EMS INSIGHTS

2/2026



MAIN FEATURE

Becoming whole. Salvation and healing.

INDONESIA: WHO CARES FOR THE SHEPHERDS?
Pastoral Well-being and the Challenges of Ministry

A TRICYCLE CHANGES THE FUTURE
Story of Hope from Ghana

WORSHIPPING AROUND THE WORLD
EMS Sunday 2026: Sharing Hope

ems Evangelical Mission in Solidarity



DEAR READERS,

The Gospel of Mark relates the story of the healing of the blind beggar called Bartimaeus. He was sitting at the city gate of Jericho and heard Jesus coming out of the city with a large crowd (Mark 10:46-52). In despair, he sat by the roadside and cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The disciples and others in the crowd travelling with Jesus told him to be quiet. But Jesus called him over and asked him, „What do you want me to do for you?"

This question never ceases to amaze me. Surely it is perfectly clear what Bartimaeus wants. He wants to see again. But Jesus still asks him this question instead of assuming he knows better what is good for Bartimaeus. And as the story of the two unfolds, it becomes clear that Bartimaeus's healing is about much more than simply regaining his sight. Bartimaeus then follows Jesus on the way and becomes one of his disciples.

"What do you want me to do for you?" At EMS, we strive in our worldwide partnership not to make the mistake of assuming we know better what is good for others, but to set out on the way together. As you read the articles in this issue, you are sure to find many instances of this.



Rev. Dr Dieter Heidtmann
General Secretary

Initiative Transparente Zivilgesellschaft

Together we care about the integrity of creation.
We are EMAS^{PLUS} certified.

Front page: The Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) supports children with disabilities and their families.

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The 25 member churches and 5 mission societies in the EMS form an international association with equal rights. Together they connect about 25 million believers in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

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Worshippers at a service held by the Christian Church in South Sulawesi (GKSS), Indonesia.

MAIN FEATURE

BECOMING WHOLE. SALVATION AND HEALING.

In Christ, the whole person experiences God's healing love. Salvation and healing encompass body, soul and spirit in equal measure. This comprehensive understanding shapes the actions of people in the EMS Fellowship worldwide

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INDONESIA: WHO CARES FOR THE SHEPHERDS?

PASTORAL WELL-BEING AND THE CHALLENGES OF MINISTRY

For the pastors of the Christian Church in South Sulawesi (GKSS), their ministry does not end with the closing blessing. The service is followed by visits to the sick, pastoral counselling sessions, meetings and, often, long journeys between different parishes. In the long run, the many demands of the ministry can push pastoral workers to the limits of their resilience.

In rural and remote congregations, distance itself becomes part of ministry. A pastor may serve two congregations, travelling long hours between ministry points. Limited infrastructure, cultural differences and family concerns add to the demands. Pastoral work may also require helping congregations navigate between Christian faith and local traditions, including situations where members still seek a *sandro*, a traditional ritual practitioner, before turning to a pastor. This requires theological knowledge, patience and cultural sensitivity.

These challenges are intensified by the shortage of pastors. GKSS has 41 congregations and seven ministry groups, but only 33 active pastors. Ten ministry points have no permanent pastor, while nine pastors serve more than one congregation. The pastor is called to be present, yet cannot be everywhere, while also carrying responsibilities toward family. Of the 33 pastors currently serving in GKSS congregations, 20 are women (including one emeritus pastor). The remaining 13 are men (including two emeritus pastors).

WHEN MINISTRY BECOMES A HEAVY LOAD

These pressures do not mean that every GKSS pastor is experiencing burnout. Yet prolonged pressure deserves attention. The General Secretary of GKSS, Rev. Semuel Dominggus, identifies cultural adaptation, monotonous routines, family needs and the pastoral problems of church members as sources of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion.

According to a survey, pastors in the GKSS expressed their wish for greater emotional support, more intensive peer exchange, stronger pastoral care, and better opportunities for rest and renewal.

Pastors are also human beings. They become tired, disappointed and overwhelmed. Across very different ministry contexts, one question emerges: How much can one person carry, and for how long?

The question of how pastors themselves can be strengthened is, however, not a new one. A remarkable answer to this question can already be found in the New Testament.

The American theologian Flora Slosson Wuellner, in her book *Feed My Shepherds*, offers a striking reflection on John 21. After a fruitless night of fishing, the disciples meet Jesus on the shore. Jesus prepares breakfast before speaking to Peter about caring for the sheep. Before the shepherd is sent back to the sheep, the shepherd is cared for.



The disciples had already been called, yet they became exhausted. Their exhaustion did not cancel their calling. The same can be true for pastors: a pastor can love Christ and still become tired. Pastoral well-being is part of sustainable ministry.

WHERE DO SHEPHERDS REST?

Pastors often recover through prayer, Scripture, family, sleep, exercise, hobbies, conversation or quiet time. The difficulty is finding the time and freedom to do so.

In his book *The Emotionally Healthy Leader*, the American author Peter Scazzero warns that leaders can become so active in working for God that their life with God can no longer sustain their work for God.

Could a regular sabbatical or dedicated time away from ministry be beneficial for pastors? This is a question that deserves careful consideration. A sabbatical offers a deliberate opportunity to slow down, find rest, take joy in God's gifts, and reconnect with God's calling. It is also an act of faith, grounded in the conviction that God's work goes on even when we pause from our own labours.

IS THE CHURCH CARING ENOUGH?

On paper, GKSS recognises the welfare of pastors and their families and has regulations concerning remuneration, health protection and retirement. In practice, however, the reality depends greatly on congregational capacity.

The GKSS places a high value on the well-being of its pastors and their families. Regulations are in place regarding remu-

neration, healthcare, and retirement provision. In practice, however, much depends on the resources available to individual congregations.

Of the GKSS's 41 congregations, only 14 are financially self-sufficient; the remaining congregations rely on synodical support to cover the living expenses of their pastors.

A similar disparity can be seen in the pastoral care provided for pastors themselves. While the GKSS strives to offer appropriate support, the key question is whether existing capacities are sufficient to meet the actual needs of its clergy. At present, the answer remains cautious: not yet.

CARING FOR THE SHEPHERDS TOGETHER

GKSS may need to look beyond programmes and ask what kind of ministry culture it is fostering. While programmes and institutional support matter, pastoral well-being is shaped just as much by relationships.

> ***Where mutual care is practiced, a space emerges in which pastoral caregivers themselves can receive support.***

Over sixty years, GKSS has developed patterns of ministry that influence how pastors respond to challenges. Some strengthen resilience; others may encourage pastors to carry their struggles alone. Change begins when a pastor can say, "I am tired," and hear, "Let me walk with you."

What GKSS needs is not simply more activities, but a stronger culture of collegiality, mutual support, and solidarity. Professional support remains essential, but it cannot replace the care and encouragement pastors can offer one another within a healthy and sustainable community.

SOLIDARITY BEYOND OUR OWN CONGREGATIONS

The concept of solidarity holds special significance for the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). Its fellowship is rooted in mutual learning, shared resources, and standing alongside one another. For GKSS, one of the ten Indonesian member churches of EMS, solidarity can mean far more than financial support. It includes pastoral formation, mentoring, and learning from the experiences of churches in different contexts.

Yet solidarity begins close to home. The first, and often most important, source of support is the colleague serving alongside us. Colleagues cannot remove every burden of ministry, but they can listen, offer understanding, and remind us that no one is called to carry the challenges of ministry alone.

THE SHEPHERDS ARE ALSO SHEEP

Pastors are shepherds, but they are not the Shepherd. They remain God's people themselves. John 21 reminds us of this. Jesus meets tired disciples after a fruitless night. He gives them food before giving Peter another task. The shepherd is first cared for by the Shepherd.

Pastors do not have to be their own source of strength; they can be human, have limits, rest and receive care. Psalm 55:23 says, "Throw your burden upon the LORD, and he will sustain you". We are called to carry the burdens of ministry, but we were never called to carry them alone.

Pardamean Simatupang

*Rev. **Pardamean Simatupang** from the Christian Church in South Sulawesi (GKSS) is currently serving in an ecumenical ministry.*

Christian Church in South Sulawesi (GKSS)
The Christian Church in South Sulawesi (Indonesian: Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Selatan, GKSS) is a small Protestant church in the predominantly Muslim Indonesian province of South Sulawesi. Its headquarters are in the provincial capital, Makassar.
The GKSS has around 6,000 members across 41 congregations. A key focus of its work is improving living conditions in the often remote and rural communities of South Sulawesi. To this end, it runs, amongst other things, two boarding houses for schoolchildren and a training centre for village development work.

KINTSUGI AND THE WOUNDED GOD



Reina Ueno, Japan

When my sister had her first child, she looked at his little feet and said, "Baby feet are so beautiful, but one day these little feet are going to be scratched, even though I don't want him to be injured."

We all experience some pain, either physical or emotional. Life can be hard, and accidents happen. Because of this, we get hurt and then heal over time. When you think about these scars from painful times, what memories come to mind? You might remember many different moments and kinds of pain.

A big source of pain for me is the great earthquake and tsunami that happened on 11 March 2011 in my hometown. Even though it was almost 15 years ago, it still hurts. The huge wave completely destroyed the shoreline I knew so well. I helped out in that area. In the shock and sadness, I started to wonder where God was during such loss. It was hard to pray because of the deep pain around me, and sometimes I doubted if my faith could survive.

HEALING TAKES TIME AND PATIENCE

Japan has a traditional way of repairing ceramics and other vessels called "Kintsugi". "Kin" means gold, and "tsugi" means to mend or to patch. While kintsugi is famous for using gold seams, artisans also use natural finishes like colored lacquers, silver, or other materials depending on the item. The repair is a slow process that takes several months. The well-known kintsugi artisan Hiroki Kiyokawa says kintsugi changes damaged pottery into something new instead of just fixing its cracks. He believes the process connects the object's history, the artist's vision, and the owner's memories to create a new kind of beauty.



This brings to mind the resurrection story in John 20:24-29, where the risen Jesus invites Thomas to touch the wound in his side. Jesus did not cover the scar with anything and was not ashamed of the painful marks which were the result of his crucifixion. The Christ of Easter does not have a perfect baby body but one that is injured and carries painful memories. After the resurrection, Jesus spent several weeks with his disciples. Though it is not certain whether his scar vanished, I think it remained for the disciples to see, with a new relationship of healing already beginning through this wounded Jesus.

That same year, after the disaster, I began my three years of study at a seminary in the US. While those years were deeply valuable and precious, I also felt lonely at times, as none of my friends there had lived through the 3.11 disaster. I believe the wounded God has been with me all along, which is why I haven't lost my faith. Healing takes time and patience. My faith carries its scars, and though they remain in my life, they are turning into something different – something with a new kind of grace and character.

Reina Ueno *is a pastor of the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ). She currently serves as director of the UCCJ Buraku Liberation Center in Osaka.*

A LIFE DEDICATED TO THE MARGINALIZED

DR. SUNG-SOOK YEO, THE "MOTHER OF TUBERCULOSIS PATIENTS"

The Diakonia Sisters in Mokpo, South Korea, have made it their mission to help the poor and the sick and to take a stand against social indifference. One of the co-founders of the Protestant convent, Dr Sung-Sook Yeo, passed away on 16 March 2026 at the age of 108.

Born in 1918 into a poor farming family in Songhwa County, Hwanghae Province (now North Korea), Dr Sung-Sook Yeo devoted her life to serving society's most marginalized people. Her work spanned Japanese colonial rule, the Korean War, and the decades of rebuilding that followed, always guided by a commitment to human dignity and service.

In January 1962, she founded Mokpo Clinic in the port city of Mokpo, at a time when tuberculosis (TB) was one of South Korea's most feared diseases. Poverty, malnutrition, and overcrowded living conditions fuelled its spread, while those affected often faced stigma and exclusion. Many delayed or avoided treatment because of fear or financial hardship.



Dr Sung-Sook Yeo spent the final years of her life surrounded by the Diakonia Sisters in Mokpo.

Mokpo, home to migrant workers, war widows, orphans, and refugees, bore the scars of post-war poverty. In this setting, Dr Yeo established her clinic as a place intentionally open to those on the margins. It soon became both a treatment centre and a refuge for people with nowhere else to turn. Through her tireless commitment, the clinic developed into a major regional centre for tuberculosis care, earning her the affectionate title "Mother of Tuberculosis Patients."

"Dr Yeo never saw her patients as cases to be treated, but as lives to be restored," recalled a representative of the Korean Diakonia Sisterhood. "Her compassion reshaped what care could look like in times of deep poverty and fear."

HEALING THROUGH DIGNITY, WORK, AND COMMUNITY

Through her daily work, Dr Yeo came to recognize the limits of medical treatment alone. She understood that lasting healing required dignity, meaningful work, and community. Acting on this conviction, she sold all her possessions in 1965 to purchase barren land in Muan County, about ten kilometres from Mokpo. There she founded Hansan Village.

At a time when rapid industrialization and authoritarian development policies often left vulnerable groups behind, Hansan Village offered an alternative vision. Designed as a self-supporting community, it enabled former tuberculosis patients to live and work together, share responsibility, and rebuild their lives with dignity. Rather than fostering depend-



Dr Sung-Sook Yeo served as director of the Mokpo Clinic for many years.

ency, the village emphasized participation, mutual support, and belonging.

Unlike many state-run sanatoria and settlement programmes, Hansan Village embodied a grassroots, person-centred approach shaped by trust and shared responsibility. Dr Yeo's work was deeply rooted in the spirit of Diakonia, the Christian calling to serve, and reflected her commitment to standing alongside the poor and excluded.

FAITH SHAPED BY SERVICE AND SOLIDARITY

Dr Yeo's commitment increasingly intersected with theological and social movements inspired by Diakonia. During the political repression of the 1970s and early 1980s, faith-based initiatives emphasizing solidarity with the poor were often viewed with suspicion by the military government.

In May 1980, amid political unrest, the Korean Diakonia Sisterhood was founded at Hansan Village. Dr Yeo played a decisive role through her collaboration with the late Prof. Byung-Mu Ahn, with whom she shared a vision of faith expressed through service and solidarity. Drawing on his experience with the Diakonia movement in Germany, Ahn proposed Hansan Village as the site for the new community. Dr Yeo provided the land and participated in the founding alongside seven Sisters. Rev. Dorothea Schweizer, sent to Korea by EMS and closely connected to Prof. Ahn, also played an important role in the Sisterhood's early development.

Although central to its founding, Dr Yeo never became a member of the Protestant Sisterhood. As a physician, she remained among the tuberculosis patients of the Mokpo region while entrusting Hansan Village to the Sisters. In later years, she donated all her remaining assets to secure the community's future.

AN ENDURING LEGACY

Mokpo Clinic and Hansan Village emerged from the realities of war, disease, poverty, and political repression, yet their significance extends far beyond them. Together, they embody a holistic response to suffering that addresses health, livelihood, community, and dignity.

Hansan Village eventually became not only a place of recovery but also a spiritual centre. It includes the Diakonia Nursing Home, where Dr Yeo spent her final years. From March 2019, she lived there and was cared for by the Diakonia Sisters until her death.

Dr Sung-Sook Yeo's life came full circle. She lived and died within the community she had helped to build, sustained by the same spirit of care, service, and solidarity that shaped her lifelong witness of Diakonia.

Astrid Weyermüller

Further information on the Diakonia Sisterhood can be found here:
https://ems-online.org/en/support/korea-diakonia-sisterhood

A TRICYCLE CHANGES THE FUTURE

The sun beats down on Fumbisi Kasiesa in northern Ghana. Today, 17-year-old Atengbiik Agoadem rides his tricycle to school by himself. It was only a few months ago that this journey was a daily ordeal for him.

Atengbiik suffers from cerebral palsy and is unable to walk due to his disability. For years, he had no choice but to crawl his way to school. It took him up to two hours. By the time he arrived, his uniform was covered in dust, his body was drenched in sweat, and lessons had usually long since begun.

> ***"It was heartbreaking to see my son struggling every day."***
>
> *Cynthia Ajubil, Atengbiik's mother*

His mother, Cynthia Ajubil, could only watch helplessly as her son endured these hardships. "As a mother, it was heartbreaking to see my son struggling every day," she recalls. "Sometimes I was afraid he would give up school altogether."

HOPE ON THREE WHEELS

The family found new hope when Atengbiik's mother met co-workers from the Presbyterian Community-Based Rehabilitation (PCBR). The programme, supported by the EMS, helps people with disabilities and their families in their efforts to become more independent. She explained her son's situation, and project worker Clement Ataambori paid a visit to the family.



17-year-old Atengbiik (here with his mother) suffers from cerebral palsy. His tricycle gives him greater independence in his daily life.

"His sheer determination impressed me most of all," says Ataambori. "Despite his severe disabilities, he was dead set on continuing to attend school."

After an assessment was conducted, it quickly became clear what kind of help would benefit him the most: a specially modified tricycle that Atengbiik was able to operate using the strength of his arms. When the family learnt that funding had been approved, they could hardly believe their good fortune. "We all were over the moon," says Cynthia.

THE DAY THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

A few weeks later, they handed over the tricycle to Atengbiik. "On that day, I thanked God from the bottom of my heart," he says, remembering the moment. Since then, his daily life has changed dramatically. He cycles to school on his own, goes to the market and takes part in village life. He can even fetch water from the well on his own now.

"The tricycle has also taken a lot of the burden off me," says his mother. "Now I have more time for other important things and I can relax knowing that my son is becoming more and more independent."

NEW PROSPECTS

The change is also noticeable at school. Atengbiik arrives on time for lessons, participates more actively and acts with greater self-confidence. "The tricycle has greatly boosted his mobility, his independence and the belief in his own abilities," says project worker Ataambori.

Atengbiik's story is typical of many children with disabilities in Ghana. For them, a tricycle means far more than just greater mobility. it provides access to education, self-determination and new prospects. "The tricycle has given my son hope, independence and a future," says Cynthia.

Every morning, when Atengbiik rides to school instead of crawling there, it shows just how much a single act of support can achieve.

Astrid Weyermüller

EMS NOW MEMBER OF THE DEAB

The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) has joined the "Dachverband für globale Gerechtigkeit Baden-Württemberg e.V." (DEAB: Baden-Württemberg Association for Global Justice). The EMS is thus strengthening its long-standing ties with this development policy network.

The EMS and the DEAB are linked not only by their long-standing collaboration but also by a shared location. Both associations have their offices in the same building in Stuttgart. The aim of the new membership is to further increase cooperation and create additional scope for joint activities.

"Our decision to join the DEAB is primarily motivated by the wish to make even better use of synergies and pool resources more strategically," explains EMS General Secretary Dr Dieter Heidtmann. Membership opens up access to funding opportunities that would be limited or unavailable outside the association. This could simplify the implementation of joint projects and development policy initiatives in future, says Heidtmann.

The DEAB was founded in 1975 and today represents around 180 member organisations that include associations, local initiatives, fair trade shops and networks centred on specific issues or in certain countries. Serving as a central point of contact for global justice, One World ministry and development policy, the DEAB informs, advises and represents its members, organises training and further education programmes, and raises development policy issues in politics and society.

In July 2026, the association changed its name from 'Dachverband Entwicklungspolitik Baden-Württemberg' (Development Policy Association in Baden-Württemberg) to 'Dachverband für globale Gerechtigkeit Baden-Württemberg e.V.' (Baden-Württemberg Association for Global Justice). The name change underlines the association's commitment to placing global justice at the centre of its work

Stefan Schaal

AN INSPIRING FESTIVAL OF ENCOUNTERS



On 21 June 2026, under the slogan 'Gaining New Perspectives', Ulm became a meeting place for people from a wide range of different countries, cultures and Christian traditions.

Organised by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg (Germany) and centred around Ulm Minster, the festival of encounters combined church services, children's services, international encounters, music, dance and culinary experiences, creating a truly colourful celebration. Emso the Elephant, the official mascot of the EMS children's programme, was also there and joined more than 100 children, parents and staff in celebrating a joyful family service at the 'Haus der Begegnung' conference centre.

Children and adults were able to learn how people in different parts of the world live out their Christian faith at a number of interactive stands. For example, at one stand they were able to design bookmarks with their names in Korean, or at another stand they could have their faces painted in the traditional style of Brazil's indigenous communities. After the service, Emso led the children and adults from the 'Haus der Begegnung' to the stage programme on the nearby Münsterplatz (Minster Square) (see photo).

Cornelia Hole

BEACON OF HOPE IN THE WEST BANK: THE STAR MOUNTAIN REHABILITATION CENTER

For many people, life in the West Bank has been dominated by uncertainty, crises and violence. The situation is particularly challenging for families with children and young adults with disabilities. In this difficult environment, 'Star Mountain' offers a beacon of hope through its work.

'Star Mountain', or the 'Star Mountain Rehabilitation Centre' to be more precise, is a support centre for children and young persons with intellectual or multiple disabilities (PwIDs). It is situated in the West Bank on the road between Ramallah and the predominantly Christian town of Bir Zeit. The organisation is run by the Worldwide Moravian Church, through which it also has ties to the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). Since 1980, children and young adults have been receiving intensive support at Star Mountain – in its school education programme, vocational training and its inclusive kindergarten. In addition, the centre is actively involved in close collaboration with local authorities to strengthen the rights of people with disabilities.

ASEEL HAS A DREAM

Jihan Haddad (name changed by the editors) is a teacher at Star Mountain. She recounts the story of a girl called Aseel. When Aseel first arrived at the care home, she had hearing and speech problems as well as difficulties with everyday life. She was shy, usually played on her own and paid little attention to her outer appearance. However, thanks to tailored support involving speech therapy, physiotherapy, sport and acrobatics, she soon made enormous progress. She learnt to express herself, became more confident and made friends.

She also acquired basic skills such as writing the numbers from 1 to 10, solving simple maths problems and matching words to pictures. She discovered a passion for sewing and now takes pride in wearing clothes that fit her. It is particularly heart-warming to see that she increasingly shows initiative in class, for example when clearing up or washing up. Now she even acts as if she was a sort of little teaching assistant – and her big dream is to become a teacher herself.

Aseel's story is just one of many stories of hope at Star Mountain. The teachers too – unfortunately there are very few male teachers – draw motivation from successes such as these. "Lots of people ask me isn't it difficult and distressing working with people with disabilities?" says Jihan Haddad. "I always reply no, when I see the smile on Aseel's face, that's the best reward I could ever wish for. I can't help but smile too. She's such a lovely person!"

RELIGIONS COEXISTING SIDE BY SIDE

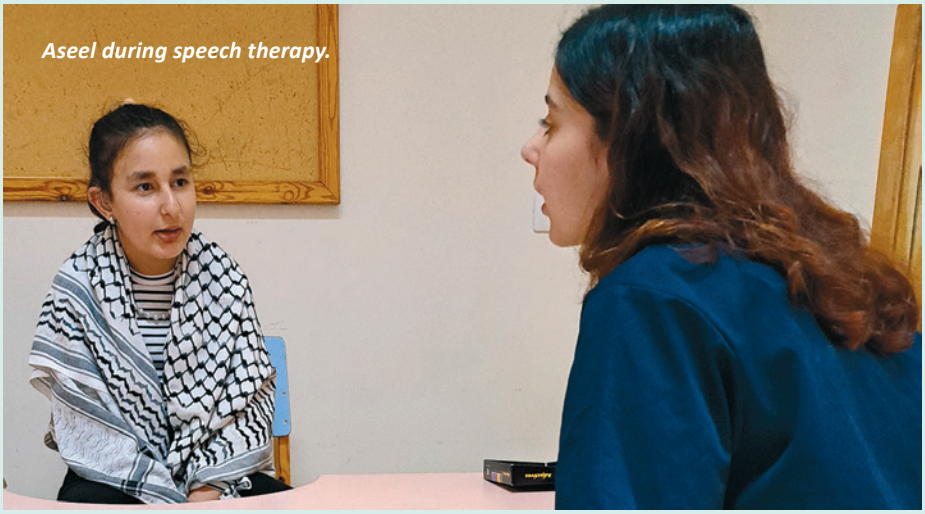
Star Mountain is a place of hope in many ways – above all for families with children with disabilities as well as for the teachers. After all, Star Mountain offers women in particular safe and stable employment, which is by no means something that is easy to find in the West Bank. Christians and Muslims work together in this Christian institution and this sets an impressive example of religions coexisting peacefully side by side.

Society is also slowly changing through advocacy for the rights of people with



Jihan Haddad teaching a lesson.

disabilities, the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream schools, and the provision of jobs for young adults with disabilities in local businesses. There is a growing awareness that people with disabilities are also members of the community. This is an important sign of hope for Palestinian society.


Aseel during speech therapy.

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

During Advent and Christmas, they set up a large nativity scene in the entrance lobby of the institution. Above it shines the Moravian Star. It is a symbol of Star Mountain and a symbol of hope – the light that shines out of darkness. And there is plenty of darkness in the West Bank. Recently, there has been a significant increase in violence against Palestinians by extremist settlers. Often under the protection of soldiers, they destroy houses and gardens, ravage fields, steal livestock or set cars ablaze. The perpetrators are never prosecuted. "What are we to do? There's nothing we can do! We just have to put up with it and hope that things will get better again one day," says teacher Jihan Haddad, offering an explanation of the situation. "Without hope, we are lost! But Star Mountain is a source of hope for me that life can be better and fairer."

Niels Gärtner

herrnhuter-missionshilfe.de/en/countries-and-projects/palestine/star-mountain-association

FOCUS: WEST BANK

Some 3.3 million Palestinians live in the West Bank under Israeli occupation. After the 1948 War of Independence, many Palestinian refugees from the coastal plain – which is now part of Israel – fled to areas west of the River Jordan where they ended up in refugee camps. The inhabitants who were already living in the West Bank tolerated the camps since they were, after all, only meant to be temporary.

In 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank during the Six-Day War. The territory then became a bargaining chip for Israel in negotiations with its Arab neighbours, with the aim of 'land for peace' – that is, the return of the West Bank in exchange for a stable peace. Nothing emerged from this for a long time. It was not until the Oslo negotiations in the 1990s that some hope emerged, though any hope was quickly dashed by extremists on both sides.

The Palestinian population in the West Bank had little say in any of these developments. They are currently experiencing a dramatic deterioration in their living conditions. According to Amnesty International, many Palestinians are severely affected by the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, forced resettlement, restrictions on freedom of movement and violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers.

“HEALING COMES FROM CONNECTION AND PURPOSE”

INTERVIEW WITH REV. DR RIMA NASRALLAH

When Rima Nasrallah was ordained eight years ago, it marked a significant step for women’s leadership in the Church. Today, she is the first Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut (NECB). In this interview, she speaks about her priorities in ministry, the challenges she faces, and how Christians in Lebanon find hope and strength amid continuing crises.

Rev. Nasrallah, your appointment as first female Senior Pastor of NECB has been widely welcomed, but it has also prompted debate in some circles. How do you engage with those who remain hesitant about women in pastoral and church leadership roles?

There are many who still oppose the ordination of women and their spiritual leadership. When the grounds are theological and based on a certain hermeneutics, I can only respect the difference and clarify that we each start from a different understanding and manner of interpreting the scriptures.

As for those who base themselves on socio-cultural considerations, their hesitation is an incentive for me to show a more faithful performance that can convince through action and teaching. But I am also resigned to the fact that this is a debate that will not end soon and that there will always be public criticism and opposition. As long as I am serving to the best of my knowledge and ability, I do so with trust and confidence.

I pray though that the way I live and practice this role will also help create a new model for leadership that is not only a replica of what men have done so far.

Your predecessor, Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, shaped the NECB for more than four decades and guided it through periods of war, reconstruction, and profound social change. What aspects of his legacy would you like to build on, and where do you hope to lead the church in new directions?

I have learned a lot from Rev. Badr. He was my teacher in seminary, and I have worked closely with him for years. He has instilled in me a deep appreciation for ecumenical relations, for tradition and for history. I have also learned from his tolerance and acceptance for others, and I have watched him practice radical generosity. These are values I would like to carry with me.

Going forward, I would like to focus on community building and leadership sharing. The location of the church and the situation in the country had negative effects on the cohesion and growth of the community. I would therefore like to focus on creating opportunities for education, sharing and spiritual growth to empower the members of the church and community at large so that they can in turn carry each other and guide our institutions. Young people and the preservation of creation are particular concerns of mine.

You assume leadership at a time when Lebanon continues to face economic hardship, political uncertainty, and the effects of regional conflict. What do you see as the most important challenges and responsibilities for the NECB in the years ahead?

In a region where the Christian community is shrinking and emigration is increasing, as NECB we need to rediscover our



sense of calling and activate our role in society in ways that are sustainable and effective.

Faced with multiple challenges for a prolonged period, the community is sometimes tempted to focus only on survival. And yet the needs around us are increasing: financial, social, and educational. And the role we can play in promoting peace, fostering human dignity and creating communities of love is becoming more vital.

I am aware of the great financial challenges facing us and the lack of human resources to accomplish the tasks ahead. But I believe that we should think creatively, and work collaboratively, in order to continue and expand the way we serve those around us and connect with those who have emigrated.

War, displacement, and loss leave deep emotional and spiritual wounds. In your experience, how can churches help individuals and communities move from trauma toward healing and resilience?

Healing comes from connection and purpose. The past decades have pushed around and dispersed the Lebanese inside Lebanon and outside of it. Wars have uprooted families, destroyed villages and caused irreversible change to patterns of life and traditions.

As a church it is our role to create community, to connect people to each other and to God. Church becomes a home when home is no longer accessible; a safe place. The Church creates rhythm and reliability in a world that is unreliable and unstable.

Moreover, the church and its institution can instil a sense of purpose and mission in the hearts and minds of those for whom life had become futile and worthless. When involved in something larger than us in God's large vision and care, one's own problems are relativised and the burden lessened. When getting involved in aiding those who need it, one's own suffering is transformed into a healing power for others.

Hope is a recurring theme in Christian faith, yet many people in Lebanon are living through prolonged uncertainty. Where do you see signs of hope today, and what gives you confidence for the future?

Hope is a gift given to us by the Holy Spirit just like love and peace. And one has to open oneself to it by accept this God given gift.

In Lebanon, we have learned like the Psalmist not to put our trust "in princes, in human beings, who cannot save." (Psalm 146:3), nor in institutions and promises. And therefore, we hope despite the situation and not because of signs and events.

This hope requires trust that the world is held by God and loved by God despite all that we humans do to each other. One lives this hope by choosing to go on and conduct life in the midst of war, ruins and disasters and not wait for those to finish.

In our church community, we have learned not to let any external threat and challenge stop us from holding prayer services, continue with our ministries, and finding life's joys amid trouble. We have learned not to have big expectations and plans as all those can collapse at any moment, but to trust in God and do all that is possible at the moment and relevant for those around us – because with God all things are possible.

Interview: Astrid Weyermüller

WORSHIPPING AROUND THE WORLD

EMS SUNDAY 2026: SHARING HOPE

Around 20 September 2026, congregations across the EMS fellowship celebrated the first-ever EMS Sunday. Under the theme “Ambassadors of Hope – Sharing Hope”, they sent a common message: in times of global crisis, the world needs hope, reconciliation and lived solidarity. Worship services took place in many places, including the Middle East, Indonesia, India, South Africa and Germany.

The day highlighted what unites Christians across continents: a shared calling to make God’s hope visible in a wounded and divided world. It also marked the anniversary of the EMS founding date on 16 September 1972. In Stuttgart’s Hospitalkirche, where EMS was established, congregation members, EMS staff and ecumenical guests gathered for worship led by Rev. Benedikt Jetter.

I celebrated EMS Sunday with two congregations in Stuttgart. There was a great deal of positive feedback about the service. Hopefully, it will become a tradition.”
Rev. Christoph Hildebrandt-Ayasse, Stuttgart

“Eight hours ahead of us, Christians in Korea, Japan and Indonesia have already celebrated EMS Sunday,” said EMS General Secretary Rev. Dr Dieter Heidtmann. “Earlier still, believers gathered in India. And while we are worshipping here, Christians in Lebanon, Jordan, the Holy Land, Ghana and South Africa are doing the same. Today, one worship service stretches around the entire globe. That is what makes the worldwide EMS fellowship so special.”

HOPE THAT CROSSES BORDERS

Guest speaker Rev. Dr Packiam Samuel reflected this global perspective as he shared insights from his work as Director of the Henry Martyn Institute (HMI) in Hyderabad, India. The institute combines research, interfaith dialogue and reconciliation work with practical support for poor and marginalised communities, regardless of faith. EMS has long partnered with HMI and jointly offers a six-month intercultural study programme in Hyderabad.

The liturgy for EMS Sunday 2026 was prepared with the support of EMS member churches in Korea: The Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK). It brings insights and inspiration



Rev. Dr Dieter Heidtmann, Rev. Benedikt Jetter, Rev. Dr Packiam Samuel (from left).

from Korea's rich worship traditions into the global celebration. Drawing on these themes, Rev. Jetter quoted a Korean hymn asking: "Where do you place your hope in this world of suffering?" He noted that Korean society continues to bear deep wounds and highlighted the commitment of PROK and PCK to healing and reconciliation through their work for justice, peace and closer relations between North and South Korea.

TAKING HOPE INTO THE STREETS

EMS Sunday was also celebrated at Christuskirche in Pforzheim, where worship was followed by fellowship and Asian refreshments. Located in one of the city's most culturally diverse neighbourhoods, the congregation has become a welcoming place for people from many backgrounds, including refugees from Ukraine and Syria.

> ***"Today at church, I felt warmth, care, and a sense of belonging. I enjoyed the service very much, and it warmed my heart, making me feel happy."***
> *Churchgoer Anatoly, Pforzheim*

The service was jointly led by Rev. Dr Stephen Lakkis and Rev. Eleanor McCormick, EMS Head of Programmes and Networks. Korean liturgical elements, including the sounding of a gong, underscored the global and ecumenical character of the celebration.



Rev. Eleanor McCormick and Rev. Dr Stephen Lakkis with attendees of the worship service.

"When I think about hope, I think of Christ calling us to take hope into the streets," Rev. McCormick said in her sermon. "We are called to be ambassadors of hope with love, courage and creativity, sharing a hope that spreads as we bear witness to Christ's love at work in the world."

Stefan Schaal

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MAKING THE GLOBAL CHURCH TANGIBLE

For more than 17 years, Rev. Dieter Bullard-Werner has shaped the work of the Basel Mission German Branch (BMDZ) as its Executive Secretary. Following the BMDZ General Assembly, he was formally honoured and bid farewell on 10 and 11 October during a festive celebration and worship service. He will retire at the end of 2026.

"Your theological and personal compass can be summed up in one sentence and has inspired many of us: our path has led us from simply reaching out to others to truly journeying together with them," said Rev. Ralf Rohrbach-Koop, a member of the BMDZ Board, in his tribute. "With conviction and courage, you moved beyond a paternalistic understanding of mission and helped open the way for authentic partnerships among equals. Creating spaces where people can meet openly, listen deeply, build trust and learn from one another has always been at the heart of your work. Through you, many of us have experienced exactly that."

For Bullard-Werner, mission is rooted in genuine encounters between people of different backgrounds who are united by their faith. His passion for the worldwide church was first sparked through the Basel Mission during his childhood. Later, studies in Tübingen, Berkeley and Bern, together with his engagement with liberation theology, feminist theology and questions of social diversity, broadened his perspective and shaped his understanding of mission. International encounters in parish ministry and academic work further strengthened his commitment to ecumenical partnership.

Among the many highlights of his ministry were encounters with partner churches in Africa and Asia. He recalls in particular his collaboration with Nigerian theologian Susan Mark and the profound insights he gained from witnessing how her church responds to terrorism and violence, working towards reconciliation. The 200th anniversary of the Basel Mission also provided an opportunity to reflect critically on the mission's own history. Bullard-Werner advocates a vision of mission grounded in mutual learning, shared participation and common action among equal partners.

GEORG MEYER TO SERVE AS INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Rev. Georg Meyer, Head of the EMS Department for Regions and Mission Associations, will assume the responsibilities of Executive Secretary on an interim basis until a successor has been appointed. Since the beginning of this year, Meyer has already been accompanying the Europe/BMDZ Unit within EMS.



In recent months, representatives of the BMDZ Board, the EMS leadership, the Presidium and Mission 21 have engaged in discussions about the future direction of the association. BMDZ, EMS and Mission 21 share a common commitment to strengthening relationships with the churches that emerged from the Basel Mission tradition. Key priorities include encouraging greater participation among BMDZ members and attracting new people to become involved in its work.

Partnership engagement will be a particular focus in the years ahead. The organisations have agreed to convene a round-table dialogue with the ecumenical departments of the regional churches to strengthen coordination and cooperation in both partnership initiatives and educational programmes.

Astrid Weyermüller,
Dr Dieter Heidtmann


DOAM

CELEBRATING IN LIVING DIVERSITY

On 26 April 2026, the Heilandskirche in Berlin-Moabit became the venue for a special occasion. East Asian and German Christians together celebrated a multilingual service there. This was a striking demonstration of just how vibrant and diverse German-East Asian ecumenism can be in practice.

The service was jointly prepared and conducted by an international team of pastors that included Mutsuko Akiba-Krämer (Japanese congregation) Cho Sungho (Korean Han-in congregation) and Luping Huang, representing Chinese-speaking Christians, as well as Barbara Hustedt from the Berlin Mission Society, Barbara Fülle and Carsten Rostalsky from the German East Asia Mission (DOAM).

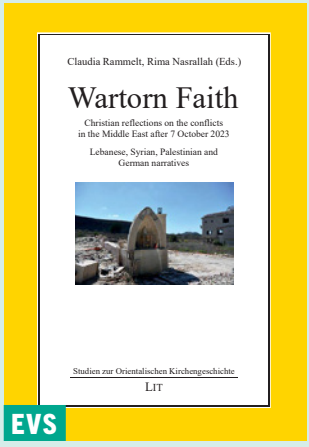
It began with the youth choir of the Korean congregation who performed a joyful song and invited the congregation to sing along. This definitely helped to create a strong sense of community. The mood was made even more moving by the shared liturgy and the reading of the psalm in three East Asian languages and in German.

In her sermon based on John 15:1–8, Rev. Luping Huang (see photo) interpreted the symbol of the vine as an invitation to fellowship and solidarity. Jesus invites people to come to him and calls on them to remain in each another. Speaking from the perspective of an Asian woman, she described how the Christian message had become an experience of liberation for her.

Reverend Huang spoke of the intense pressure many women feel in Chinese society to achieve and to constantly prove themselves to men. At the same time, she drew attention to the situation of many children and young adults of Asian heritage in Germany, who are frequently confronted with the expectation that they must achieve above-average academic results.

The service sent a powerful message of reconciliation and solidarity. At the same time, it served as an encouraging example of cooperation with the East Asian diaspora communities in Germany, whose support and empowerment the DOAM holds in particularly high esteem.

Schulamit Kriener



EVS

BOOK „WARTORN FAITH“

“Wartorn Faith”, edited by Claudia Rammelt and Rima Nasrallah and published by LIT Verlag Münster, brings together diverse perspectives on the conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in the aftermath of 7 October 2023.

For more than 25 years, the EMS programme Studying in the Middle East (SiMO) has enabled students to study at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut. This 190-page English-language volume is one fruit of that long-standing engagement. Bringing together voices from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Berlin, it shows how history is experienced not only through political events but also through the lives of individuals and communities. By embracing multiple narratives, the book creates space for honest dialogue, mutual understanding, and respectful exchange.

“Wartorn Faith” is available for €29.90 (print edition) and €24.90 (e-book). Further information is available at: https://lit-verlag.de/isbn/978-3-643-91721-8/

THE LIGHT COMES FROM OUTSIDE



Three narrow stained-glass windowpanes depict the traditional Christmas narrative in familiar scenes: shepherds in the fields, the child in the manger, and people looking on in awe and gratitude. Käte Schaller-Härlin created the stained-glass window in 1916 for the Protestant town church in Oberndorf am Neckar (Germany). When light shines through the stained-glass panes, the colours and figures come to life and the message is revealed. Like Christmas itself, the Christmas window is imbued with life from the light coming from outside.

Christmas starts with people living outside society. God comes to those who stand in the darkness and are often overlooked. No one should be left out. The child, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lies in a manger. People and animals gather all around him. God does not conquer the world as a tyrant, but as a child who shows love and calls forth love in return. He becomes the centre of a fellowship defined not by origin, rank or possessions, but by the loving kindness of God shining forth in this child.

Käte Schaller-Härlin was born in Mangalore in southern India in 1877. Her father worked there as a missionary for the Basel Mission. This may explain her particular sensitivity to a message that unites people beyond borders. Perhaps it also explains something of her artistic signature. Her distinguishing feature is the Protestant focus on the essential. The figures, along with the composition as a whole, convey dignity through simplicity. A rich palette of colours brings the scene to life and pulls us into it so powerfully that what might seem like an ancient and distant narrative becomes one that speaks to us directly.

The Christmas narrative has been called the Gospel's first missionary story. Käte Schaller-Härlin's Christmas windowpanes do not speak the language of those who understand 'mission' to mean the conquest of the world and its subjugation to Christ. What brings people together here is the light of God's love for humanity, radiating from the child in the manger. It achieves its effect by opening hearts.

*Church Councillor **Johannes Koch** is Adviser for Art and Liturgical Spaces at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg (Germany)..*