

Lifegate in May 2026

A month filled with travel, excursions, special services and positive experiences is behind us, and we would like to share a little bit of our "joyful month" of May with you.



...Stately oak tree in Travemünde...

...Visiting good friends in not always so good times...

SK Tours, a travel company in Jerusalem with which we have been friends for many years, invited friends from Germany to participate in a "taster hiking trip," and some brave souls came. Among them was my personal and Lifegate friend **Christoph Zehendner**, a theologian, journalist, and author.

(among others: "Welcome to the House of Laughter"), singer-songwriter and musician. Christoph, accompanied by guitar virtuoso **Werner Hucks**, gave a concert in the Johanniter Hospice in Jerusalem's Old City. It was a wonderful evening with many guests and very moving songs and readings.



Christoph Zehendner and Werner Hucks in concert

After the hiking trip, Christoph and other guests also visited Lifegate. It was a joyful reunion with our children, young people, and the team, and here on the **right with Therwat** from our office.

Welcome to Lifegate.

A new child has joined our early intervention program. When we welcome children mid-year, we make a particular effort to help them settle into the group, our facilities and resources, and the many new faces. Our two "Snoezelen rooms" are a great help in this process. This therapy combines beautiful light effects with calming music, often creating an atmosphere of beauty, comfort, and security. Our new Lifegate child is experiencing their first encounters with a world that was previously hidden from them.



...A trip back to prehistoric times...

It was a special moment when a group of Lifegate children encountered creatures from bygone eras for the first time, felt their size and power, and even heard some of the sounds played in the museum. A true immersion into the long-gone world of dinosaurs. During such visits and excursions, we meet other children and school groups, creating a sense of normalcy; our children are included, they belong, and they aren't hidden away in any institution or home!



Natural History Museum in Bethlehem

..On the Run..

We were delighted that a marathon was organized and held again this year in both Jerusalem and Bethlehem. While the number of international guests and athletes wasn't as high as in previous years, it was still a highlight in May for our children, young people, and the Lifegate team. With specially made T-shirts and jerseys, beautiful, pleasant weather, and safe roads and paths, the Lifegate team was ready to take to the course. "We wheelchair users and people with special abilities belong here!" was the message of our participation. We wanted to share the joy of running, rolling, and walking together. It was a wonderful day with many happy faces, and we're already looking forward to next year.



The Lifegate Marathon Team 2026

...Training and workshops...

Another greenhouse, built from waste materials, was moved to a new location. Our gardener Khader is explaining to his apprentice, Ben Bella, that he will now be responsible for this greenhouse and the plants inside. A few days later, we transported the greenhouse to the young man's village.

Our donated laser welding machine in action. With this device, we can completely clean rusted metal parts using a laser beam (pictured: an old garden bench), and weld all metals together (cold welding) without any fumes or environmental hazards. We are grateful for this important upgrade to our equipment in the Lifegate metalworking department.



..Joni and Friends..

We were delighted to provide the first 35 people with the new wheelchairs that arrived from the USA in April. The Lifegate team, this time supported by our visitor Torsten Neumann (board member of Lifegate Gateway to Life Germany, **pictured on the right**), had set up various stations in the courtyard and our workshops, where the invited people in need of a wheelchair were warmly welcomed. The wheelchairs were adjusted to each individual with the help of our therapists and technicians. The old Lifegate motto, "A wheelchair must fit like a glove," was once again put into practice. In addition to the wheelchair, people received a small booklet with Joni Erikson's life story in Arabic and a Bible, if they were open to it. We want to share the hope given to us through faith and life with Jesus Christ in practical action and our witness to others, and we know that every seed sown will one day bear fruit!



Wheelchair fitting and distribution to 35 young and elderly people

...Visit to Lifegate Garden...

We invited mothers and children from the department for children with severe disabilities to our guesthouse in Bethlehem, where they spent a happy day filled with activities, a delicious breakfast in our blooming garden, and relaxing in our comfortable rooms. The mothers are especially grateful for the opportunity to enjoy a change of scenery during these challenging times, and they are learning from our team how to support their children's development at home. The atmosphere at Lifegate Garden offers a sense of being "abroad," far removed from everyday problems. We are incredibly grateful for this place and its positive impact on our staff and guests from both home and abroad!



Being and learning together in Lifegate Garden

Awwad, our orthopedic technician, is visiting Germany.

To our great delight, our former employee Jonas Weinholz (orthopedic shoemaker and technician) suggested inviting our local technician Awwad, whom he had briefly trained in Beit Jala last year, to the assistive devices trade fair in Leipzig. This fair showcases the latest rehabilitation aids from around the world and serves as a networking hub for materials and exchange within the industry. Awwad accepted the invitation and also met our professional orthopedic shoemaker, Rudolf Schöning, during his trip. He returned safely to Bethlehem a few days ago, and we eagerly await his reports and the experiences he gained.



Awwad with Rudolf Schöning from Hamburg and Jonas and a friend in Germany

Friends in need – an important look beyond the fence...

The Catholic St. James Parish in Jerusalem, with its dedicated priest, Father Piotr Zelazko, and Monika Faes, a close friend of Lifegate from Switzerland, has been caring for young people for many years. These young people were born and raised in Israel, speak Hebrew, and know no other country. They are the children of foreign aid workers from the Philippines, India, and other countries who work in Israel with work permits, caring for the elderly, working in hotels, and performing many other essential tasks. With few exceptions, these young people have not received Israeli identity documents; they are essentially stateless and live in constant fear of deportation to countries they have never known. They are allowed to attend school in Israel, and many people in Israel are working to ensure they are officially registered and that Israel is recognized as their homeland.

The St. James Parish has established meeting places in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and provides assistance to many of these often single mothers and their children and young people. To raise awareness of the plight of these people, a short film about the lives of this small minority was produced. It was screened at the Cinematheque in Jerusalem and can be viewed on YouTube. Our friendly connection to the community, its active members, and the young people is intended to help them build a life in this country that gives them hope and a perspective. We encourage you to watch the film (in English).

...Around Lübeck...

In May, the time had come: many members and friends of the Lifegate Gateway to Life association met in Lübeck for their annual general meeting. This year's host was the Baptist church in Lübeck, to which **Barbara Könnicke**, a Lifegate board member, belongs.

Following morning meeting in a harmonious atmosphere, excellently prepared by our German office manager, **Ms. Maria Zaidan, and the Lifegate board**, the association's activities and figures from the past year were presented, discussed, and approved by the various departments. This was followed by an open evening at the Baptist Church, which was well-attended, and where I gave a slideshow presentation about our past Lifegate year in Beit Jala. It was a year marked by much tragic news from our region, yet also full of positive experiences and events from our Lifegate work. Many friends from all over Germany had come, and I was able to continue my journey feeling very grateful, fulfilled, and strengthened by these encounters.



Annual General Meeting of Lifegate Gateway to Life e.V. 2026 in Lübeck

On the eve of Lübeck, I accepted an invitation from the *Christian-Jewish Society in Hamburg*. and was able to present the work of Lifegate to many interested listeners and see dear friends and volunteers again.

The *YMCA Seniors Initiative* I met with around 80 people in Bad Alexanderbad in the Fichtel Mountains, my next stop on my short trip through Germany. It was a reunion with my spiritual role model and mentor, YMCA Secretary Helmut Barthel and his wife, in whose youth work in Gießen I grew up and came to faith. I was also there with other dear friends (the Parzany couple, Thomas Brendel, and the Werth couple) who have left their spiritual mark on my life and have supported our Lifegate work and me personally for many years, as well as introducing the work of Lifegate to many people. I was able to express my heartfelt thanks and share a lot of new information.



From left: Mr. and Mrs. Parzany, Thomas Brendel, Mr. and Mrs. Barthel and Mr. and Mrs. Werth

in a small town not far from Giessen (my hometown). A friendly community educator (she had once visited us in Beit Jala) and the Protestant pastor had invited me and gave me a very warm welcome. Based on experience, I expected up to 30 people at 5:00 PM in towns of this size. I was quite surprised

when the parish hall of the Protestant church gradually filled up, more chairs were brought in, and probably around 150 people had arrived. After the lecture, many volunteers had prepared a delicious buffet, and people happily stayed to chat and share their thoughts. It was a blessed evening that ended at 9:00 PM and brought me together with some people I hadn't seen in 50 years.



Presentation in the Protestant church in Niederwetz

At the end of my time in Germany, I learned about a talk by my German friend **Georg Rössler** (a partner in SK Tours in Jerusalem), who lives in Jerusalem, at the Christian-Jewish Society in Giessen on the domestic political situation in Israel. It was a great pleasure for me to surprise the organizers, Pastor Wolfgang Grieb and Georg Rössler, along with Christoph Zehendner (who had just visited us in Beit Jala) and his wife Ingrid. There, in a well-attended room, I also met a former Lifegate volunteer and a Palestinian woman from Beit Jala with her German husband.



*Left: Christoph, Gedi
and Georg from SK
Tours*

*Right: Christoph and
Ingrid Zehendner*

My son Mika drove me to several appointments, and we had a blessed time together. We were able to visit the Baltic Sea near Travemünde (close to Lübeck) for the first time (for him). Meetings with family and friends, and a church service at Move Church in Gießen, found their place between the lectures. In times of war and mortal danger, one learns not to postpone important encounters, but to seize them when possible.



Pray and work

This sentence from Benedict of Nursia has stayed with me since my church history research on the Benedictines, which I wrote during my theological studies 50 years ago. For almost five years now, we have been living in a kind of "state of emergency" in our country. First, there were the years of the pandemic with their many restrictions, resulting in almost no visitors. Then, when tourism was beginning to recover slightly came the events of October 7, 2023, and the subsequent war wiped these beginnings out. Since then, almost no groups and very few individual travelers have come to the country, and therefore none have visited Lifegate. It was often these visitors who got to know us, found our work valuable, and became our friends and supporters upon returning to Germany. Many volunteers who regularly visited us, lived and worked with us, also continued their involvement with Lifegate's work in Germany afterward. **We realize that we have missed five whole years of these natural opportunities to find new friends and supporters and to grow.**

The war has drastically increased the cost of living in our country, and this is also having an impact in Germany, for example at gas stations. In addition, the exchange rate of the NIS (new Israeli shekel) against the USD and the euro has changed drastically to our disadvantage. While a year ago we could exchange almost 4 NIS for one euro, now it's only 3.25 NIS. All Lifegate obligations (which must all be paid in NIS) have therefore become significantly more expensive.

We work daily, and we work hard, and at the same time we pray that the Lord of all good things, who knows what we all need, will find ways to provide us with what we need month after month for our work. We also pray that people will answer the call to support and share in our work.

So we look on confidently, like little *Esther Neumann*, into the next month, and we cast all our anxiety on him who promised to care for us and to revive us in all our troubles, Matthew 11:28



With warmest greetings and blessings

Yours sincerely, Burghard Schunkert and the Lifegate Team