

# EMS INSIGHTS

1/2024



Let the little children come to me.  
Before God, they are the greatest.

## **MAIN FEATURE** VALUED RELATIONSHIPS

Pleas for a child-friendly church

**“WE MUST CREATE SPACE FOR ENCOUNTERS!”**

The church today with children

## **CHILDREN’S PROGRAMME WORKBOOKS**

A real treasure for Sunday schools



Evangelical Mission  
in Solidarity



### **GOD SEES THE LITTLE SPARROW FALL**

“God sees the little sparrow fall, it meets his tender view; if God so loves the little birds, I know he loves me too.” We used to sing this song at the children’s service and it’s still a favourite with children all over the world. It reminds us of one of Jesus’ sayings: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matt 10:29.31)

Each and every one of us is of special value to God. This is particularly true for children and young people. They play a major role in the EMS. The international EMS Fellowship supports children’s homes and schools; it promotes facilities for children and young people with special needs and it helps churches to be “child-friendly”. In their message on the occasion of the EMS Jubilee, young people from the EMS member churches and member associations emphasised how important young people are for the churches: “Youth needs to be allowed to serve with their resourceful ideas, gifts, skills, time, energy by creating a space for them to grow and to make mistakes freely, without judgement. This is found many times in the Bible, as God often used young people to do marvellous and great things.”

Emso the Elephant and his little friend Pipit are symbolic figures in the EMS for its work with children. By the way, Pipit means “sparrow” in Indonesian. But I’m sure you already guessed that.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dieter Heidtmann". The script is cursive and fluid.

Rev. Dr Dieter Heidtmann  
General Secretary

#### **Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS)**

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.

**Donation account:** Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS)

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## LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME. BEFORE GOD, THEY ARE THE GREATEST.

Children are a gift from God. But they also mean a great responsibility. The international EMS Fellowship strives to help children in many different ways. We present some examples of the work of our members in this issue.

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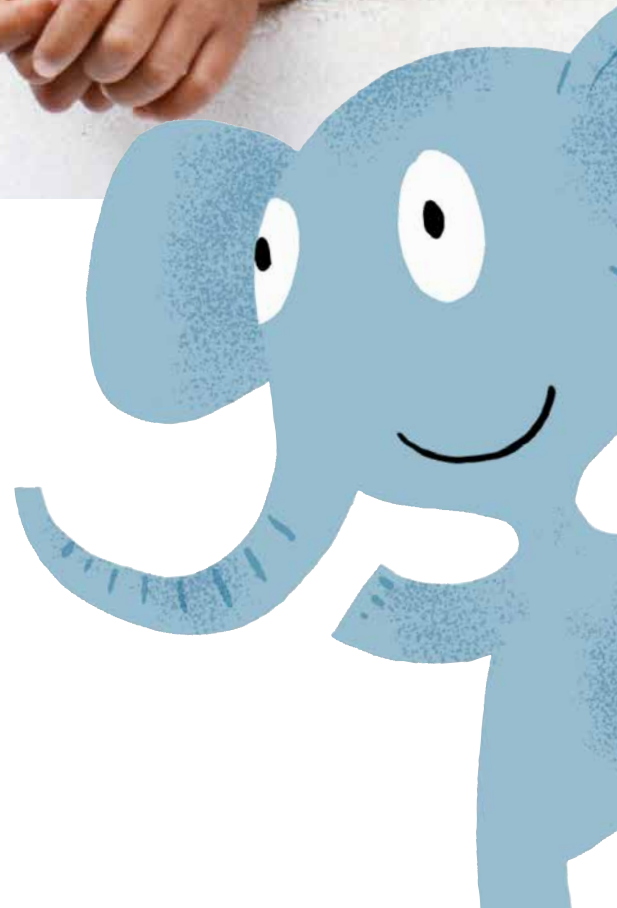
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*Boys in Bali: In Indonesia, Christians are the the second largest religious community.*



## **VALUED RELATIONSHIPS**

**PLEA FOR A CHILD-FRIENDLY CHURCH**



**Children should feel accepted in church and be able to contribute their own views – Pastor Gustina Saruran from Indonesia is convinced of this. As a staff member of the international EMS children’s programme YOU + ME: FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD, she is committed to bringing children’s services more closely in line with the needs of girls and boys. For EMS Insights, she presents the concept of a “child-friendly church”:**

Jesus reaches out to children and therefore we as a church should also be child-friendly. One of my favourite verses from the New Testament is: “But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs’” (Matt 19:14). These few words alone show how friendly Jesus is to children and how much he cares about a personal relationship with the youngest. Jesus takes their side and really listens to them, taking them seriously. Children are just as important to him as adults. Jesus even goes one step further and places children at the centre, treating them as role models in faith. The kingdom of heaven belongs to children – without them having to do anything for it. Simply because they are who they are. A gift from God.

When we talk about children today, we are talking about the future of the church. If we as a church begin to see children not as passive recipients but as active players, it means putting them at the centre. Just as Jesus does. When adults deal with children, we should become familiar with their ways of thinking and patterns of behaviour. We should be able to accept their points of view. Sadly and all too often, we behave like the disciples who treat children condescendingly and want to preach to them.

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*Children are not only our future, their opinions count in the here and now.*

Much of the traditional children’s services is decided and dictated by adults. Perhaps because they assume that children do not yet understand what is best for them. This may be well-intentioned, but it fails to meet children’s needs. A children’s service of this kind is heavily based on the chalk and talk teaching model, where everyone has to sit still, pay attention and listen. Anyone who does not comply is reprimanded or even punished. It’s no wonder that children then are not so motivated to go to children’s services. And yet by nature they are eager to learn and enjoy discovering new things. A lack of interest is usually the result of unappealing learning methods and is rarely due to the child itself.

*Emso the Elephant and Pipit the little bird are the mascots of the EMS children’s programme. They invite all children to join them in discovering different countries, cultures and religions.*



### TAKING CHILDREN SERIOUSLY

With the “child-friendly church” concept, we want to place a completely different emphasis and – following the example of Jesus – put ourselves at the same level as children. We want to take them seriously in their joy of communicating, their natural thirst for movement and their desire to play an active role themselves. It is all about creating an environment where children can feel comfortable and enjoy church and faith. And where they feel free to express their opinions. In order to understand something in the truest sense of the word, children must always be able to learn with all their senses. They should be able to explore the biblical message in a playful and creative way and contribute their own experiences and ideas. This applies in particular when preparing the materials and teaching programmes for children’s services. It is precisely here



**NEW WORKBOOK FOR CHILDREN**

**YOU + ME: FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD** is an EMS educational programme for children in children’s services and in primary school. The programme provides materials in several languages. The new workbook is all about God’s “Creation”.

Every afternoon after school, Dado loves playing outside in nature. His favourite thing to do is to run through the fields with his pet and enjoy the fresh air rushing past his ears. Dado is ten years old and lives on the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia. God’s creation fills him with joy. He would love to show all the children in the world his wonderful village with its bamboo trees and paddy fields. But at the same time, Dado is worried: “The climate is changing so fast. Sometimes this makes the harvests smaller. And there are plastic bags everywhere in the fields and rivers!” Dado is not the only one with these concerns. Many children on our planet are aware of environmental impacts and are involved in preserving the Creation.

The new workbook of the EMS children’s programme **YOU + ME: FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD** is all about God’s creation. Together with mascots Emso and Pipit, children go on an exciting journey to Indonesia. They meet Dado and learn a lot about the country of Indonesia with its many islands, about Indonesian food and Indonesian culture; there is even an Indonesian

fairy tale in the new booklet. In this workbook, the children discover God’s creation very intensively: they immerse themselves in the seven days of creation and marvel at everything that God has created. The girls and boys go on a walk in nature, experiencing it with all their senses and discovering God’s creation in a totally new way.

Many children’s groups in the global EMS family are committed to preserving God’s creation. The new booklet presents some of the activities of these “Creation Champions”. Of course, there are also songs, prayers and creative ideas for children. The booklet offers a variety of methods that are easy to use and are suitable for different forms of children’s service.

**The new booklet will be published in German, English and Indonesian in summer 2024. Please send pre-orders to [info@ems-friends.org](mailto:info@ems-friends.org).**

*Anna Kallenberger  
Coordinator EMS children’s programme*

[ems-online.org/en/get-involved/childrens-programme](https://ems-online.org/en/get-involved/childrens-programme)

that children should be allowed to participate as they themselves know best what is interesting and means something to them. Therefore, the concept of a “child-friendly church” represents a genuine paradigm shift in the work of preparing children’s services. The aim is to empower children and foster our sensitivity and love for children. This will allow them to feel comfortable in church so that they can grow mentally, physically and spiritually in the best possible way.

*Children are the focus of our work. We hear their voices and take their wishes into consideration. This is how we want to make our churches more child-friendly.*

The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) is a network of 25 churches and five mission societies in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East. As a Christian fellowship, we share our resources, learn from and with each other and make decisions together – to improve everyone’s lives. We at the EMS also bear responsibility for the well-being and future of many girls and boys. That is why the team of the EMS children’s programme YOU+ME: FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD has started to develop binding guidelines for a “child-friendly church”. The guidelines should be simple to put into practice in parishes and place children at the centre. It is hoped to publish these guidelines before the end of this year.



*This is also “child-friendly church”: when young and old celebrate a church service together.*

The guidelines are intended to actively involve children in all decision-making processes that affect them. This should help adults to better respond to the children’s needs and expectations. Last but not least, the guidelines also cover the issue of children’s rights.

**INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

In order to implement the concept of the “child-friendly church” in its member churches, the EMS has set up an international platform, so far comprising nine people from Indonesia, South Africa, Germany and India. They have collected ideas from children in various countries through surveys and interviews. They have also consulted churches that have developed their own approaches to a “child-friendly church”. The official name of the working group is “Koodam”. Koodam is a Tamil word that means when parents and children sit and eat at table together as equals.

An international meeting was held in Indonesia from 16 to 23 April 2024. There, experts from the EMS member churches continued to work on the guidelines and recommended actions for the “child-friendly church”. The host church was the Christian Protestant Church in Bali (GKPB). Girls and boys from the Balinese church were also present. The opinions of these children were listened to and considered since the aim was not to talk “about” children, but “with” children.



*In April 2024, the EMS organised a workshop in Bali on the theme of “child-friendly church”.*

## MAIN FEATURE

The EMS field of mission is broad and international. The concept of a “child-friendly church” is so important because the needs and wishes of children are the same all over the world.

*It is a unique feature of the EMS children’s programme that children are really listened to.*

The “child-friendly church” addresses the situation of children in all parts of the world. There are many local and international organisations working with children, but many see children as passive and in need of help instead of actively listening to what they have to say. Yet this is exactly what the EMS does in its children’s programme. In this way, the church can become a safe, friendly and loving place for children.

*Gustina Saruran*



*Rev. Gustina Saruran works for the Toraja Church as a pastor in the area of child protection and for the women’s commission. She lives with her family in Makassar, Indonesia.*

## A VOICE FOR CHILDREN

Three questions for Pastor Gustina Saruran

**Rev. Saruran, you have been a member of the international team for the EMS children’s programme since November 2021. What are your duties?**

“One of my main duties is to organise workshops on the topic of the ‘child-friendly church’ in the Indonesian member churches of the EMS. I really enjoy using the materials from the EMS children’s programme, such as the ‘Diversity’ booklet and the booklet on ‘Peace.’”

**Who are these workshops intended for?**

“The participants at these workshops are mainly Sunday school teachers or leaders of children’s and youth groups. The response to my workshops is tremendous as many lack the necessary educational skills to create really appealing and child-friendly programmes. Above all, children want Sunday school teachers to be loving, friendly and patient with them.”

**What other challenges are there?**

“Participants at the workshops often complain about a lack of financial support from the parishes. There are so many children’s programmes but they cannot take place since there are no funds. In general, many churches focus more on adults and this means that children’s services are often neglected. Through my work, I want to help change the mindset of church leaders and adult church members.”

*For more information on the EMS children’s programme, go to: [ems-online.org/en/friends](https://ems-online.org/en/friends)*



## WELCOMING CHILDREN

**All the writers of the Gospel except John relate the blessing of the children in the same way (Matt 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). The familiar story shows Jesus warmly beckoning the little children to his open arms, blessing and welcoming them.**

In Greek, i.e. the language in which the Gospels were originally written, the word δεξιται (dechetai) is used at this point. It not only means “to welcome” but also “to receive”, “to shelter” and “to accept”. This is the same word that Jesus uses when he invites us to accept the kingdom of God as children. In this way, Jesus expresses that children are just as important to him as the kingdom of God itself. But it also means that anyone who rejects children is rejecting God himself.

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*Welcoming children means accepting them and giving them a place in the community.*

What is Jesus trying to tell us? Children are open and unbiased. We should turn to God just as a child turns to its mother or father full of love and trust. For Jesus, the two-way relationship between parent and child is a model for a successful relationship between humans and God. We must open ourselves up like children in order to truly experience God’s love. But Jesus also teaches us here to see children through his eyes. When we welcome children as he did, we take them seriously with all their fears, hopes and needs. Last but not least, it means we must create safe spaces for children in church and society where they can open up and feel appreciated.

It is undeniable that all too often we adults build walls around children instead of giving them the space they need. What is more, children are exposed to all sorts of dangers, such as sexual abuse, physical and psychological violence, human trafficking or exploitation for economic and cultural reasons. We therefore need to take action to defend and protect children because, after all, the future of the global community lies in their hands. This is all the more important in view of the fact that currently there are roughly two billion children aged 14 and under in the world. One in four humans is a child.

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*The values we teach our children today will shape their future.*

We and our children live in a time when moral and ethical values are being challenged by personal or group interests and eroded by materialism, consumerism, miscommunication and various other challenges. A lot of what the world has to offer seems more interesting, more tempting and more appealing than listening to the message of the Bible. As Christians, we should not forget that the values we teach our children today will shape their future. A church that welcomes children can make a decisive contribution here.

*Armin Sukri Kanna*



*Pastor Armin Sukri Kanna is Chair of the Advisory Board of the Synod of the Christian Church in South Sulawesi (GKSS), Indonesia.*

## STRONG NETWORKS



### EYVP: ASSIGNMENT POSTS WANTED!

The EMS Ecumenical Youth Volunteers Programme is an opportunity for young people who want to gain experience abroad and be part of an international fellowship in solidarity. The EYVP is currently looking for assignment posts in Germany in institutions that would be interested in taking on volunteers.

The EYVP supports young adults from Africa, Asia and the Middle East to work as federal volunteers (Federal Volunteer Service) in social institutions in Germany. The assignment posts may be in day care centres, family education centres, world shops, diaconal institutions, schools or nature conservation projects. Partnership groups or church congregations accompany the volunteers through their daily life to ensure they are well integrated into a German parish outside of their work.

The voluntary service starts in March and lasts for one year. It offers young people the chance to make important intercultural learning experiences. As one Indonesian volunteer said at the end of his year: "I learnt to live together

with people from different cultural backgrounds. I would like to share this knowledge with my home church. No culture is above the other." Conversely, exchanging ideas with the volunteers also opens the German hosts' eyes to the values, traditions and lifestyles of other cultures.

During their assignment, the young people receive intensive support and counselling from the EYVP team. In addition, a total of 25 seminar days are organised during the year where the young people can develop their own personalities and learn about topics dealing with civil society and development policy.

*Regine Nagel, Coordinator Ecumenical Youth Volunteers Programme*



### WOMEN'S NETWORK: PART OF A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

"It is empowering to know that women in Indonesia and South Africa are fighting against domestic violence just like we are in Lebanon," says Rima Nasrallah from the National Evangelical Church of Beirut (NECB). She recently conducted a workshop on this topic and now shares her experiences on video in the international EMS women's network.

The information and impressions from the workshop can then be adapted to the various contexts of the women's groups. Each group collects ideas and considers whether similar approaches are possible in their own churches or what changes would be necessary. EMS networks, such as the Women's Network, aim to bring people together who share a particular interest or concern. It is all about information and sharing. It is all about mutual support and developing joint strategies to achieve a common goal. Networking means being part of a worldwide movement. It means exploring the concept of 'solidarity' and constantly discovering new aspects.

Strong networks unite people with a common theme or concern, such as the clear declaration against gender-specific violence by the women's network. Networks are platforms for intercultural learning. It is precisely the differences that arise from taking different contexts into account that make them strong; the same applies to sharing the different approaches to dealing with an issue. The success of the campaign of the international women's network against gender-specific violence shows the enormous potential of networking. At the same time, it is also true that the network is a work in progress; there is always a lot to do; there is always something new to discover.

A network is strong when the participants bring it to life and develop a dynamic cooperation through fruitful open discussions from which everyone can benefit. It is not at all easy to develop and maintain a joint strategy that takes account of the many different interests involved. The social function of the networks and interaction between the participants are certainly crucial factors. At the same time, however, it is essential to validate the results of joint work and therefore the ability of the networks to communicate. This is best achieved through a directive from the EMS Mission Council.

*Dr Kerstin Neumann*



### **A DAY FOR THE KIDS THE MCSA SUSANNA FESTIVAL**

On every Sunday that is closest to 17th August, we in South Africa and in some other provinces of the Moravian Church celebrate the "Kinderfees" (Afrikaans: "Kids' Festival"), also known as the Susanna Festival. It commemorates Susanna Kühnel and her conversion at the age of 11 on 17th August 1727. It triggered a great spiritual revival movement among children in Herrnhut.

Susanna's family originally came from what is now the Czech Republic. The family had fled to Upper Lusatia in Saxony (Germany) after the Thirty Years' War for religious reasons. Susanna was born there on 28th June 1716. When she was 11 years old, her mother died after a serious illness. Her mother's passing caused a deep emotional struggle in Susanna and prompted her to turn intensively to her faith. More and more children followed her example and invited Jesus Christ into their hearts. Susanna's story of conversion was brought by Moravian missionaries to South Africa and also became a role model for many children there.

As I remember, the weeks leading up to the "Kinderfees" were always a particularly exciting time. During these weeks, we rehearsed songs and plays that were to be performed in the worship service. We went out into the fields to collect wild flowers and decorate the church for Sunday. The children were given new clothes and school friends from far and wide were invited to lunch with local families. Nothing has changed to this day. In some congregations, it is even traditional for Sunday school children to celebrate a day of fasting and prayer on 17th August. In the evening, they break their fast together in church and sing children's festival songs.

On the Sunday of the Susanna Festival, everyone looks forward to wearing their new clothes, performing their musical pieces and eating lunch together. The spiritual messages for the day are written in simple language so that every child can understand them. Sweet "mosbolletjies" – a pastry similar to brioches – are handed out to the children with tea or juice. Unlike in the past, now presents and sweets are handed out. So, on the Susanna festival, it is the children who take centre stage – it is a day when our church shows its most child-friendly face.

*Gregson Erasmus is a minister in the Moravian Church in South Africa (MCSA).*

*The Church of South India (CSI) supports children to develop their religious faith.*

## CHILD-FRIENDLY CHURCH IN INDIA

**Children are an indescribable joy – not only for their parents, but for the entire community in which they grow up. Children are also especially important to God. “Child-friendly church” is a religious education concept that has precisely this aim in mind. It is now being successfully adopted by more and more EMS member churches – including the Church of South India (CSI).**

There are over 350 million children under the age of 15 in India. About 160 million of them are girls. Despite the enormous progress made in recent decades, many of them live in difficult circumstances. But Indian society still favours male over female children. When a family’s financial situation becomes critical, it is usually the girls who are no longer allowed to go to school. They have to help in the home, work in the fields or break stones in the quarries for just a few rupees.

Poverty is the main cause for the plight of children in India. In many cases, the parents are unable to take proper care of their children because their time is completely taken up in earning a meagre living. The most vulnerable are children from the Dalit and Adivasi communities, from the families of migrant labourers and from the poor families of small farms in the villages. Not only that. There are other dangers that threaten the well-being of children: drugs and sexual violence.

Working with children and young adults is particularly impor-

tant work for the Church of South India (CSI). For the largest member church of the EMS, children are an essential part of church life. Girls and boys need to feel accepted and understood in order to become part of the church. Children should be able to discover the church for themselves and experience it in a child-friendly way. The “child-friendly church” project of the CSI wants to give children their own space in the church. Playing, having fun and being creative are just as important as the children’s questions, hopes and concerns. To achieve this purpose, the church trains pastors, staff and volunteers to specifically address the needs of children. A key factor is the organisation of children’s services. Therefore, the CSI produces, among other things, worship service materials in the various languages of India.

### CHILD-FRIENDLY APPROACH TO FAITH

Quite apart from the actual children’s services and youth work, the CSI regards itself as a “child-friendly church” – especially when it involves the protection and rights of children in need. Many Christians in South India come from Dalit and Adivasi communities, i.e. those sections of society that are still severely disadvantaged. The Church of South India has set up “welcome centres” which act as counselling and training centres where the church supports parents in their efforts to care for the well-being of their children. The children’s homes run by the Church of South India also work specifically to improve the living conditions of girls and boys in need. The EMS supports several of the church’s children’s homes. The effects of climate change are already very



*Many Indian children suffer from poverty.*

noticeable on the Indian subcontinent. The CSI is the only church in India that has adopted environmental protection in its mission aim. The children at the church's schools learn all the ways to save water and electricity, recycle waste or keep the air clean. They also learn how to pass on this knowledge to their families and villages. It is the church's intention to secure the children's future despite climate change.

## CHILDREN IN INDIA NEED OUR HELP

The General Secretary of the Church of South India, C. Fernandes Rathina Raja, stresses how important it is for everyone in the EMS to work together to give children a future. "God's people should unite and commit themselves to the protection and welfare of children." We need your support for this. The EMS has the great advantage that it can pass on 100% of donations to projects thanks to the support of its member churches. Every euro and every cent contribute to giving children in South India new prospects for the future.

*Fundraising Team*



*Girls during school prayers at a boarding school.*

**Your donation to the "child-friendly church" project helps girls and boys in India discover the richness of the Christian faith.**

**€100 are an important contribution to provide child-friendly illustrated materials for children's services.**

**€350 is the price of a workshop to train church staff to prepare exciting and interesting children's services.**

### **Donation account: EMS**

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 India: Child-friendly church

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“The great challenges of our time are ecology-conscious behaviour and the sustainable use of the resources made available to us by creation. With this certification, we want to make a contribution to a climate-friendly and socially just world. We want to act instead of being paralysed by powerlessness – together and in solidarity,” emphasised Rudolf Bausch, Executive Secretary of the EMS. He thanked the members of the EMS sustainability team (see photo) for their enormous commitment. “They all put in a lot of their time into this massive project,” said Bausch.

*Stefan Schaal*

[ems-online.org/en/about-us](https://ems-online.org/en/about-us)

## EMS AWARDED EMASPLUS-CERTIFICATE

The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) successfully completed the EMASplus certification process. On 3 March 2024, the EMS was awarded the EMAS (Eco Management and Audit Scheme) environmental sustainability certification as well as the EMASplus certification, which is an additional certification for social, ethical and financial sustainability.

EMASplus is regarded worldwide as one of the most effective environmental and sustainability management systems for companies, organisations and institutions. It has also been used successfully in the church sector for many years. Based on a specified catalogue of criteria, the EMS can now systematically monitor and improve all relevant operational environmental and sustainability aspects – for example thermal energy and electricity consumption, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions on business trips or economic aspects such as financial investments and asset management.

The current EMASplus certificate is valid for four years. After that, a reassessment will take place at regular intervals. For the certification process, the EMS had to prepare a sustainability report that covered economic, ecological, social and ethical criteria. The report was then submitted to an external auditor for assessment. The 74-page document is publicly accessible on the EMS website.

## DETLEV KNOCHE RECIEVES HONORARY DOCTORATE

Senior Church Councillor Detlev Knoche, Chairman of the International Mission Council of the EMS, has received an honorary doctorate from the prestigious Henry Martin Institute (HMI) in Hyderabad. Knoche received this special award for his services in promoting interreligious dialogue. The honorary doctorate was conferred on him during a ceremony at the Henry Martin Institute (see picture below).

The Henry Martin Institute (HMI) is an ecumenical institute in the state of Telangana, India, dedicated to the study of religion and the promotion of interfaith relations and reconciliation. Founded in 1930, the institute serves scholars from India and abroad for master’s, doctoral, and post-doctoral studies. EMS has supported HMI’s research and reconciliation work for many years. A joint international study program is being prepared.





In his acceptance speech, Knoche emphasized the responsibility of religions for peace: “We understand peace and peace-making as an indispensable part of our common faith. Peace is inseparably related to the love, justice, and freedom that God has granted to all human beings through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit as a gift and vocation.”

Detlev Knoche is a pastor of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN). From 2009 to 2014, Knoche headed the Ecumenical Center of the EKHN. In 2015, he was appointed director of the newly created joint “Zentrum Oekumene” of the EKHN and the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck (EKKW). In this position, he has maintained a partnership with the Henry Martin Institute for many years. Knoche has been a member of the EMS Mission Council since 2012. After four years as vice-chairman, he was elected chairman of the EMS International Mission Council in 2022.

*Dr Dieter Heidtmann*

## FAREWELL AND A NEW BEGINNING

**After more than eight years, Rev. Dr Kerstin Neumann is leaving the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). Her official farewell took place on 14 March during a service at the Pauluskirche (St Paul’s Church) in Stuttgart.**

Kerstin Neumann was Head of the Programmes and Networks Unit and Secretary for Intercultural Theology and Education, Women and Gender. From 2018 to 2020, she was also Acting General Secretary of the EMS. Over the past eight years, she played a key role in shaping the development of the EMS. During a festive service, former colleagues from the church and the EMS Fellowship as well as current and former co-workers paid tribute to Kerstin Neumann’s commitment to interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

Rev. Dr h. c. Detlev Knoche, Chair of the international Mission Council of the EMS, highlighted Kerstin Neumann’s commitment to the internationalisation of the EMS: “Her vision of mission as an international community of learning in which resources and knowledge are shared has inspired and motivated many. As Acting General Secretary from 2018 to 2020, she steered the EMS through challenging times with great commitment.” For Anne Heidtmann, Deputy Chair of the Mission Council, Kerstin Neumann made a special contribution to the empowerment of women in the EMS member churches: “She networked us sisters in the EMS. Together we campaigned against discrimination against women and gender-based violence. The experience of not standing alone is incredibly important, especially for women from minority churches.”

Kerstin Neumann studied Protestant theology at Philipps University in Marburg, where she later completed her doctorate. As an ordained minister of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck (EKKW), she dedicated herself early on to serving people and intercultural encounters. The years she spent in India, where she worked as a lecturer and in various mission activities, left a lasting impression on her and significantly broadened her perspectives. Her path now leads her back to India to join her husband, Rev Dr J. David Rajendran, former rector of the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary (TTS) in Madurai, South India, with whom she has two children.

*Dr Dieter Heidtmann*



**BMDZ**

### A HOME FOR STREET CHILDREN

The Basel Mission – German Branch (BMDZ) and the Swiss mission society Mission 21 (M 21) are jointly supporting the work of the “Muhaba” children’s centre in South Sudan.

Orphans and children whose fathers were killed in the war or whose mothers are overstressed, alcoholic or mentally ill, often struggle as street children in Renk, a town in the north of South Sudan. They beg for food, search for anything valuable in the rubbish or work in odd jobs. Many sniff glue. Although the high numbs hunger, in the long term it damages the brain. “If life at home is less bearable than life on the street, children and young people often end up on the street,” says Reverend Markus Häfele, a former ecumenical co-worker of M 21.

The Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS) has been running the “Muhaba” children’s centre (English: love, friendship) in Renk since 1998. There, street children receive shelter, education and psychosocial counselling. The BMDZ and M21 are the only donors to the centre. In 2022, funding was increased from an annual sum equivalent to US\$50,000 to a total of US\$100,000.

Communal life at the children’s centre needs a regular daily routine. “Not everyone gets used to this rhythm. The transition from freedom on the street to a fixed schedule is a delicate topic,” says Markus Häfele. And some opt out later. At the centre, the children receive two full meals a day. They attend various schools in the neighbourhood. Last year, a separate home for girls was added to the home for boys. Girls in particular have much poorer opportunities for education in South Sudan.

The country became independent in 2011. A civil war broke out in South Sudan in 2013, ending with a peace treaty in 2018. Its actual implementation still poses major challenges for all parties involved. The town of Renk has a population of about 70,000 inhabitants. As the border is only roughly 50 kilometres away, many refugees are fleeing to the town as a result of the violence that broke out in Sudan in the summer of 2023. This poses an additional burden on the Presbyterian Church’s work with street children.

*Wiltrud Rösch-Metzler*



**DOAM**

### HORIKAWA AISEIEN: “BUILDING TRUST AGAIN”

The German East Asian Mission (DOAM) has been supporting the Christian children’s home “Horikawa Aiseien” in the Fukushima Prefecture (Japan) for many years. Founded in 1945, it initially cared for children who had lost their parents in the war. Today, the centre looks after children and young people who have been neglected, beaten or abused by their families.

The director, Kazuteu Kageyama, explains: “Our intention is for the girls and boys at our centre to grow up in a sheltered environment and we help them rebuild their trust in God and people. We want them to feel safe and protected when they sit down at table to lunch or go to bed at night. For many here, this is a completely new feeling.”

This made the triple disaster of Fukushima in 2011 all the more terrifying for the children and young people. The building units at the children’s home – the name translates as “Garden of Love and Life” – were damaged by the earthquake and the air was contaminated with radioactivity. For years, the girls and boys were only allowed outside for a short period of time every day; the

ingredients for the meals are still tested for radioactivity today.

“Due to the earthquake damage, we had to leave the previous buildings and completely rebuild the facility,” says the director. Today, five housing units, each with rooms to accommodate seven residents and one carer, administrative buildings and a church stretch along the small slope. Each of the housing units has a very homely atmosphere. They are flooded with light with large windows and lots of light-coloured wood.

The children and young people range in age from 6 to 18 years; one carer is assigned to each house. The concept is therefore similar to the model of the SOS children’s villages and is rather unusual in Japan. Despite all these positive aspects, the director mentions new concerns: donations are declining and funding is becoming increasingly difficult. “But we’ll manage this too!”

*Jutta Klimmt*



**EVS**

### CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

The boarding home at the Schneller School in Jordan will be renovated this year. The girls and boys living there were allowed to contribute their own opinions and suggestions.

Around 80 of the 256 girls and boys attending the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) live in the boarding home. They therefore spend most of their free time on the school grounds and in the school’s residential buildings. The educational concept of the TSS envisages that the children and young people live together in small groups, so-called families, each of which is looked after by a carer. Each family has its own area comprising a living room, a kitchen and bedrooms. For many of the young people who have experienced violence or the loss of a parent, this group truly becomes their family.

After decades of use, the buildings and the facilities are in urgent need of renovation. The TSS now intends to tackle this mammoth task this year. Surveys have already been carried out to determine the measures that are needed to bring the buildings up to the latest

standards. It was also important to the school management to find out from the residents what improvements they would like to see themselves – after all, the boarding home is their home. The school therefore organised a workshop with an architect and the children and young people (see photo).

The girls and boys were presented with plans for a possible interior design and were asked to contribute their opinions and suggestions. For the architectural firm, the participation of young people was somewhat unusual at first, but the architect was nevertheless impressed by the results. The students expressed their needs and wishes very clearly and they will now be incorporated when the renovation is carried out. Their main concern was that the changes should contribute to a feeling of feeling safe and comfortable. They also wanted an environment in which they could concentrate on learning and have room to develop their personalities.

The EVS is funding these modernisation measures and welcomes donations. Work is scheduled for completion in 2025.

*Joscha Quade*



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*“Wherever children can experience church in a joyful way, whether in a worship service or in many other forms, that’s what I want to get involved in.”*

**Markus Grapke has been state pastor for children’s worship in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg since April 2022. His job is to develop programmes that get children from the age of three to twelve interested in church and faith.**

**Rev. Grapke, church attendance and religious belief are on the decline in Germany. How does this affect children’s services?**

Bishop Gohl of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg was right when he once said: “It is no longer considered good form to be a member of the church.” This may sound a little sobering at first, but it also creates a great deal of freedom, because those who accept our offers come with an inner motivation and a high degree of voluntariness. There is no outside pressure from the expectations of other people. According to a recently published study called “Jugend zählt 2” (Youth Counts 2), around 2% of all Protestant adults in Württemberg attend church services. However, as many as 10% of Protestant children attend church services – in various forms, not necessarily the traditional children’s

*Children playing in the “Domino World”, a programme at St. John’s Church in Karlsruhe during the 11th WCC Assembly 2022.*

service. This means that we actually reach more people through church programmes for children than through adult services.

**Do these programmes also reach children whose families are not so strongly involved with the church?**

If you only look at traditional Sunday children’s services, then that’s a tough one. We probably only reach those who are already very connected to the church. I think we need completely new formats for this. The first thing we need to do is change the way we think that in essence says: ‘Please come to our parish halls and churches and experience faith here.’ Instead, as believing Christians, we need to go out into society – into the social spaces, towns and villages, and present our programmes there. For example, why don’t we simply go to the playgrounds in summer and offer a playground service? For many churches here in Germany, these are admittedly still very new and unfamiliar ideas. We still have a long way to go. But I’m convinced that the future is to actively approach people instead of waiting for them to come to us in the churches and parish halls. We must create space

for encounters! And we need authentic people who show that they appreciate children, that they have an open ear and have understanding for them. Children should be able to feel 'This is where I am welcome.'

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*"We want to be a church that is open to all children in our society."*

**In your opinion, what role is played by the fact that our society is becoming increasingly diverse?**

That is a factor that is very important for me. Basically, church with children is an extremely dynamic and creative field of work and it is always a reflection of the times in which we live and the challenges we face. We want to be a church that is critical of racism, sensitive to diversity and open to all children in our society. Especially for those who have experienced marginalisation, whose families are poor or who perhaps have only a basic level of education. They may have a history of migration. We also welcome those who believe in a totally different faith and religion. This is where I would like to break down the barriers and overcome boundaries. And what we shouldn't say is that we only look after the classic, traditional family but also those who have opted for a completely different life style. I think we have to widen our approach, really widen our mindset, our way of thinking and our hearts.

**Many churches within the global EMS Fellowship have their own concepts of a child-friendly church. In the German context, what do you think a child-friendly church should look like?**

As adults, we have to crouch down to be at eye level with the children. We need to know their world, speak their language and, above all, not patronise them. We should provide children with space in the church where they have the freedom and indeed the security to develop and practise Christian life together – with other children and also with adults. I don't think Germany is so different from any other country in this respect. But what I also observe here is that children are often under such enormous social stress. Church should also be a space where children are free to breathe, far from the stress of what is expected from them and the pressure of having to perform. For me, a child-friendly church also means that adults and church leaders must consider the children's point of view in all their decisions. And that children should actually be allowed to participate and that decisions are not made over their heads.

*Interview conducted by Stefan Schaal*



*Markus Grapke is advisor on children's services at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg.*

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## EMS CHILDREN'S PROGRAMME WORKBOOKS

## OUTLOOK

Take your Sunday school on a journey into the worlds of children from Indonesia, India, Germany, South Korea, Ghana and South Africa!

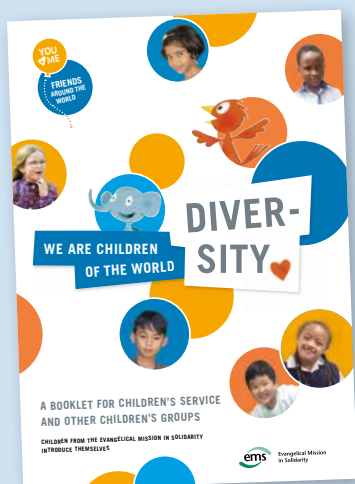
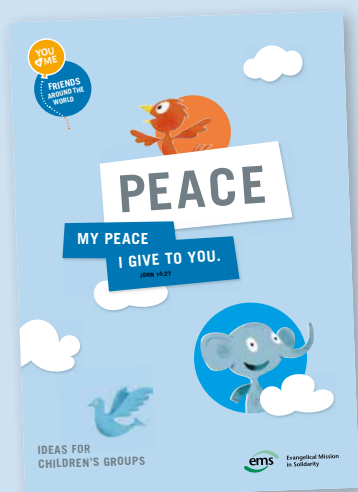
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### "PEACE" WORKBOOK

Peace is a topic that concerns children all over the world. What does peace mean for children in different countries? And what does the Bible say about peace? In this workbook, eight children from India, Indonesia, South Africa, South Korea, Ghana and Germany talk about what peace means to them. The focus is on South Korea.

### "DIVERSITY" WORKBOOK

In this workbook, girls and boys from six countries and churches describe their lives, their daily life and their faith. They talk about their children's services, their friends, school and much more. The workbook uses inspiring methods, beautiful illustrations and many photos of Germany to organise children's Sunday school lessons.



You can find more information here:  
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