

Lifegate in September 2026



"The sun rises on the just and the unjust," especially beautiful in our country.

A month filled with memories and media recaps of the horrific events of October 7, 2023, and the devastating consequences of the ensuing war, which is still ongoing and continues to haunt Israel and the entire region. A month of an election campaign entering its final phase in Israel before the vote on October 29. A month of the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, and the Feast of Tabernacles, when entire communities gather in a hut—on balconies or in the streets—to share meals, host guests, and commemorate the Exodus from Egypt with Moses, with the more hardy even sleeping in the hut. A month of prayers for good winter rains, of giving thanks to God for the year's harvest, and for the Ten Commandments, which Moses received on Mount Horeb and which still help to hold our world together. A month of horrific violence perpetrated by Jewish settlers in the West Bank and demonstrations by the ultra-Orthodox Jewish population, who would rather emigrate than contribute in any way to the state where they live in comfortable circumstances, while secular Israelis are forced to perform military service nonstop. In September, a staff member at our special needs school lost her mother-in-law and her daughter in an Israeli airstrike in Gaza. The suffering is often unimaginable and heartbreaking, and we encounter it far too frequently on all sides. We are shaken, we stand by them, we try to find words of comfort, and so often we have no answers to the question

"Why?" Every day we turn to the One who himself endured and overcame suffering, shame, rejection, and an innocent death. He can and wants to stand by us in these times, to comfort us, and to lift us up again. To Him we bring all these events, and it is in Him that we place our hope and ask for the strength to make things better each day. His love will have the final word and may have its effect on our lives today and every day.

Smartboards have arrived and are now operational

We are delighted to announce the installation of smartboards in our early intervention rooms and at the Lifegate special needs school. On these large touchscreens, the children learn using programs that we design ourselves and that are already available. Working with these boards encourages interaction among the children, who can express their answers, hear, see, and move around by moving objects or actively participating in a situation or process. This stimulates several of the children's senses, and we are thrilled about the progress this now makes possible in our daily educational work.



Active mothers in our work with severely disabled children



The mothers of the children we support are invited to participate in our regular meetings. We encourage these women to share some of their often busy time with us and other mothers and to actively participate in these gatherings. For example, in September, two mothers of children with severe disabilities introduced their children, the daily tasks and challenges they face, and their hope that their children will thrive. They were grateful for the attention and support their children receive at Lifegate and were pleased, along with the other mothers, that their concerns are heard at Lifegate. "We want to give these often isolated mothers something," they said—a good breakfast, an outing, plenty of attention, and also some further education. They are often in the spotlight for the first time because of their child's disability, as they have frequently faced rejection in their communities due to this child. The women are open with each other and with us, actively participate in the support they learn at Lifegate and at home.

From the special needs school

At Lifegate, we work with local schools to help ensure that children with disabilities are accepted into these schools. Often, the doors are still closed to our children due to teachers' uncertainties and anxieties, as well as large class sizes. In our joint encounter programs, the children and their accompanying teachers often overcome their initial reservations after the first few meetings, become friends, and develop positive relationships. Every year, we successfully integrate 3-5 children with special needs into mainstream schools. We support these steps with university students who spend time assisting in mainstream classes to ensure the successful integration of our children..



"Fear of contact" is no longer an issue!

From the workshops

Christmas is not far away and we are busy producing nativity scenes for the beautifully carved figures made of olive wood, an old traditional craft from Bethlehem.



In the carpentry workshop, the packaging boxes for the new olive oil shipment are being made. The 5-liter canisters will be placed in these beautiful wooden boxes, which many customers can then easily convert into birdhouses for their gardens. We hope our olive oil will arrive in Germany in January.



The next greenhouse made from waste materials is currently being built in our yard. We're using wooden pallets and plastic bottles, which we cut up, flatten with an iron, and then use as walls. Waste materials are being given a new purpose. The greenhouse will be used to grow vegetables, flowers, and herbs, helping impoverished families become self-sufficient and earn a small income.



“Passing it on” with Joni and Friends

In September, I had the opportunity to visit two countries and share experiences and blessings from my life with people. In Armenia, Joni and Friends conducted an introductory workshop for a training program designed to encourage church members to recognize, welcome, and integrate people with disabilities into church life. This program, prepared by the Joni and Friends Armenia team, also included participation from JAF staff members from the USA, Serbia, Turkey, and Jordan.

A joyful community, very friendly and open encounters and exchanges, good conversations, an interesting course, and a visit to a local institution were all part of these intense days in Armenia, which culminated in an excursion to an old monastery and a temple in a beautiful natural setting. From Turkey, Albania was the next destination. Together with a very experienced and dedicated JAF colleague from Serbia, responsible for Eastern Europe and the Balkans, and the American director of Joni and Friends for Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, we met local Christians who work with people with disabilities and want to expand this work in the country. Here, too, we encountered many open-minded people with many questions, visited a church community, and met in a café, which was attended by many pastors, social workers, and therapists.

dsA highlight in southern Albania was a visit to a school supported by Germany, where a former friend of mine is also involved and which offers a small program for autistic young people. The headmistress mentioned a small orthopedic workshop offering therapy right next door and invited us to visit. The workshop's manager had already attended the morning's "Cafe Meeting" and was delighted by our arrival. When she heard about my German background, she mentioned a German technician who had volunteered with her, whose name reminded me of a former orthopedic mechanic at Lifegate. Next, she spoke of an older German gentleman, and this time it was I who said the name: "Rudolf." "Yes, Rudolf," she confirmed with a laugh. Simon and Rudolf are former Lifegate volunteers (an orthopedic technician and a master orthopedic shoemaker). They met and became friends at Lifegate and now volunteer in other countries as well.

Thus, I encountered a piece of Lifegate in the heart of southern Albania, and I was very happy and grateful for a commitment that already extends far beyond the borders of our deployment location, Beit Jala.

Traveling to these countries brings back many memories of the early days of our work in Beit Jala in the 80s and 90s, and I am happy to be able to encourage people to take small but courageous steps towards a future with the people with disabilities entrusted to their care and their parents. We are now exploring where, at the request of the locals in these countries, our expertise, experience, and commitment can be applied, and Joni and Friends and Lifegate will consider these requests with open eyes, ears, and hearts and try to provide assistance.

We are grateful for all “gateways to life” for people with disabilities, wherever they may open with God’s help!

Joni and Friends Beyond Suffering Course Introduction in Yerevan Armenia



Albania



New female employees on the team

Since last month, I've been delighted to have a young colleague supporting me with the tasks for the Joni and Friends activities in the West Bank, and she's already settled in wonderfully. Catherine Qubrosi (right) is the wife of our social worker, Peter Qubrosi; they have two children, and Catherine is passionate about the JAF work and coordinates the activities with me.

Zaina Yatim (left) supports us in managing projects at Lifegate. She is also married and has been familiar with our work for some time. She made a conscious decision to leave her previous job and support Lifegate's work, and we are grateful that she is now familiarizing herself with projects involving German organizations and helping to cover this crucial area.



Share in the joy and celebration

The German school Talitha kumi in Beit Jala celebrated its **175th anniversary** and invited us to participate in the festivities and set up a small Lifegate stand.

For many years, our work has been closely linked to this school. Our wheelchair basketball team trains every Friday in the gym. Individual children from Lifegate are integrated into the school. Regular exchanges between classes from Talitha and the Lifegate school help our children accept and become friends. We are allowed to use the school's facilities for staff training, which is open to everyone in the country. Mr. Torsten Neumann, a member of the Lifegate board, also supports the work of this school. On this special occasion, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the school's sponsor, the Berlin Mission Society, the current director, Mr. Birger Rese, and all the friends who have known and supported both institutions for many years. On this special day, we were able to present our wide selection of whole-grain breads from the Lifegate bakery to the many visitors and guests and to highlight our work.

We wish the school and our excellent cooperation in many areas many more happy and blessed years! Thank you very much!



Headmaster Birger Rese (left) and Torsten Neumann, TzL board member, present a personal donation and express great interest in the Lifegate (bread) sales stand.

Miracles are part of our lives

Many people in Israel and around the world witnessed the news on September 29th from the plane en route from Dubai to Tel Aviv, which was about to be crashed into Ben Gurion Airport. The courageous Indian pilot, though seriously injured, opened the cockpit door, allowing the would-be hijacker (a co-pilot from Oman) to be overpowered. A passenger then stabilized the aircraft from its descent. Two former pilots who were also on board landed the plane safely in Saudi Arabia, and all 174 passengers, predominantly Israeli, were rescued.

On the morning of September 28th, as our young people from Lifegate were already happily seated on the coach in Beit Jala, ready to depart for a retreat with an Israeli group in Tabgha, I received a message on my phone in Armenia that the entire West Bank had been closed that morning due to fears of terrorist attacks during the Jewish holidays, thus revoking our travel permit. After contacting our team and offering prayers both locally and in Armenia, we decided to proceed to the border checkpoint by coach. The soldiers inspected the coach, the passengers, and their identification documents, and then wished us a safe journey.

Our young people enjoyed a wonderful week at the Sea of Galilee, including a great encounter, a trip to Capernaum, and fun swimming in the pool. We had waited three years for this trip, and all participants returned happy and safe.

Games, morning gymnastics, excursions and shared meals in Tabgha on the Sea of Galilee



Outlook

Several Lifegate friends have announced their intention to visit us in October and offer their practical support. We are delighted that this will strengthen our community and we are confident that we will have some wonderful results to report.

The first groups of visitors are also arriving at Lifegate and Lifegate Garden, a blessing after a very long time when we were almost exclusively among ourselves.

We hope and pray that our region will find lasting peace and that moderate and conciliatory people will bravely prevail.

Please join us in prayer and continue to support us.

With kind regards, Burghard Schunkert

