

Lifegate in November 2025

Summer had requested an extension in our country, and even though it is November we were still wearing T-shirts. Only on one weekend were we blessed with the first long-awaited, substantial rain.

“Families visiting Lifegate Garden”

It was precisely on this "winter weekend" that our annual family retreat, supported by Joni and Friends, took place under the theme "Unifying and Strengthening Family Members". Eighteen families enjoyed two fulfilling days at our guesthouse. Once again, we were supported by a team of young people from the Immanuel Church in Bethlehem, who lovingly cared for the children with disabilities and their siblings. I shared this year's biblical themes, chosen by Joni and Friends, with a member of the church staff. We learned about the person of Moses, explored the life and family of Zacchaeus, the tax collector from Jericho, and considered the story of the washing of the feet, the example Jesus gave us. Fun evening programs, mosaic craft sessions, and ample opportunity for conversation and exchange were all part of these encouraging days. Our well-being was exceptionally well cared for at the guesthouse, and all participants returned home grateful.



Family time in Lifegate Garden



The unusual tale of a “little” bell

It was truly an impossible story that came to our attention in 2024. An Evangelical pastor, deeply connected to Israel and Palestine, together with friends with horse lovers in Germany and us at Lifegate, was planning a small peace mission to the Holy Land. In Germany, a peace bell was cast from melted-down weapons from the Second World War, and this bell was to be transported overland by horse-drawn carts to Jerusalem and installed in a suitable location. The "Peace Track" project actually started at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, and surely someone will one day write a little book about this adventurous journey.

The intrepid group of extraordinary people were not deterred by the adversities along the way, by obstacles, borders, or entry bans, nor by a major war in the Middle East, and arrived in Jerusalem in November. Unfortunately, the horses were not allowed to enter the country for the final leg of the journey due to special vaccination and quarantine regulations, but the carriage still reached its destination. In a ceremonial event on November 13, 2025, the bell was presented to a school in Jerusalem where Jewish and Arab children are taught together – thus symbolizing solidarity and support for this important work. The joy among the Germans who had completed a long and arduous journey, as well as among us locals, was immense. We had recommended this school – our small contribution to an endeavor that no one thought possible, but which, through faith and perseverance, was realized.



The headmistress of the "Hand in Hand" school in Jerusalem accepts the bell and a loaf of bread that was brought along, which was then shared with all the guests.



"Further training and new perspectives for our therapy department"

The Neumann/Weberpals family, this time joined by Tina, Georg's wife, came for another training series for the Lifegate therapist team. While Georg continued to teach the PNF therapy he had started in previous training sessions to the physiotherapists, Tina worked with the occupational therapists on the Galileo training device, which they had brought along and donated. This device uses vibrations to stimulate body parts, improve balance, and enhance sensorimotor skills. Our team had an intensive exchange with the two of them and was rewarded with a certificate of participation at the end. Our "Gateway to Life" board member, Torsten Neumann and his wife looked after the four children they had brought along, some of whom were suffering from a virus. Torsten helped prepare the Lifegate olive oil for transport and had in-depth discussions with the workshop management and with me (Burghard) about future deliveries. We sincerely thank you for the wonderful time we spent together and the fantastic investment in our therapy work at Lifegate!





"Newly trained Lifegate therapist team"

“Parenting Training” by Erik Praetorius

For many years we at Lifegate have worked closely with the parents of the children. We want to continuously intensify and expand this collaboration. We aim to empower the parents of children in our early intervention program to interact with their children in everyday life in a way that best supports their development. To this end, our special education teacher, Erik Praetorius, together with our social worker, Marianna, launched a parent training program in October. In a total of five sessions, parents learn why children with disabilities learn and develop differently, what helps them, and how they, as parents, can specifically support their children. Our focus is on teaching parents how to engage in developmentally supportive play with their children.

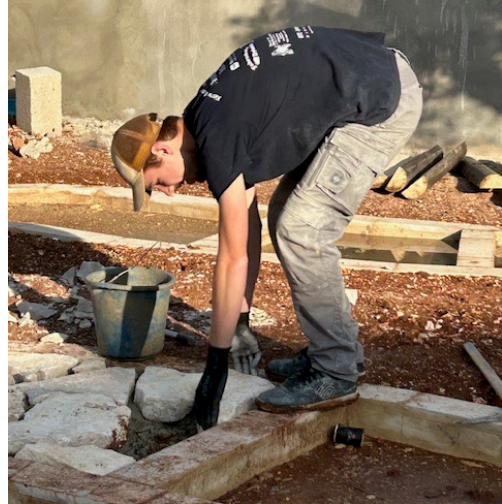
Play can lead to development and learning in all areas. When a child builds a house with building blocks together with their mother, they learn new fine motor skills, interact and acquire social skills, communicate verbally or nonverbally with their mother, see different colors and shapes, and can hear and learn their names. After discussing various principles for playing together in theory, at our third meeting we watched several videos of play scenes that the mothers had sent us. They then gave each other encouraging feedback on how much of what they had learned what each mother in the video was already implementing.

It was very encouraging to observe how many skills the mothers already possessed and how motivated they were to improve playtime with their children and try out new strategies. The mother of a four-year-old girl with Down syndrome reported that in her video recording, her daughter did some things with her for the first time, such as sorting balloons by color and repeating some words after her. In December, we will also begin these training sessions with the children's fathers. We hope that these shared playtimes will become a regular part of the families lives, and that we will thus have the most important people for the children—their parents—actively involved in the joint support team.



„Moving forward with great strides“

This is how one could describe the intensive two weeks that Kurt, Reno, and Frank spent giving our hill on the neighboring property a “face”, thus enriching the sensory and adventure garden with yet another attraction. The time flew by far too quickly, but many children will benefit from the results for many years to come! A heartfelt thank you for your cooperation, friendship, and active support!



Word kept

Our initiative in a nearby village with many residents, including children and young people with disabilities, has entered a new phase. We installed grab bars in bathrooms and showers in several homes, and our orthopedic technician examined some children to determine if they needed orthotics. Additional wheelchairs were distributed to those in need. Next, we plan to meet with the owners of the local quarries, hoping they will fund the salaries of two therapists. This could lead to the opening of a small therapy center, which is urgently needed. We're working on it.



Grab bars are installed, a child is measured by the Lifegate orthopedic technician, and wheelchairs are delivered – a village experiences hope!



„The delicious Lifegate olive oil is 'packaged' and on its way to Germany.“

“Animals are part of our lives.”

The visit with our special needs students to a farm with many animals was a particular highlight in November. The animals were introduced to us and explained to us; we were allowed to pet them and learn how to interact with them. The children overcame their initial fear of touching the animals and learned to accept them as friends and also as helpers for us humans.



„Company-outing to a World Heritage Site“

The Arab town of Battir is 5 km from Beit Jala and has a rich history. Traces of early settlement date back to 3000 BC. The Jewish town of Betar served as a refuge for the Bar Kokhba rebels from the Romans in 135 AD. Today, approximately 4000 people live in the Arab town, and a Jewish Betar also developed not far from the Arab town. The ancient railway line from Jerusalem to Jaffa on the Mediterranean, dating from the Turkish period, ran directly through this small town. Battir was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of its ancient terraced fields, which were irrigated by equally ancient water channels. A beautiful hiking trail leads through a hilly landscape from Beit Jala to this spot, and the Lifegate team traveled there in a cheerful group in summery temperatures. The final stop was a very nice restaurant with a breathtaking view and delicious food. A wonderful team outing that we will be talking about for a long time.



„ Terraces from ancient times“



„ Rest on a rock along the way “

Friendly people visiting Lifegate

After more than two years, we were delighted to welcome our first guests from two tour groups who had included Lifegate in their itineraries. First, a personal friend and experienced Israel expert, Alexander Schick, visited us for the first time with his group and, along with his wife Karo and many other interested people, learned about our work. A few days later, our long-time friend, supporter, and author of the book "Welcome to the House of Laughter", Christoph Zehendner, came with a group. It was a heartwarming reunion with many familiar faces at Lifegate. Both groups had lunch with us and enjoyed a sightseeing day in Bethlehem, which we had organized. Our world, which had shrunk considerably over the past two years, suddenly became much larger, brighter, and friendlier again because people were showing interest in our work. It was truly a blessing!

Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

As the eventful year of 2025 slowly draws to a close, we would like to sincerely thank all our friends, the people in organizations, foundations, and our association in Germany for their commitment to Lifegate's work. With your help, we were able to financially weather another challenging year with very limited local income and offer many children and young people extensive support and thus a future. We warmly ask for your continued support in the new year.

Christmas

A long journey through wooded territory from Nazareth to Bethlehem, over the mountains of Samaria, with wolves, bears, leopards, snakes, and scorpions, presumably the Syrian elephants, and many a two-legged robber. The arduous climb to Jerusalem and Bethlehem awaited the heavily pregnant Mary and Joseph at the end; apparently, no one there welcomed their arrival. The small Jewish village of Bethlehem (around 300 inhabitants) was completely overcrowded. It was here that the young David was anointed King of Israel by the prophet Samuel. Joseph came from this lineage, and therefore the family had to be registered here in the census.

Jesus was born among animals in a stable and among very simple people; hygiene was not a concern, and a kind of shroud to wrap him in and a manger to lay him in were initially sufficient. A bright star in the sky and a multitude of "heavenly beings" with light and praise. This humble birth was actually a tragedy, yet it had been foretold by the prophet Micah 700 years earlier.

Herod, king of the land, and wise men who had traveled from afar, experts in astronomy, knew that a special person had been born. Herod wanted to have him killed immediately (unsuccessfully), while the others worshipped him and brought gifts.

God showed solidarity with the poorest of the poor in the arrival of his son into our world. The family fled to Egypt and later returned to Nazareth. At the ages of 12 and 33, Jesus encounters us again and begins His saving ministry on earth, which culminates in the redemption of humanity through His death on the cross and concludes with His overcoming of death in the resurrection and His return to His Father in heaven. Prior to this, he had ensured a constant 24/7 connection to Him through his Holy Spirit. Whoever accepts the gift of salvation in faith enters into a personal relationship with Jesus and subsequently transforms our world right where we are. Connecting to the source of power, Jesus Christ, changes us and enables us to be salt and light, living and sharing the hope given to us everywhere. Thus, we can wholeheartedly celebrate Jesus' birthday today, and He is right there with us!



Joyful and blessed Christmas

Yours sincerely, Burghard Schunkert and the Lifegate Team