

Lifegate in January 2025

The year 2024 ended at Lifegate with cheerful Christmas parties that delighted children, parents and team members and made everyone involved forget the situation in the country for a while.

Officially, no decorations were allowed at the birthplace of Jesus again this year and Christmas therefore took place in the churches and church services and family celebrations in the homes of Christians (0.8% of the Palestinian population). The young people from our workshop and many of our sponsored children visited the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem with us and heard the story of the beginning of God's great gift to our world "His plan of salvation through His Son for the people who trust in Him and, in the future, our whole earth". We are very grateful that, with the help of many friends, small Christmas gifts could also be passed on at Lifegate and the traditional Christmas dinner with our team took place. God has led us through a difficult year unscathed, with His love, protection and hope.



Visit to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem

Our underground shelters and storage rooms were completed and put into operation in January. We are delighted with the completion of this project and the wheelchair basketball court, which our team are looking forward to making full use of.



10,500 kg of olive wood, which we need to make our gift items, was purchased in January and has now been stored to dry. The wood needs to dry for one to two years before it can be processed.

To our delight, **Lifegate Garden** was visited by several families at Christmas and in January we had a group staying in our guest house for a whole week for a seminar. We are in the process of renewing the outdated hot water system (solar panel and storage tanks) on the roof and building an underground water storage tank. We hope that more guests will come to us again in the new year and use this little oasis in the middle of Bethlehem.



An underground water reservoir is chiseled out of the rock in Lifegate Garden

Friendly helpers from Germany

We were delighted to welcome the German couple Trackl in January, who spontaneously offered to work as volunteers. They are very committed to their work in our early intervention center and our olive wood workshop and are expected to support us until the end of February.



"Renate fights her way through..."



Siegfried works with olive wood



..and turns some things upside down..



thank you very much!

Our young trainees visited the Palestine Museum of Natural History which is closely connected to the Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability (PIBS) in Bethlehem. Lifegate continues to make a contribution in the processing of waste materials and ensures that the property and adjacent streets are cleaned up and that young people learn to take responsibility for our environment



Visit to the Natural History Museum



Building greenhouses from plastic bottles and wooden pallets "Lifegate environmental projects"

The Lifegate aid project for families who have fallen into poverty continues. Every day, 50 loaves of bread and 50 hot meals leave our building and help families who are struggling to provide themselves with basic foodstuffs. We have been involved in this important project since the start of the war over a year ago.



"Cooking and baking for people in need"



Two young people joined us in January. Usama is learning in the Lifegate laundry and is enjoying his work. Dima is a participant in the confectionery training program at the Talitha kumi school in Beit Jala, which has had a friendly relationship with us for many years. She is completing an internship in the Lifegate bakery and pastry shop.



Usama



Dima

After a long period of intensive preparation, **the Lifegate Center is to be expanded this year** to provide space for the increased requests from the population for rehabilitation places for very severely disabled children, autistic children, assistive devices, therapies (1st floor), as well as opportunities for further education, training, parent programs and international conferences, seminars, advanced training and meetings on topics of medical developments in the field of assistive devices and therapies (two remaining floors). Lifegate's international contacts to neighboring countries, but also to the USA and above all to Joni and Friends Ministries, are intended to provide usable space for these important and peace-promoting programs. Joni Erikson Tada and Samuel Koch have been appointed patrons of these two floors. Both are international role models in their work with people with disabilities, are friends with each other and are very committed to our work.



Samuel Koch



Joni Erikson Tada



In addition to wheelchairs and aids, courses are to be offered for people working with the disabled and church staff, as well as family camps for families with disabled family members. Lifegate took over the coordination of Joni and Friends activities in the Middle East and North Africa two years ago and is in the process of establishing contacts in Greece, Cyprus and Italy and involving them in this work. In January this year, I was again invited to a staff meeting of the international Joni and Friends team in Los Angeles. Despite the fires not far away, I was able to experience a safe and richly blessed week, listening to colleagues from India, various countries in South America, Serbia, Ukraine, China and the USA and reporting from our region.

Of course, the participants were particularly interested in the war situation in our country. The American team with Joni Erikson lovingly looked after us, gave us biblical impressions that were both uplifting and enriching and discussed plans for the work in 2025 with us. A service in a Los Angeles church on Sunday gave us an insight into the life of a church that had welcomed and integrated people with disabilities. A meeting with many committed volunteers and Joni and Friends staff from the USA rounded off this trip to the USA. I returned to the Middle East full of gratitude.



"Animation of the finished Lifegate Center"

A draft program of the Israeli Alyn Hospital in Jerusalem, where many children with disabilities are medically and therapeutically rehabilitated and with whom we have been working successfully for years for the benefit of our Palestinian Lifegate children, proposes Lifegate to the Israeli Ministry of Health as a bridge to children with injuries and disabilities in Gaza, who can then also be admitted to the Lifegate Center (last two floors) accompanied by a parent and receive medical care in Jerusalem at Alyn Hospital and then receive temporary therapeutic rehabilitation at Lifegate. This program, which will be presented to international donors, would fit well with Lifegate's unifying work, which always promotes peace and understanding. We are curious to see whether it will find an open ear and heart among all decision-makers.

Hope and fear

This is how one could describe the situation in the country after a fragile ceasefire in Lebanon and Gaza has held until now and the first Israeli hostages have been released in exchange for many Hamas fighters in Israeli prisons. Further comments, details and background information can be found in the local and international media and are important!

The joy of the invaded Israeli people to see living family members again after more than a year is huge, but the concern about whether there will be further releases and who will govern the Gaza Strip in the future is also present everywhere. What solutions will be found for the Palestinian people in Gaza and

the West Bank so that they can live in peace and freedom (without resorting to violent resistance and terror)? Who will ensure the security of the people on Israel's borders in the Gaza Strip and north to Lebanon and can there be a repeat of October 7? How can the Iranian nuclear bomb be prevented and will the Houthis in Yemen fire more missiles? There are many questions but so far not many answers.

We pray that hatred and discord will come to an end and that people who want to live together in peace will be strengthened to speak out courageously and work for a future with or alongside one another.

Humanly speaking, it will take years for wounds to heal and trust to grow anew. But this is exactly where we as Christians, who know about reconciliation and its price (Jesus' death on the cross), want to make our contribution. Please pray with and for us for daily hope, the power of reconciliation and creative "steps towards peace". Thank you!



We would like to thank Maria, Andreas and Walter Moreth from the bottom of our hearts for their many years of wonderful work on the Lifegate calendar in Germany, which will continue to accompany many people throughout the year. They are taking their well-deserved "calendar retirement".

With kind regards and blessings

Yours, Burghard Schunkert and the Lifegate team