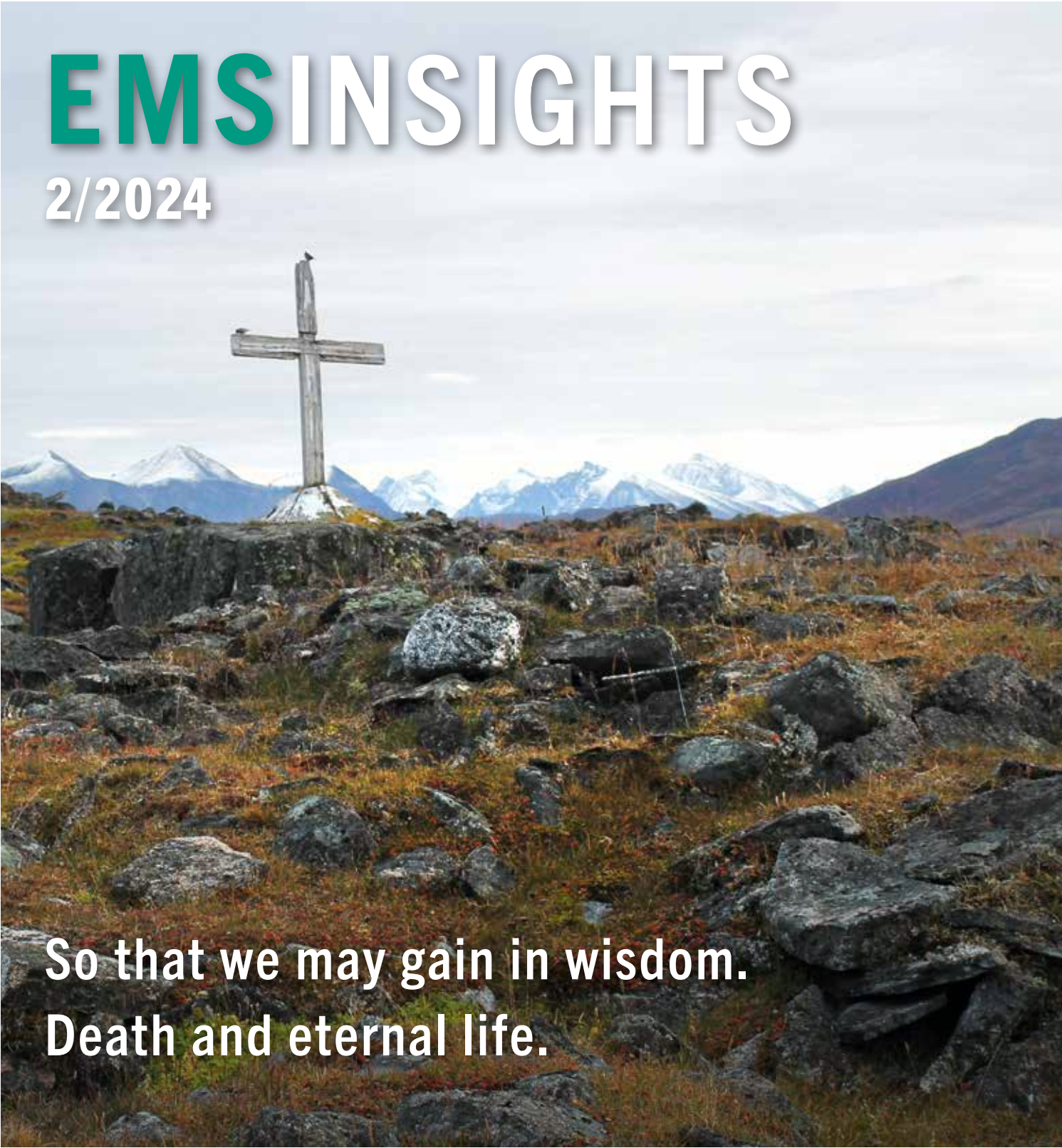


EMSINSIGHTS

2/2024



So that we may gain in wisdom.
Death and eternal life.

MAIN FEATURE EQUAL AND YET NOT EQUAL

Graveyards of the Moravian Church

GOD'S TABLE IN HEAVEN

Theological reflection from Ghana

DO WOMEN GRIEVE DIFFERENTLY?

Voices from the EMS Women's Network



Evangelische Mission
in Solidarität



SO THAT WE MAY GAIN IN WISDOM

By the time you hold this issue of EMS Insights in your hands, it is late autumn in the northern hemisphere, the days are shorter, and the sky is usually overcast. In the southern hemisphere, it's a completely different story. In South Africa, for example, everything is growing, budding and blossoming. These different seasons in the worldwide EMS Fellowship are also reflected in the main theme of our magazine. Death is the end of this life but, at the same time, it is the beginning of eternal life.

When I was a vicar, the cemetery in my parish was located on a hill above the town. I always made it a point of walking to funerals as the road leading up to the cemetery seemed to mirror the path out of life and the noise of the town. On the way back, I again became much more aware of this life. Death makes us realise how vulnerable human life is – but also how special! So that's why, during the service commemorating the death of a parish member, we pray "Lord, teach us to remember we must die so that we may gain in wisdom."

At the EMS Secretariat, we continuously experience how the churches and mission societies in the worldwide EMS Fellowship close ranks when it is a matter of suffering or death. This happened during the coronavirus pandemic and now we see it again during the war in the Middle East. But it also occurs when people who are linked to the EMS suffer personal tragedies. At the end of life, what unites us is hope: "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. See, I am making all things new."

In heartfelt solidarity,

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.

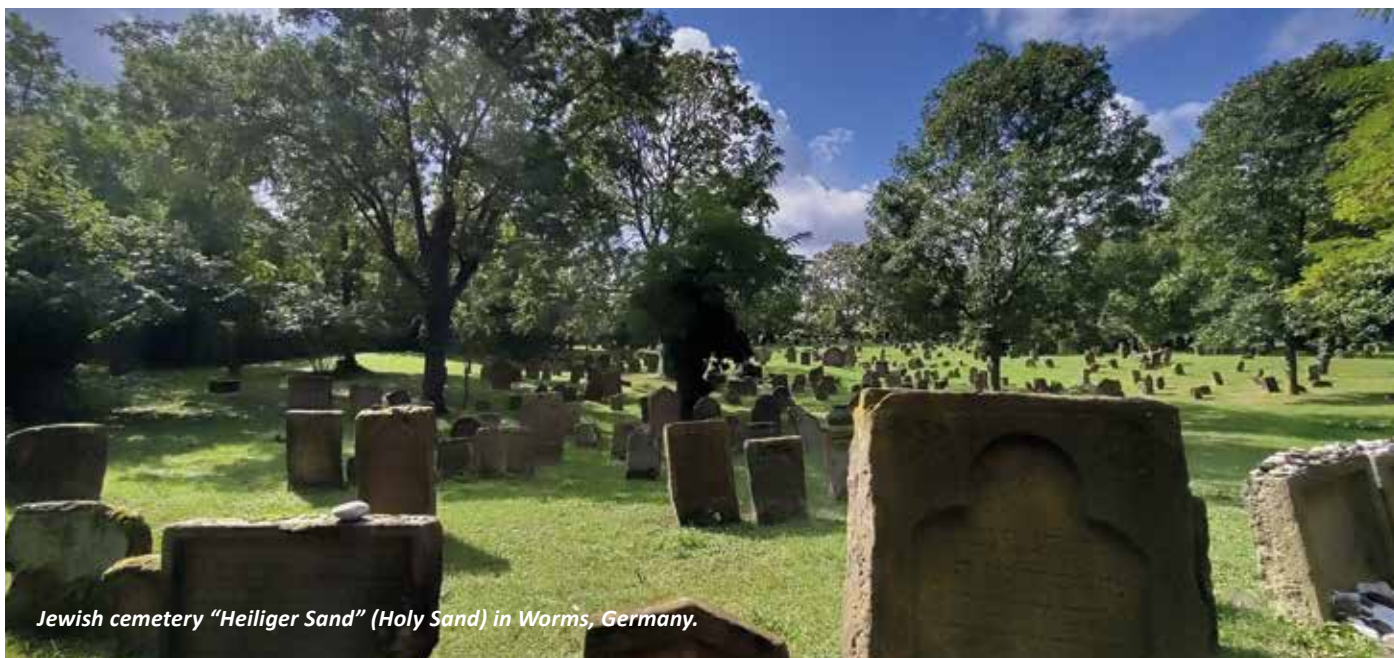
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Jewish cemetery "Heiliger Sand" (Holy Sand) in Worms, Germany.

SO THAT WE MAY GAIN IN WISDOM. DEATH AND ETERNAL LIFE.

Every religion has its own beliefs about death and the soul's spiritual journey to the afterlife. Looking more closely at these concepts can help us to better understand our own cultural identity and beliefs.

MAIN FEATURE

EQUAL AND YET NOT EQUAL

Graveyards of the Moravian Church.

Pages 4/5

WHAT UNITES AND WHAT DIVIDES

South Korea: Religions coexisting side by side.

Pages 6/7

FUNERAL CUSTOMS OF THE AKAN

Between tradition and Christian doctrine.

Pages 8/9

DEATH IN SULAWESI

Indonesia: The rituals of the Toraja.

Page 10

GOD'S TABLE IN HEAVEN

Theological reflection on Matthew 8:11.

Page 11

STRONG NETWORKS

Do women deal differently with death and grief?

Pages 12/13

CREATING LASTING VALUES

Bequeathing something good for the long term.

Pages 14/15

EMS NEWS

UNESCO World Heritage, transparency, new EMS newsletter.

Pages 16/17

ASSOCIATION NEWS

News about the BMDZ, EVS and DOAM.

Pages 18/19

FINANCIAL REPORT 2023

The year in figures.

Pages 20/21

HINDUISM: ETERNAL CYCLE OF LIFE

Cremations at the sacred ghats.

Pages 22/23

OUTLOOK

The sparrow and the fire

Page 24

EQUAL AND YET NOT EQUAL

GRAVEYARDS OF THE MORAVIAN CHURCH

The first time you visit a Moravian Church graveyard, which they refer to as God's Acre, you will probably be quite surprised. Instead of a wide variety of gravestones and tombs that you usually find elsewhere, you only see flat stones of the same size arranged in rows and fields. The term God's Acre comes from the belief that the bodies of the dead are sown as seeds in God's field so that they may rise again on the Day of the Resurrection.

When you take a closer look at the gravestones, you see they only show the name, place and date of birth, place and date of death and usually a Bible verse. Titles such as 'Doctor', 'Mayor' or 'Senior Government Councillor' are completely omitted. No achievements are listed either. Some may also notice that men are buried on one side and women on the other. There are no family tombs. What's more, you can't choose your own grave site – the next person to die gets the next grave in line. So, as you walk along the graves, you are in fact walking through time. This particular Moravian burial culture is far from arbitrary as it is based on theological principles. A life with God mainly plays out in this world. After

death, the soul returns to the "bosom of the Father". Instead of speaking of death, they often talk of "going home to God". The body itself is irrelevant and therefore the place where the body is buried does not need very much attention at all. That's why it is not necessary for married couples or families to be buried in the same place or next to each other.

After death, the human soul is called home to be with the Lord.

Even the simple inscriptions on the gravestones have a theological meaning. As they were in this life, all people stand before God as sinners and need his forgiveness. The man is neither above the woman nor the doctor above the potter. This is why there is no need to adorn oneself with earthly titles and why the members of the Moravian Church address each other by their first names (without a title). This equality or equivalent value of people is also expressed by the fact that these titles are deliberately omitted on the gravestones and they are all the same size.



GOD'S ACRES INTERNATIONAL

The Moravian Church was one of the first Protestant missionary churches. Since 1732, Europeans have travelled to little-known regions of the world to bring the gospel to enslaved and indigenous populations. Their own culture often went along with it, such as the simple white church hall or the division of the community into equal social groups (widows, young single men, etc.). Even their burial culture was part of the European culture that they brought with them. But soon the missionaries realised that there were important cultural distinctions, especially in the matter of burial rites. So how can the equality of all people be respected here? Do they all have to be buried according to the same brotherly ritual?

Over the course of time, this problem was solved in different ways in the various mission fields. It is interesting to take a look at Greenland, the second oldest mission region of the Moravians. In 1733, the station of New Herrnhut was founded near the settlement of Godthåb (now Nuuk), which was founded by Hans Egede. In the following decades, further mission stations were established towards the south:

Lichtenfels, Lichtenau and Friedrichsthal. God's Acres were established at all the stations. All deceased members of the congregations were buried there, whether they were European or Inuit. And yet the graves are very different. While the European graves are marked with a classic Moravian gravestone, the Inuit graves are built according to their own tradition. They did not bury their dead in the ground but covered them with stones. Each stack of stones represents one person. So, in these graveyards, Europeans and Inuit are buried side by side (as equals) and yet they remain true to their own cultures. Equal and yet not equal.

Niels Gärtner

Niels Gärtner is pastor of the Moravian Church in Germany.

WHAT UNITES AND WHAT DIVIDES

SOUTH KOREA: RELIGIONS COEXISTING SIDE BY SIDE

Rituals surrounding death and burial are as old as humanity itself. Every culture and religion has its own way of dealing with the deceased and their grieving relatives. The example of South Korea shows that these traditions are by no means rigid but can overlap and undergo dynamic change.

The South-East Asian country has always been a melting pot of different religious traditions such as Shamanism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity. Over the centuries, all these religions have influenced and enriched one another in Korea. This is particularly evident in Christian burial rites, which incorporate elements of various religious traditions. There is a lot that unites us but also a lot that divides us.

According to Confucian burial customs dating back to the 14th century, the period of mourning in Korea originally lasted three years. During this time, all family members wore the prescribed mourning clothes and observed certain rituals. If the father died, the eldest son would erect a tent beside the grave and live there for three years. The son's duties during the three-year mourning period included erecting an altar and regularly making offerings of incense, food and alcohol. In this way, he honoured his father and took over his position as head of the family.

However, under the pressure of modern times, funeral customs in Korea have drastically changed. Today, the official mourning period is only five days, sometimes even as few as three. Also, the deceased is usually not laid out at home but in a morgue. The elaborate burial is often replaced by a simpler cremation, mainly because of the costs involved.

THREE DAYS, FOUR CEREMONIES

Christian funeral customs in Korea are based on a fixed procedure that was adopted from traditional Confucian funeral rites. There are four different ceremonies that take place over a period of three days. The first ceremony, called "imjong", is held immediately after the person dies. In the second ceremony, "ipkwon", the body is placed in the coffin. The third ceremony, "balin", takes place on the morning of the third day when the coffin containing the deceased is taken to the cemetery. The fourth and final ceremony, "hagwon", is the actual burial of the coffin in the cemetery or cremation.

Only close friends and family members usually attend the last ceremony. If an entire family is Christian or Confucian, there is no question which rite should be used to bury the deceased. Sometimes, however, family members belong to different



*“My family members smile because they accompanied their grandmother to the other world peacefully and respectfully. Before that, they had cried for three days.”
Sigamoney Shakespeare*

religions and this can lead to disagreements about the type of burial. So, to avoid conflict, the rites of different religions are often performed one after the other.

Many Christian funeral rites in Korea include interreligious elements.

This is what happened when my wife’s grandmother died last year at the age of over 90 (see photo above). She and two of her daughters were baptised Christians. Three of her daughters and two of her sons, on the other hand, followed the Confucian tradition. At the funeral, the traditional Confucian rituals took place first with an altar and offerings. While this was happening, all the Christian members of the family stayed in the background and prayed silently. When the Christian pastor arrived, the incense, alcohol and food were removed from the altar and the cross, Bible and flowers were placed there instead. Most family members were present for both the Confucian ceremony and the Christian service. This allowed everyone to grieve in their own way and pay their last respects to the deceased.

The Confucian funeral rites were led by a woman, which would have been unthinkable in the original Confucian tradition. Christianity has had a great influence here. Christian missionaries introduced schooling for girls to Korea in the 19th century, among other things. This empowered the role of women in the long term and increasingly opened up new social opportunities that had previously been denied them in Korea’s patriarchal society.

Dr. Sigamoney Shakespeare

Rev. Dr Sigamoney Shakespeare is a theologian and lecturer in religious education.

He lectures at the Yonsei University in South Korea.

Black and white mourning clothes are worn at the funeral.

MAIN FEATURE



FUNERAL CUSTOMS OF THE AKAN

BETWEEN TRADITION AND CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Mission in Africa came up with theological interpretations to reconcile traditional practices with Christian teachings. For example, drumming and dancing are integrated into the service as an expression of joy and the celebration of life. Mission also contributed to understanding and respecting the burial customs of the Akan.

The Akan are a West African ethnic group that mainly lives in Ghana. As Christianity spread, many traditional Akan rituals were incorporated into the church system, creating a harmonious blend of cultural heritage and Christian faith. Akan funeral practices are an example of the rich cultural heritage of the Ghanaian people. Integrating these traditions into Christian worship through African mission bears testimony to the respectful and innovative approach to cultural assimilation. By recognising and reinterpreting traditional rituals, the church provides a platform where faith and culture can coexist in harmony. The future of Akan funeral practices lies in this ongoing dialogue and mutual respect, ensuring that the cultural identity of the Akan is preserved within the Christian faith.

HOW THE AKAN VIEW DEATH

The Akan view death as an all-encompassing experience that is meant for the living in the divinely created order. They have a saying: “Owuo da amansan konmu” – which means “Death is there for everyone”. Death is described as unfeeling, remorseless and stronger than life. “When death attacks someone, life cannot save him.” The Akan believe that the human soul is immortal and begins its journey into eternity at the moment of death. As in other traditional religions of West and Central Africa, the Akan believe in a supreme god, who generally does not come into direct contact with humans, and many subordinate deities who help people. The ancestors – family members who, before their death, led a good and socially acceptable life – are also honoured and worshipped as they have attained superhuman status and serve as intermediaries between the living and ‘Onyankopon’ (God).

“KRA WUO” AND “ATOFO WUO”

Akan funeral rites may vary greatly depending on the social status or position the deceased held in life. For example, there is a significant difference between the funeral for a chieftain and the funeral for simple servants or family members. When a child dies or the deceased is the first among siblings, the funeral is shortened and kept simple (“soduo”) because children are not yet considered full members of society. There is also the fear that an elaborate funeral will encourage further deaths in the family.

A “good death” is one reason for the Akan to celebrate life.

The Akan distinguish between a good death at the right time (“kra wuo”) and an untimely death (“atofo wuo”). The differences are reflected in the type of funeral put on for the deceased. A good death is when someone dies after a long, meritorious life and as a respected member of society. A good death is also a precondition for a person to become an ancestor. For the Akan, such a death is not so much a reason to grieve as an occasion to celebrate life and to show respect for the deceased. An untimely death, such as by suicide, accident, drowning, etc., on the other hand, means that the deceased is deprived of an appropriate funeral service.

BALANCING FAITH AND CULTURE

One of the greatest challenges for the churches is to ensure that traditional practices do not come into conflict with Christian teachings. The church leadership has to deal delicately with complex situations and find a balance that does justice to both faith and culture. Two examples, one positive and one negative, may explain this more clearly.

In the past, especially before the spread of Christianity, it was customary for the head of the family to offer water to the dying and pray to their soul: “May all the women of the house bear children and the family be blessed”. This death ritual was taken up by the Christian mission and given a new theological meaning, particularly with regard to Jesus’ words on the cross: “I am thirsty” (John 19:28). Today, it is customary

for the family to call a pastor or chaplain to pray with or for the dying person and to administer Holy Communion in order to deliver the soul of the person into the arms of God. However, there are also cases where traditional beliefs cannot be reconciled with Christian teachings. For example, the Akan believe that no one dies without a reason. Even in the case of very old deceased persons, the family may investigate to find out who caused the death. Widows are particularly likely to be the target of such investigations and suspicions. They are often subjected to severe physical and psychological abuse which traumatises them. Even the invocation of spirits is part of these practices – which the church quite rightly rejects, of course. In order to counter such inhuman acts, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, for example, has developed a special liturgy for widows. This replaces traditional widow rituals.

Traditional rituals were taken up by Mission and reinterpreted in Christian terms.

The mission church still has much to do to educate and guide the community in practices that are consistent with their faith and the biblical implications of the practices they abhor. The church must play an active role in adapting traditional rituals to Christian practices. This includes ongoing dialogue with community elders, educating them about the Christian faith and developing worship practices that acknowledge their culture.

Rev. Ebenezer Ahenkan Owusu

*Rev. Ebenezer Ahenkan Owusu is
Public Relations Officer of the
Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG).*

DEATH IN SULAWESI

INDONESIA: THE RITUALS OF THE TORAJA

For the Toraja, death is merely a transition to a new life. Their traditional funeral ritual is an important part of their culture and identity. It has not changed even with the spread of Christianity in South Sulawesi.

The Toraja are a people that lives in the mountainous region of Tanah Toraja in South Sulawesi (Indonesia). When a Toraja person dies, he or she is initially considered sick rather than dead. The corpse is beautifully dressed and laid out in the house until the funeral. In the past, herbs were used to delay physical decay; today, formaldehyde is used. The funeral can also take place months or even years after the death. This is because the funeral ceremony needs to be well planned so that all the relatives can attend as well as guests from overseas, sometimes.

On the death of Ambe Arruan, who was mayor of the village of Te'tenai for many years, Hans Heinrich travelled there from Stuttgart. At the time, he was the EMS Liaison Secretary for Indonesia. "I was invited to the funeral service, which was attended by close family and friends. The time up to the funeral is spent in the company of the deceased. You sit by the bedside and share food or a cigarette together," says Hans Heinrich. But he waited in vain for the funeral to take place during his visit. It took another nine months to complete the preparations. Then Hans Heinrich returned to Te'tenai to attend the actual funeral. With great ceremony, the deceased was laid to rest in a mountain tomb and provided with funerary gifts for his new life in the other world.

GIFTS AND BLOOD SACRIFICE

The social status of the deceased's family is crucial to the way a funeral is organised. The higher the social standing, the more lavish the festivities. It is customary for the mourners to bring gifts – palm wine, rice, coffee, sugar or cigarettes, even pigs and water buffaloes. A particular highlight is the public slaughter of the buffaloes and pigs, which used to be the main part of the religious ritual in the past.

The animist and Christian religions are not mutually exclusive for the Toraja. The ceremony is attended by a pastor who delivers a sermon. The question of how the church deals with this ritual is nonetheless important. After all, around 80 % of the 600,000 Toraja population in South Sulawesi today are Christians. "The church has been involved in far-reaching discussions for a long time," says Hans Heinrich. "There are many critical voices among young and old pastors who regard the funeral ceremony as cultural 'baggage' and consider it superfluous." In practice, however, most churches come to terms with it. They have realised that the ritual is important for the Toraja people – regardless of their religion. If the church were to reject or even ban this burial practice, many Torajans would turn their backs on the church.

Lea Wirz

Lea Wirz is member of the Public Relations Team of Mission 21 (Switzerland).

GOD'S TABLE IN HEAVEN

"I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven," (Matthew 8:11).

Much as there are verses in scripture which suggest the exclusivity of salvation to the Israelites (see Matt. 15:24), the teachings, practices and the spirit of the teachings of Jesus Christ point otherwise. There are examples of the Lord Jesus Christ interacting with, and responding positively to requests from people of gentile background.

The message of salvation applies to all people – regardless of their origin.

One such encounters of the Lord with a person of gentile descent is his interaction with the Centurion of Capernaum we read about in Matthew 8:11ff. Though a gentile, after he demonstrated his belief in the Lord Jesus Christ by pleading with Jesus to heal his servant, Jesus responded positively to his request. Based on this, Jesus indicated the inclusivity of all who would believe in him. They will dine at table with the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, whether they are from the east or from the west, irrespective of their geographical or ethnic background. These words from Jesus Christ affirms the observation of Peter that "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." (Acts 10:34-35).

The statement of Jesus Christ draws attention to the need for the Church to be open in its mission activities. The Church as the body of Christ and the ambassadors of Christ has the responsibility to head the call to "... go and make disciples of all nations..." in spite of possible barriers such as ethnicity/race, gender orientation, religious background, ideological orientation, etc. Christ, indeed, is the saviour of the universe. Therefore, the message of the salvation he brings cannot be limited to any group of people. Furthermore, the healing of the servant of the Centurion serves as a reminder to the Church to be

a vehicle providing healing to our world plagued with all sorts of ailing conditions such as ecological injustice, socio-economic inequalities, religious extremism, various forms of discrimination, etc.

Those who believe in the Lord will be received at God's table in the kingdom of heaven.

The diversity of those who will recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, as declared by Jesus Christ, also gives assurance of a better life for all who die in the Lord. Such believers in the Lord would be received by God at table in the Kingdom just like the Patriarchs. Indeed, as a Church, our witness of Jesus Christ is to all the nations, for whoever comes to faith in Jesus through our propagation of the gospel will be a bona fide citizen of the kingdom of heaven. This should be an inspiration for the Church to persist in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

Joseph W. Acheampong

Joseph W. Acheampong is pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Ghana (PCG).



GHANA AND SOUTH AFRICA: DO WOMEN GRIEVE DIFFERENTLY?

Traditional role models and behavioural norms also determine how we deal with death and mourning. Often, it is especially women who are disadvantaged and discriminated against by very specific expectations in society. Members of the international EMS Women's Network in Ghana and South Africa report on their experiences.

Do women in Ghana deal with death differently than men? A Ghanaian proverb says "Berima nsu" (in English: "A man does not cry"). Society expects men to be strong, to remain stoic and to keep their feelings to themselves. Women in Ghana are also expected to behave in a certain socially acceptable way when faced with bereavement. There are special, culturally determined mourning rituals for widows which they must adhere to. Adherence to these widowhood rituals is in the hands of special women who also usually act as undertakers.

It is not uncommon for widows to be subjected to traditional rituals that make them even more depressed and frustrated after the loss of their husband (see also page 9). These rituals are usually performed by the family of the deceased husband with the consent of the widow's family. On the other hand, widowers are not affected by such cultural rules. Widowers are often encouraged to remarry – unlike widows, who often remain alone for reasons of child rearing or because they are too deeply hurt and traumatised emotionally.

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) offers counselling and advice to grieving families. There are also special programmes to provide widows with financial support. This boosts their self-esteem and enables them to live self-determined, independent lives.

Insights from South Africa

In South Africa, women's experiences of death and mourning also differ significantly from those of men. In rural areas in particular, women are encouraged to

show their grief publicly. They are not only expected to feel the pain but also to be 'seen' feeling it.

Buyiswa Sambane, a member of the women's network from South Africa, recalls, "I was at home with my mother and my cousin when we found out about my father's death. My mother took the sad news very calmly. But she was afraid the villagers would say they hadn't heard her lament for her husband's death. So she started crying out loud because that's what was expected of her. Men are not expected to do that; they are supposed to be strong and calm." Their traditional role as providers and protectors forces men to suppress their emotions – even when a family member dies.

The way we were raised influences our behaviour and our reaction to death. It is not uncommon for people to be judged for how they express or fail to express their grief. The different ways in which men and women deal with death are largely determined by family, community, societal norms and expectations. These tend to be restrictive for women and liberal for men. In any case, the death of a loved one is a deeply moving experience for both genders.

*Rebecca Abladey (Ghana),
Buyiswa Sambane (South Africa),
Anda Nkosi (South Africa)*



LEBANON: DEATH IS NOT THE END

War and terror on an unprecedented scale are currently devastating the Middle East. Reports and news of horrific deaths are now part of everyday life for many people in Lebanon.

However, people's reactions to them vary greatly. Some see the victims as martyrs who have paid the price for a just cause and who deserve honour. For others, the deaths are a contemptible expression of evil and a cause of misery and despair.

In my role as pastor, I see time and again how differently men and women deal with such situations. While men take care of the practical matters associated with the death of a loved one, such as organising the funeral, clearing the home or paying bills, it is the women who publicly express their grief. Traditionally, women continue to wear black for days and sometimes months after a death. They weep, often loudly, hug the

coffin and shower it with kisses. Many refuse to eat or wash, clinging to the deceased's belongings as if they could hold on to them that way. Women often engage in an internal dialogue with the deceased, wishing that they themselves had died rather than their loved one.

It is our tradition for the bereaved to receive official condolences three days after the funeral, when family, friends and acquaintances come to sit together, often in silence, drinking a cup of bitter coffee and holding hands. But the condolences last longer than these three days. And often it is the women who continue to come together to help each other find their way back to normal life.

Of course, not all deaths are due to war and terror. Loss is simply part of life. In the Christian community in Lebanon, the response to the death of a loved one is the phrase "Christ is risen". This phrase – or rather, this confession of faith – shows how the Christian community deals with death. It places death in the context of God's action in Christ and

the overcoming of death by Christ's death and resurrection. By confessing this faith, death – even though it remains a cause of grief and suffering – becomes more bearable. The deceased is seen as united with Christ. And Christ is included in the family's experience. The loss is no longer a purely private experience but takes on a cosmic dimension and opens up to the promise of resurrection. Death is not the end. And there is comfort in this realisation.

Dr. Rima Nasrallah

Dr Rima Nasrallah is pastor of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut (NECB).

Note: This article refers to the current situation in the Middle East at the time the German version of this issue went to press in October 2024. Please take into account any later developments.



Female students at the GKSS student's residence in Makassar, Indonesia

EMS FOUNDATION: CREATING LASTING VALUES

Passing on something good – even beyond one's own lifetime. With an endowment contribution or legacy, you can make a mark of solidarity that spans generations. Here, the EMS Foundation is your reliable partner.

Sustainable change requires a lot of staying power: Educational opportunities do not improve overnight. Poverty is not eliminated in a short time. After crises and conflicts, it may take several years before reconciliation again becomes possible. The EMS Foundation "Mission in Partnership" invests in the future of disadvantaged people worldwide. It was established in 2008 to provide a secure long-term financial basis for projects undertaken by the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

MAKE AN ENDOWMENT, GIVE HELP TO MANY

Whether during your lifetime or in the form of a legacy, you can provide effective long-term support for the work of the EMS Foundation with an endowment. While a donation for a specific project only helps once, your endowment bears fruit on a regular basis. Assets transferred to the Foundation increase the Foundation's capital and interest. Earnings from the interest are distributed annually and can then be used depending on the Foundation's purpose – year after year.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT

The funds entrusted to the EMS Foundation are invested safely and responsibly so that they generate a good return on investment. Managed by the Protestant Church in Württemberg, the Foundation's assets are invested not only based on sound economic principles, but also according to ethical criteria – in a way that is socially acceptable, ecologically sound and generationally fair.

An endowment during your lifetime brings you tax advantages. You will receive a donation confirmation for the tax office on a regular basis for your support. A donation given to the Foundation is also tax-deductible as a special expense. The following applies to bequests: as a non-profit organisation, the EMS Foundation is exempt from inheritance tax. This means that every legacy goes to the purpose specified in your will without any deductions.

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PROJECT FUNDING

The EMS Foundation mainly focuses on funding projects that promote education and peace and fight discrimination worldwide. Two such projects are presented here as examples:

JAPAN: BURAKU LIBERATION CENTER

In Japan, they are called the 'Buraku', descendants of labourers who were once outcast and regarded as 'untouchable' due to their occupations, such as butchers, tanners or undertakers. Although the Buraku have officially been recognised by law as equal since 1871, they are still socially disadvantaged today – whether at school, in their professional lives or in their choice of partner. The Buraku Liberation Center of the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ) is committed to fighting this discrimination, for example, by putting on information events, theatre performances and through political activism. The aim is to raise awareness about this issue in Japanese society and to stop discrimination against the Buraku. At international level, the Center collaborates with the self-help organisations of the Dalits and with associations of the Sinti and Roma in Germany.

INDONESIA: STUDENT'S RESIDENCE IN MAKASSAR

In the remote rural areas of South Sulawesi, many girls and boys have no access to secondary education. Very often there is a lack of qualified teachers or well-equipped schools. Parents who want to give their children better educational opportunities have no choice but to send them to the distant city of Makassar, which has a population of over a million. They usually live with host families and have to earn their board and lodging themselves – for example by cleaning, doing laundry or gardening. There is hardly any time left for studying. Added to this are the dangers of big city life such as drugs, alcohol and crime. The Christian Church in South Sulawesi (GKSS) maintains a student's residence in Makassar that offers a safe temporary home, room to study and financial support. Rev. Atok Samarang, Church President of the GKSS, recalls: "If my parents had not sent me to the student's residence, I would probably have remained a farmer in my home village and would never have been able to study."



Demonstration by the Buraku Liberation Center

The following subsidiary foundations that have their own specific purposes are currently grouped under the umbrella of the EMS Foundation:

URSULA HELENE FOUNDATION

The purpose of the Ursula Helene Foundation is to give girls in Africa access to education. Educated girls have better career opportunities and are less likely to fall victim to exploitation and violence.

RITSERT FUND

The proceeds from the Ritsert Fund are used primarily to provide pensions for pastors of the Moravian Church in South Africa (MCSA). Its founder, Rev. ret. Karl Ritsert, was an ecumenical co-worker of the MCSA for many years.

If you would like to donate to specific foundation purposes only, you can support these subsidiary foundations at any time – or set up a non-independent foundation with a specific foundation purpose yourself. We would be delighted to advise you. Angelika Jung, Head of the Fundraising Unit, looks forward to hearing from you.

Email: jung@emsonline.org

Fundraising Team



HERRNHUT IS NOW A UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has added the settlements of the Moravian Church in Germany (Herrnhut), Northern Ireland (Gracehill) and the United States (Bethlehem) to the list of World Heritage Sites.

None of the places stands alone but is part of a greater whole. They now all form a joint international World Heritage Site together with Christiansfeld in Denmark, which was already recognised in 2015. Until the mid-19th century, the settlements founded by the Moravian Church in Herrnhut were self-contained communities where only members of the community lived. The idea of community is paramount. All those belonging to the community see themselves as sisters and brothers in faith and strive for a binding form of living together.

This idealistic vision is implemented in practice in the settlements. Each Moravian settlement is characterised by careful planning based on the values and needs of the community and a characteristic architecture that has an astonishing uniformity despite the sites being so far apart.

The roots of the Moravian Church lie in the Bohemian Reformation of the 15th century and in 18th century German Pietism. Its most influential figure was Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Moravian religious refugees founded the town of Herrnhut on his estate in 1722. The Moravians are

considered pioneers of Protestant world mission and are represented in numerous countries today. The Moravian Church is a member of the EMS Fellowship. The EMS supports the worldwide mission and project work of the Moravian Church through the Herrnhuter Missionshilfe (MHM / Moravian Mission Aid).

Andreas Herrmann



COURAGE FOR TRANSPARENCY

The fifth conference on “Courage for Transparency” took place at the Protestant Academy Bad Boll. The three-day event focused on the exchange of ideas and experiences for combating corruption in church development cooperation.

Corruption is a global challenge, also for church-related development organisations and mission organisations. For many years, EMS member churches and societies have developed concepts to prevent corruption and strengthen integrity in cooperation.

From 11 to 13 September, experts from Africa, Asia and Europe met at the invitation of Transparency International at the Protestant Academy Bad Boll to discuss how international financial cooperation between churches worldwide can be made more secure. They shared their practical experiences in fighting corruption.



MALAYSIA: STRENGTHENING TIES WITH THE BASEL CHURCHES

The Director of the Basel Mission – German Branch (BMDZ), Rev. Dieter Bullard-Werner, returned from a trip to Sabah in Malaysia in August, full of new impressions and ideas. “EMS Insights” interviewed him.

What was the reason for your trip?

The purpose of my trip was to strengthen our long-standing relationship with the two „Basel churches“ in the province of Sabah where we support projects through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg. I visited one of these projects, which is a community centre in the countryside that was built for the indigenous community. The community uses it for church services and other purposes, such as youth work. I delivered greetings from the Bishop of Württemberg, Ernst-Wilhelm Gohl, at the inauguration of the building.

At the same time, the 8th Asian Continental Conference of Churches, that goes back to the Basel Mission, was taking place in Sabah...

Yes, it was excellent timing. It meant that our small delegation, consisting of Rev. Dr Miriam Haar from Heilbronn, Mathias Waldmeyer from Mission 21 and myself, was able to take part in the conference. The East Asian churches that emerged from the work of the Basel Mission meet in person every two years. This time, the topic was “Leadership and community development”.

What are the differences between the churches at the conference?

Their financial situations alone, for a start. For example, the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia-BM (BCCM) is struggling to finance its church activities and pastors. Their Basel Farm project grows fruit and vegetables to generate income for the church. The farm also serves as a teaching garden for local farmers.

Are there any plans on how the BMDZ could strengthen its contacts with the “Basel churches” in Malaysia?

We must bring our international connections in contact with local parishioners here in Switzerland. Next year, we are offering a work camp and a choir trip to Malaysia with this in mind. Among other things, we want to bring a youth choir from Esslingen to sing together with a Malaysian partner choir at the inauguration of the “Basel Farm”.

*Interview conducted by:
Wiltrud Rösch-Metzler*



LIVING AS EQUALS IN A MAJORITY SOCIETY

This year’s DOAM study conference took place at the Protestant Academy Bad Boll on 7–9 July 2024. The theme was “Minorities fighting for equal participation in church and society”.

The conference continued an exchange that began 25 years ago at the initiative of the Japanese church to work with Sinti and Roma in Germany and has since been continued in the DOAM and the EMS. At the conference, the third of its kind, delegates from the discriminated Sinti and Roma in Germany, the Dalits in India and Germany and the Buraku in Japan, presented their reports and brought their reality to life in workshops. They have all been and continue to be affected by unfair treatment. The conference participants experienced at first hand what it feels like to be exposed to hate comments on the internet, what a lifelong struggle for identity are triggered when you belong to several discriminated groups, or what discriminatory treatment can really mean when dealing with the authorities. The exchange also brought new insights for the representatives of these minorities.

Rev. Reina UENO, pastor and Director of the Buraku Liberation Center in Osaka, said: “This was the first time I heard people from the Sinti and Roma and the Dalits speak at first hand. I was horrified and angry that discrimination is still continuing. But at the same time, I was greatly encouraged by meeting people who continue to fight against discrimination in Germany and India and refuse to give up.”

Jovica Arvanitelli (photo), Deputy Chairman of the Association of German Sinti and Roma, Baden-Württemberg Regional Association, summarised his impression in his closing remarks: “What we learnt here is that we are not alone.”

Rev. Silke Stürmer, officer of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Würtemberg in charge of cooperation with Sinti and Roma, took up this idea again in the touching closing service together with Rev. Reina UENO.

The next DOAM annual conference will take place in Berlin on 26–28 June 2025 and will focus on the theme of “How the Chinese Communist Party’s Sinicisation programme shapes religions”.

Sabine Marschner



LEBANON: CHANGE OF DIRECTOR AT THE SCHNELLER SCHOOL

Odette Haddad Makhoul has been appointed the new Director of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS). She succeeds Reverend George Haddad on his retirement.

At present, church work in the Middle East means serving people against a backdrop of war, trauma and the complete collapse of the old economic and political order. Rockets also hit near the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS, photo) in Lebanon; the war between Israel and the Lebanese Hezbollah militia approaches very close time and again. Because of the widespread hardship, the school is well over capacity. Additional boarding groups have been set up in an old farm building on the grounds and in the guest house. After all, as the principle states, we can’t turn away children in need!

In the midst of this situation, a change of leadership took place at the JLSS. After 18 years as Director of the school

and after several prolongations after reaching his official age of retirement, Rev. George Haddad finally took his well-deserved retirement on 1 October.

His successor is Odette Haddad Makhoul. Like George Haddad, Mrs Makhoul, who is no relation, is also a “Schneller veteran”. Her father, John Haddad, was a teacher and head of the boarding home at the JLSS many years ago. She herself started working here as an English teacher in 1987. Later, she became coordinator for English lessons and finally (after a few years at a French school in Lebanon) head of the school at the JLSS.

Now she is the director of the entire institution – including the school, vocational training workshops and boarding home. In these extremely challenging times, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) wishes her a steady hand, good luck and God’s blessings. At the same time, the EVS expresses its deep gratitude to George Haddad and his wife Laure. May they have a long and happy retirement together!

Dr. Uwe Gräbe

Note: This article refers to the current situation in the Middle East at the time the German version of this issue went to press in October 2024. Please take into account any later developments.

FINANCIAL YEAR 2023

REVENUES

Donations, offerings	1,350,391.58
Contributions from members	4,115,375.04
Project refunds and subsidies	1,079,047.52
Interest, dividends	170,934.59
Rental revenues	124,488.52
Refunds and other revenues	210,350.51
Carried forward result previous year	298.42

7,050,886.18 EUR

EXPENDITURES

Project allocations	2,653,795.16
Allocations to reserves	550,000.00
Staff costs administration	781,331.41
Staff costs programmes	1,979,288.24
Staff costs ecumenical co-workers	54,080.03
Write-offs	21,634.43
Material costs administration	486,532.35
Material costs programmes	519,839.05

7,046,550.67 EUR

Annual surplus

4,385.51

All figures in Euro.

THE YEAR IN FIGURES
EMS FINANCIAL REPORT 2023

The Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) successfully continued its project and programme work in 2023. The funds were used for a wide range of projects in the field of education and awareness-raising, to promote diversity and justice. Our thanks to all the donors and supporters who care about this work.

One of the greatest challenges of our time is the integrity of creation. It is also one of the major tasks and commitments of our actions as a mission society. The EMS has embarked on a path that not only places value and emphasis on sustainable and ethical action in its projects and programmes but has also aspired to obtain certification according to EMAS (European Management and Audit Scheme) and EMASplus, obtaining them in March 2024. The EMS is thus committed to the sustainable development of its members and their commitment to sustainable processes in their own environments.

For decades, the EMS has been promoting projects whose objectives are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined by the United Nations in 2015. The EMASplus management system allows the EMS to systematically evaluate and continuously optimise its economic, ecological and social impact. Sustainability and future planning are systematically integrated into the organisation. Some key sustainability goals have already been achieved, such as the power supply which is now carbon-free, including heating and hot water for the Secretariat in Stuttgart due to the installation of a photovoltaic system and the purchase of green electricity. By the end of the first certification period in 2028, the EMS aims to make further progress in all three aspects of sustainability - environmental, social and economic.



Read the Sustainability Report here.

SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN DONATIONS

Contributions from members and in particular the German member churches remained unchanged in 2023 and therefore represent an essential source of funding for the work of the EMS. To a large extent, these funds determine the fields of activity of the EMS and the priorities required on the path to a fairer world and the integrity of God’s creation. As a result, significantly more donations were raised for these tasks, programmes and project measures in 2023 than in the previous year. A further increase in revenues was achieved through refunds for services and revenue from interest. At the same time, staff costs did not increase to the extent initially expected, as vacant positions resulted in savings. The improved revenue situation from donations also enabled us to increase funding for our international programme and project work, thus strengthening the sustainability of projects. A large number of projects in recent years have focussed on environmental as well as social and ethical aspects of sustainability. In order to raise awareness for sustainable management in the financial sector, the EMS invited financial officers from its members to a consultation to discuss sustainable investment criteria for financial investments and issues relating to the transparent handling of financial resources.

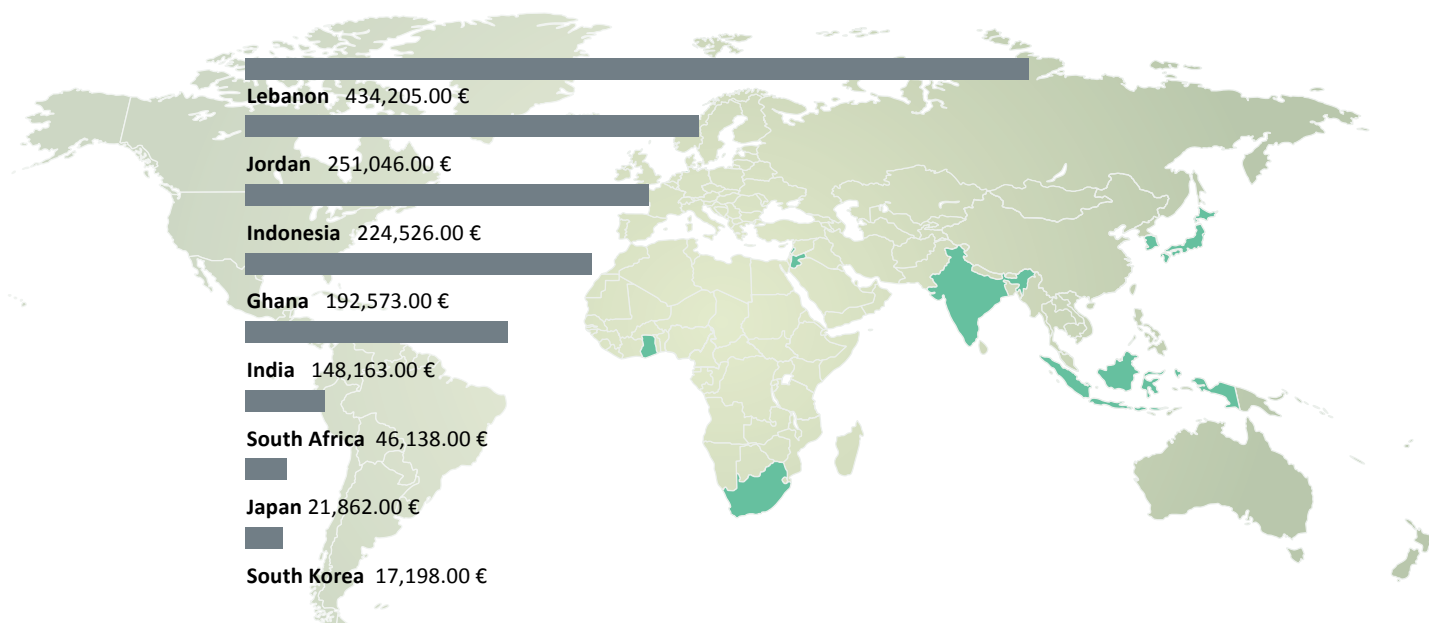
OUTLOOK

In the coming years, the scope and intensity of EMS activities will depend on a number of factors. Costs, in particular staff costs, will rise while staff numbers will remain the same and income will have to be generated increasingly from the donations market. Global developments in politics and society are leading to ever greater challenges for organisations such as the EMS. Revenue for German churches is declining and this is also used to finance contributions to the EMS.

Solutions do exist for the societies, such as new collaborations and closer cooperation between mission societies in Germany to achieve high synergy effects. Programme areas that are carried out nationwide by the societies, as well as cooperation with particular countries, can provide enough leeway to ensure ecumenical cooperation. This is a calling card of the churches that needs to be expanded and strengthened rather than restricted in times of financial and political difficulties. Now is the time to send out a clear signal. This calls for the leaders in our churches and societies to chart the right course at the right time. The EMS has already started.

Rudolf Bausch
General Manager

EMS PROJECT FUNDING BY COUNTRY*



*The figures refer to the 51 projects adopted by the EMS bodies for 2023.

HINDUISM: ETERNAL CYCLE OF LIFE

CREMATIONS AT THE SACRED GHATS

Hinduism, along with Buddhism, is one of the two major world religions that originated on the Indian subcontinent. Hindu funeral rites are closely linked to certain beliefs about death, life after death and the spiritual journey of the soul. A closer look at these practices can help us to better understand our own ideas about life and death.

More than 80% of Indians are Hindus. Their religion does not consider death to be final but merely a transition to another earthly life, with the type of rebirth determined directly by karma. Karma is a spiritual concept that every action – both physical and mental – inevitably has consequences. In other words, good deeds create good karma, while bad deeds create bad karma. The goal of all devout Hindus is to break the eternal cycle of life, death and rebirth, which is considered to be a painful one, through good karma and the attainment of 'moksha' (salvation). This can be achieved by following certain spiritual practices.

PREPARING FOR THE LAST JOURNEY

Hindus are not usually buried in cemeteries. The most common form of funeral is cremation. According to tradition, this takes place in public at specially designated places. The body is placed on a wooden pyre which is lit by the eldest son or another male member of the family following a precisely defined procedure. To make the soul's journey easier, the ashes are scattered in a sacred river such as the Ganges, if possible. Rituals such as the sacrifice of gifts to the ancestors are performed after the cremation to ensure the deceased rests in peace and to honour their memory.

Immediately after death, the deceased is washed, often with ghee (clarified butter), honey and milk. This expresses respect and reverence for the deceased soul and serves as a form of ritual cleansing. The body is rubbed with fragrant substances – turmeric for women and sandalwood for men. This honours the deceased and prepares them for their final journey. Afterwards, they are dressed in a ceremonial robe or white cloth and laid out in a posture of prayer. Offerings such as flowers, rice balls and lamps are placed around the body. Water is sprinkled and prayers are recited.

A special form of femicide was practised on the Indian subcontinent until the British colonial authorities intervened: the ritual of 'sati' (Sanskrit: 'faithful woman'). This custom was based on the belief that a deceased man could not live in the afterlife without his wife. Therefore, the widow was expected to lie down next to her deceased husband on the funeral pyre or she was even forced to do so. The ban on widow burning was generally met with great relief. However, it has not been possible to completely eradicate it to this day. Individual cases continue to come to light and it is assumed that there are a large number of unreported cases.

CHRISTIANITY: THIRD LARGEST RELIGION IN INDIA

India is a secular state. Its constitution stipulates that no religion in the country should be favoured or discriminated. This is intended to protect religious minorities which include the approximately 30 million Christians in India. They thus form the third largest religious community in India after Hindus and Muslims. Christians are outside the traditional Indian caste system. More than half of them are Dalits, formerly known as the 'untouchables'.

The Church of South India (CSI) is the largest member church of the EMS Fellowship and one of the largest Christian churches in Asia. The Church of North India (CNI) joined the EMS in 2022. It has around 2.2 million members in 4,500 parishes.



Hindu men at prayer

HOLY CITY ON THE GANGES

The city of Banaras (Benares), also known as Varanasi, plays a central role in the Hindu funeral culture. The city on the Ganges is considered one of the holiest sites in Hinduism and is also called 'mahashamshan' or 'the great cremation place'. Devout Hindus consider it a great privilege to spend their last days in Banaras, to die there and to be cremated on the sacred ghats. According to Hindu mythology, scattering the ashes in the Ganges means immediate release from the eternal cycle of reincarnation.

In India, a 'ghat' refers to steps leading down to a body of water. They serve a variety of purposes and are often lined with Hindu temples and other buildings. The two most important ghats in Varanasi which are used for cremation ceremonies are the Manikarnika Ghats and the Harishchandra Ghats. The funeral ceremonies that take place there are attended not only by the immediate family and relatives of

the deceased, but also by priests and helpers. They often belong to traditional occupational groups and perform various tasks during the cremation: the Mahabrahmanas act as priests of the dead, the Nau shave the hair of mourners, while the Doms are simple burial assistants. Each group contributes to the complex web of customs and rites that surround death at the sacred Ghats of Banaras.

Sofia Christabel

Rev. Sofia Christabel is pastor of the Church of South India (CSI).

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THE SPARROW AND THE FIRE

OUTLOOK

When Abraham was thrown into the fire on the orders of the brutal King Nimrod, a sparrow rushed to a spring and in his little beak, he brought back a few drops of water which he sprinkled onto the fire. Then it flew back to the spring. Untiringly, it flew back and forth while the ruler's soldiers fanned the flames to make the fire burn more fiercely.

Another bird was watching him. "What hope do you ever have of making any difference to the flames with your tiny little beak?" he shouted, laughing at the sparrow. "I know the few drops I fetch won't achieve much," replied the sparrow, "but when the Day of Judgement comes and I am asked what I did when the great Prophet was thrown into the fire, I do not want to stand there full of shame, so my answer to the Lord of the Worlds will be, I did what I could."

Rafik Schami

From: Rafik Schami, Wenn du erzählst, erblüht die Wüste

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