this plan is finally adopted, the school will face enormous financial difficulties. The weak Euro is also having a negative impact on the school's finances. The Lebanese currency is linked to the US dollar but the school receives all its subsidies from European partners in Euro. In concrete terms this means that the school has a lower budget at its disposal. The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) and the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) are well aware of these interactions on the global market and are constantly seeking solutions to shoulder this problem together with the schools.

NEW MEMBERS ON THE MANAGEMENT BOARD OF THE SCHNELLER ASSOCIATION

Stuttgart (EVS). At the beginning of May, the Board of Trustees of the *Schneller ASSOCIATION - Education for Peace* appointed Reverend Andreas Maurer and Church Council member Klaus Rieth to the management board of the association. Andreas Maurer is Managing Director of the Paulinenpflege Winnenden (centre for the handicapped). As former President of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) and Middle East Liaison Secretary at the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS), he knows the two schools very well and also brings a wealth of experience to church work in the Middle East. Church Council member Klaus Rieth heads the Mission, Ecumenism and Development department at the Evangelical High Consistory in Württemberg and has known the schools for many years. In his function as Deputy President of the EMS Assembly and Mission Council, he is also closely connected to Schneller work.

Maurer and Rieth succeed Helmut Hekmann and Margit Rupp who have retired from the management board of the association. As Managing Director of the Vocational Education Centre Waiblingen (retired), Hekmann advised the EVS Management Board on questions relating to vocational training. Margit Rupp is Director of the Evangelical High Consistory in Württemberg and has supported the Schneller Association since its establishment in 2007. The EVS and the Schneller Association would like to extend their sincere thanks to Margit Rupp and Helmut Hekmann for the many years of their commitment to the two Schneller schools in Jordan and Lebanon.

ABOUT PEOPLE WHO DO NOT GIVE UP



Under the title “Hoffnung im Nahen Osten” (Hope in the Middle East), the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW) is focusing the latest edition of its quarterly magazine “Eine Welt” (One World) to people who do not give up. A number of different authors mainly from the Middle East report about themselves and their motives to stay despite war and crisis, and work towards a better future for all people in the region.

For example, the Lebanese theologian **Rima Nasrallah** tells how she decided with her husband to give up living in the safety of the Netherlands for a life of chaos and unrest. Theologian **Najla Kassab** writes about the commitment of young people who want to stay in Syria despite everything. Others that have a chance to speak include an environmental activist and a young conceptual artist who wants to make Beirut

into a greener and more colourful city. A young Syrian

who was forced to flee before Islamic troops two years ago explains why he still sees his future in Syria despite everything. Then the Armenian theologian **Paul Haidostian** writes about the history of the Armenians and how the chaos and brutality in the Middle East today can be interpreted as a repetition of the history of suffering against the background of the genocide against the Armenians a hundred years ago.

In addition **Katja Dorothea Buck**, who is the brainchild of the magazine, examines how Egyptian Christians have managed to not allow death to have the final word after the brutal murder of 21 Coptic migrant workers in Lybia by placing the event into the hands of their church according to the tradition of stories relating to martyrdom. Finally she reports about two pastors from Homs and Aleppo who are building and rebuilding churches despite the hail of bombs.

The magazine is a publication from the co-operative press of the mission societies and can either be obtained as “Eine Welt” from the EMW. EineWelt/Missionshilfe Verlag, Normannenweg 17, D-20537 Hamburg, Germany, demh@emw-d.de, Tel. +49 (040) 254 56-143.

or as “Darum” from the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). This magazine contains additional features on the Middle East, among others on the Evangelical School in Irbid (Jordan). For the ordering address, please turn to page 26.

Each magazine costs 4.50 Euro plus 1 Euro shipment for both issues. Read a short preview of the magazine at www.missionspresse.org.

WHEN CHILDREN CAN SMILE AGAIN

Children at the preschool in Wadi al-Nasara



Photo: EMS/Gräbe

For many children a hot meal in preschool is the most important food at the moment.

In 2013, the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) set up a preschool in the Valley of Christians in Syria. The project started up very great success. In its next meeting the EMS Mission Council will discuss the next three years. What is already clear now is that, without the preschool, children like Aboudi or Noura would have had even fewer opportunities.

The war in Syria has many grave consequences - expulsions, losses and poverty. But the worst thing is when someone in the family is injured or killed. And it is almost unbearable when the one who has to pay the price for this is an innocent child. Aboudi is five years old and used to live with his parents and his

sister in their own home in Aleppo. When the situation became life-threatening in Aleppo, Aboudi's parents fled together with two neighbouring families. They could not take anything with them except for a small bag with clothes. Shortly behind Aleppo they were stopped by terrorists who demanded the three family fathers to join them. Aboudi's father tried in vain to run away. The terrorists beheaded him in front of his family. From this moment on, Aboudi stopped talking. The little boy was so shocked about what had happened.

It was a miracle that Aboudi's mother managed to get herself and her children to the safe town of Kafroun in the Valley of Christians, where she found a job as

Photo: EMS/Gräbe



Loving care for each child

caretaker. The owners provided a room for her and her children. But then Aboudi's condition became worse. Every night he had nightmares, he refused to speak to anyone, even his mother. As money was short, she could not go to the doctor. The mother heard about the preschool at the EMS and asked for help there. The pastor responsible, Reverend Ma'an Bitar, promised her he would do everything he could to help Aboudi. The boy came every morning to preschool. He was a very still boy with empty eyes who refused to play or eat with the other children. The boy was severely traumatised.

Every day Rev. Bitar came to see Aboudi and built up a relationship with him in this way. The boy gradually opened up and gave his trust. The class teacher also made every effort with him and everyone in the house gave Aboudi their encouragement. They were friendly to him and

showed him love and sympathy. Suddenly, Aboudi began to eat, speak again and play with the other children. In school he will have to catch up on many things but the most important is that he is back on the right track. "I don't know what to say," said the mother once to the persons in charge. "Despite all my sorrow about my husband, you have managed to bring happiness back into our lives. I am so

grateful that I have my son back."

Meanwhile people are spreading Aboudi's story by word of mouth and this is really increasing the preschool's reputation. Then at some point in time, the preschool also caught the attention of Noura's parents. Noura is five years old and was forced to leave Aleppo with her family. They were already very poor before the civil war broke out. After they had fled to the Valley of Christians, the father could not find any work. At the beginning they slept anywhere they could on the street. A farmer finally offered the father a job on his farm for a little money and shelter. The poor man was so happy to find a roof over their heads for his family. But the shelter was a cow shed and the money was hardly enough for one meal a day. Sometimes the neighbours gave them something for the children.

Finally the mother asked the preschool for help. "Noura would so like to go to school but we simply can't afford it." Rev. Bitar took the child in and on the next morning, Noura came to class pale and in her shabby clothes. She was very shy and was very embarrassed when some of the children said that she smelt awful. At lunch Noura refused to eat with the others. Rev. Bitar tried to encourage her but the girl whispered to him she would prefer to take the food home and share it with her brothers and sisters. Rev. Bitar promised her he would give her some food if she ate her plate clean. Noura was very excited. For her it was the first time in her life that she ate rice with chicken and vegetables.

Sometimes, Noura also receives clothes from the preschool for her brothers and sisters. Her teacher says that she is a well behaved and sweet child. Now that she receives a hot meal at preschool every day, she is much better and she looks a lot healthier.

Until recently, Loyal Jarrouj looked after the bookkeeping at the preschool. Before she went, she took the time to write the stories of these two children.

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE EVS!

The "Evangelischer Verein für die Schneller-Schulen e.V." (Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools, EVS) supports and accompanies the work of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon and the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan. Its special task is to offer poor children school education and professional training at the Schneller Schools.

In its publications and events, the EVS provides information about churches and Christians in the Middle East. The Schneller Magazine is published four times a year and can be subscribed free of charge. Speakers for lectures on topics featuring the work of the schools can be booked from the EVS Secretariat.

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



Vogelsangstrasse 62

D-70197/Stuttgart

Germany

Tel. *49.(0)711.63678-0



EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools

VIEWED FROM A DISTANCE

Review of a time spent as ecumenical accompanier in Bethlehem

I'm back in my usual and well protected surroundings, back in a reality which at first no longer really felt as if it was my own. Three months can really make their mark. My time as an EA (Ecumenical Accompanier) was very intensive and full of new impressions which I first had to digest after my return from Bethlehem.

My apprehension of meeting with a lack of understanding when I talk about my experiences turned out to be well founded. What I mean here is not that people lack compassion for the suffering and fear which dominate the lives of many people on the West Bank. What I mean is the feelings which concern me personally. When the local situation escalated at the end of last year, I was already back home but I was overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness. Of course I kept on telling myself it would have been impossible for us as a team to be everywhere in Bethlehem to document or even prevent incidents. But when we were there, we actually took part in the lives of some families. Yes, we had the feeling of being needed.

Both during my time on the West Bank and when I was back in Germany, I was confronted with critical opinions which questioned whether the EAPPI programme was at all meaningful. Looking back though, I can say that I am even more convinced about the idea of ecumenical observers since my assignment. We observed, listened, shared life at local level and made friends with some extraordinary people. The assignment brought us closer

together as a team which consisted of six people from different backgrounds (Brazil, Finland, Denmark, etc.). We felt that receiving information at first hand was something enriching. I regarded it as a privilege to share the fates of Palestinian men, women and children and enjoyed the trust they showed me. Of course I noticed how emotionally demanding this can be. I realised I was the voice of the oppressed and felt the need to share what I had experienced during the three months.

But this need was drastically dampened by my departure, followed by the change of scene during the first few weeks after my return. I noticed how my experiences affected me. For the first time, I felt at total peace and this allowed me to pause and review all the things I had experienced. I felt I was in a state of limbo. I missed the daily adversities of everyday Palestinian life (at checkpoints, schools, in traffic, during the olive harvest, etc.). All of a sudden I was no longer capable of standing in solidarity with people. On the other hand I was grateful that everything was OK at home. After these guilty feelings of having left certain fates behind me, there came a phase of indifference towards the



Denis Daut photographing road blocks near Bethlehem.



circumstances there. “There’s no way I can change anything and it only weighs me down!”

One of the most important lessons from my assignment as EA is that I intend to be more aware in future of the injustices that exist all around us. In the end, this is what always motivates me to report about the work of the EAPPI and of other local Israeli and Palestinian organisations and create awareness for their concerns in my home country. I use my own small network of acquaintances, family and friends to spread the message about the people on the West Bank and in Israel. As international ecumenical accompaniers, it was our privilege to hear the voices from both camps. All too often they said the same thing. On the one hand, there is a deep-seated fear of the “others” and this is indisputably fuelled by overstimulation

from the media. On the other hand, many simply want to live in peace together. This is a fact that often brought me to the brink of despair. I thought “If only they could just really listen to each other speak.”

Despite the escalation of the conflict within the last few months, I still hope for a better future, sharing this with all the wonderful people who taught me “sumud”, which in English means “steadfastness”.

In 2015, Denis Daut was sent by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) to the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI).

NEWS

The idea for the EAPPI originated from the churches in Palestine. Since 2002, it has been a World Council of Churches programme. For general information about the EAPPI, go to www.oikoumene.org/de/was-wir-tun/eappi-de

If you are interested in going on an assignment to Palestine or Israel, please contact our Middle East Liaison Desk at the EMS,

feist@ems-online.org



Patriarch Warns Against Emigration

Bagdad (Fides). The Chaldean Patriarch Luis Raphael Sako issued a categorical warning to priests in his church. In no way should the church in general or its priests in particular become involved in programmes which would assist Iraqi Christians to plan or carry out emigration abroad. Anyone failing to observe this instruction will have to answer for their actions to the Patriarch, it says in the proclamation.

The sensitive topic of the emigration of Christians to Europe and America was recently discussed at a conference of Chaldean bishops in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil. In view of the massive emigration trends, the churches in the Middle East fear for their existence. Some bishops complained at the conference that private people and groups who were not in direct connection with the church were exploiting the dramatic situation of many Christian refugees for their own economical, political and media interests. The intention was not to question the freedom of decision of individuals to seek a place of safety for themselves and their family. But at the same time, people should be warned of the dangers that arise when they put themselves in the hands of illegal smugglers and traffickers of human beings.

Christians from Mosul and the Nineveh plains in particular who fled from the Islamic State and who now live in terrible conditions in the autonomous province of Kurdistan in northern Iraq would easily fall victim to such manipulative people. In their statement the Chaldean bishops therefore renew their appeal to the international community to advance with

united force against the Islamic State. Liberation from the jihadists can neither be the responsibility of the church nor political parties or even the Iraqi government. Indeed, it requires cooperation between the international community and regional and national forces in Iraq to liberate the country from the IS. This would allow families who had fled to return to their homes.

Copts Again Make a Pilgrimage to Jerusalem

Kairo/Jerusalem (Fides). To celebrate this year's Orthodox Easter at the end of April, nearly 6,000 Coptic Christians went on a pilgrimage from Egypt to Jerusalem to take part in the Holy Week rites. This is all the more astonishing since Copts have been banned from visiting the Holy City since 1979. During the escalation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the then Coptic Orthodox Pope Schenuda III called upon Christians in his church to desist from going to Israel. Even when the Egyptian President Anwar as-Sadat appealed for a normalisation of relations between Egypt and Israel, Pope Schenuda III did not rescind this ban. Officially, it is still in place today.

However in 2014, 90 Copts ignored the ban for the first time and travelled to Jerusalem for the Holy Week. In November last year, the present Pope Tawadros II even went to Jerusalem to attend the funeral of the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop Abraham. Officially the Coptic Orthodox Church declared this visit as an "exception". For many Copts, however, it apparently gave the signal that the new Pope would not adhere to the ban.



Unusual picture: Coptic Christians on a pilgrimage in Jerusalem

UNUSUAL TONES

Lebanon (Vatican Radio). The Maronite Patriarch Boutros Béchara Rai speaks up against the “catastrophic mood” among Christians in the region. He does not believe in a “total expulsion” of Christians from the Middle East, he said in an interview with a Catholic news portal. “Some day, the storm will be over and Christians will not have disappeared from the region where Jesus came into the world,” said the Maronite Patriarch of Antioch. “Christians are not an ethnic political group, nor are they a political party. They are children of the Church of Christ,” explained Rai and added that the presence of Christians in the Middle East is not only dependent on politics or history.

REJECTION OF CHRISTIAN MILITIA

Baghdad (Fides). Recently, the Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako issued a cat-

egorical rejection of Christian militia. “If we believe that our victory depends on armed groups to defend our rights, then this will lead to another ‘holocaust,’” writes the Primate of the Chaldean Church in a long message to believers. This already happened in the past when Christian militia “fought the wars of others”. Instead we “should learn from the lessons of history”. If anything, Christians should join the regular armed forces and not defend the rights of their religious community in the fight against jihadists by becoming part of their own confessional militia, as recently demanded by Syrian, Assyrian and Chaldean groups. In reality, such confessional militia would “be supported by the same forces which triggered the conflict in the first place”.

The only legitimate and effective solutions, according to the Patriarch, is to recruit into regular forces, for example in Iraq or the autonomous region of Kurdistan, “to fight in their ranks for the liberation of the occupied territories. We must realise that our fate is linked to that of all Iraqis and that this is the only way to guarantee a common future.” The Patriarch described Islamic extremism in the Middle East as “abnormal and politically controlled.”

PATRIARCHS AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA

Aleppo (Fides). The two heads of the Eastern Churches in Syria – the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II and the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Yohanna X. – issued a warning against the anti-Islamic instrumentalisation of the suffering of Christians. “We will also continue to live

in the regions, ring our bells, build our churches and set up our crosses. The poor who rise to the crosses do this together with our Muslim brothers and sisters,” it says in a statement which the two Patriarchs published on the occasion of the third anniversary of the abduction of two bishops from Aleppo, Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim and Boulos Yazigi. They were kidnapped on 22 April 2013 and nothing is known of their whereabouts to this day.

In their letter, the two Patriarchs emphasised that Muslims “are suffering under the bitter blows of the terrorists as much as we are”. They are “intruders” in relations between Christians and Muslims. “But we will claim victory over the present darkness with the light of the eyes of the Holy Virgin Mary, who is revered by both Christians and Muslims, and to whom we appeal for the safe return of the two kidnapped archbishops.”

Christians were never a “minority”. Instead they were always an integral part of Syria and the entire region. People from the outside who stand up “passionately for so-called ‘minorities’ and open doors to refugees from Syria” rather request the Patriarchs to do their utmost to find a final solution to the conflict so that people no longer have to embark on the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean. “We appreciate all humanitarian efforts by governments or organisations,” write the Patriarchs, “but it is no protection for us in the region if people make it easier for refugees to emigrate. We only want peace.” We want a peace “which is not based on the concept of minority or majority but on peaceful coexistence”.

REMAINS FOUND OF A BYZANTINE CHURCH IN GAZA



Photo: LPJ/Saher Kawas

Cross engraved on a foundation stone

Gaza (Fides/LPJ). The remains of an antique Byzantine church dating from the 4th or 5th century were found in the Gaza Strip during construction work on a shopping mall. During foundation work on Palestine Square in Gaza City, construction workers uncovered parts of marble columns with Corinthian capitals and a cross engraved on a foundation stone. Although the Palestinian Antiquities Department confirmed the find, construction work has continued. This has led to strong protests from archaeologists and Palestinian Christians. For example, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem immediately sent an appeal to UNESCO and to the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism to which the Antiquities Department reports, giving the reason that the church is part of Palestinian history.

Hiam Al-Bitar, Head of the Department for Museums and Antique Sites in the Ministry of Tourism, also admonished that it should be the order of the day to search for solutions beyond all political differences to preserve the common heritage. She also wrote to UNESCO with a plea for support to safeguard the archaeological finds in the Gaza Strip where there is are



Found when excavating the foundations for a shopping centre: columns of a Byzantine church

numerous testimonies to a rich Christian past.

Gaza is the birthplace of Saint Hilarion, founder of the monastic system in Palestine. In the year 329, he founded the first monastery between Maimaus and Gaza. Today, the site is known as Tell Im-Amer and is situated to the south-west of the Nuseirat refugee camp. The monastery is marked on the famous antique mosaic map of Madaba. However today, the monastery is threatened by total decay.

Historical sources and archaeological finds testify to the fact that there must be at least ten monasteries in the Gaza Strip region dating from the Byzantine era. They were frequently used in later times as stone quarries to build houses in the neighbourhood.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Contact with our readers is invaluable for our work. We are delighted to receive all your readers' letters, even if they are critical or present a different opinion than that of the editors. We reserve the right to edit your letters for space reasons.

About Schneller Magazine 1/2016

The article entitled "A question of courage and hope" in the last Schneller magazine, which contained massive criticism by leading theologians in the Middle East against the German refugee policy, annoyed me very much when it said that there was a mass exodus of Christians from Iraq and Syria.

So far I was convinced that people – be it Christians or Muslims - leave their country because they can no longer bear the daily violence of bombs and terror. But apparently these fleeing Christians are hopeless cowards because they failed to hold out any longer. For my part, this analysis is just not tenable. For this reason, it can only mean for us Christians here to stand by the side of these frightened people who have lost all hope.

Irmgard Seiz, Stuttgart

Many thanks for your support and great attention concerning MECC important role for unifying the Christian voice in the region. We are also very proud of what you are doing especially the beautiful magazine you shared with us.

Tarek Sater, Program Coordinator at the Middle East Church Council (MECC)

131th Year**Issue 2, June 2016**

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

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

Address: Vogelsangstrasse 62
D-70197 Stuttgart, Germany
Tel.: +49 711 636 78 -39
Fax: +49 711 636 78 -45
E-mail: evs@ems-online.org
www.evs-online.org
Seat of the Association: Stuttgart

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

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

Rüt mattstrasse 13, CH-5004 Aarau
PC Account 30-507790-7
CH05 8148 8000 0046 6023 2
www.schnellerschulen.org

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

English Schneller Magazine online:
www.ems-online.org/en/schneller-magazine

SCHNELLER

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

Vogelsangstr. 62 | 70197 Stuttgart

Tel.: 49 (0) 711 636 78 -39

Fax: 49 (0) 711 636 78 -45

Email: evs@ems-online.org



Donations to the EVS:

Evangelische Bank eG,

Bank code 520 604 10, Account no. 407 410

IBAN: DE59 5206 0410 0000 4074 10

BIC: GENODEF1EK11

Endowment contributions to the Schneller Foundation:

Evangelische Bank eG,

Bank code 520 604 10, Account no. 407 437

IBAN: DE09 5206 0410 0000 4074 37

BIC: GENODEF1EK1



The Schneller Schools are dependent on your donations.

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

Please visit us on the Internet at www.evs-online.org



...for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.
Gal. 3:26



EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools