

News from our team

Our team is grateful for the stability of their jobs during this difficult year. Marian Nasrallah started in the early intervention department. Maria Abu Zolfo and Ghada Ghneimat joined us at the school. We are very happy to welcome two new colleagues to the workshops – George Musallem in our aids department and Awad Bardawel in orthopaedic technology. Jonas, who worked for us as an orthopaedic shoemaker and technician in 2023 and was brought back to Germany by his sending organisation after the outbreak of the war, supported us for three weeks in October. During this time, he was able to familiarise our new orthopaedic technician, Awad, with his former LIFEGATE workshop and train the young man. A wonderful, unplanned coincidence. We wish all new team members God's blessing and every success.

Reflections

by Burghard Schunkert

“Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

2 Corinthians 9:6

In our garden project, we plant flowers, vegetables and herbs. Before we can do that we have to prepare the soil, loosen it up and add natural fertiliser to provide nutrients.

Sowing seeds requires preparation. When we plan an event, a visit or an important trip, we prepare ourselves mentally and practically, thinking about what materials we need to take with us and what tools we want to use. We make sure that the laptop is working and that we didn't forget the loudspeaker. Even as we prepare, we ask for God's blessing, that the appointment fits into our schedules and that transport, arrival and perhaps overnight accommodation can be organised.

For our planting season in the garden, we pray for sufficient rain in winter and enough water during the long hot summer. As the little plants grow, they need care and attention and sometimes our protection.

At LIFEGATE, we pass on God's gift of love in our daily loving care for children and parents. We tell the stories of the Bible to our young adults in our devotions at the beginning of the week and in our communal festivities. We pray with the children before meals, and we are not 'stingy' in our actions and words. On the contrary, over the years we have been able to experience wonderful 'harvests', and every child and young adult who has developed and blossomed in our work is for us the harvest of the seed we have sown. Sowing and harvesting belong together in our daily work.

We don't have to go into our garden. A good conversation after a long silence, a comforting hug, a phone call or a message, a Christmas card with a personal greeting and always helping hands at the right moment – all of this is already sown seed that can blossom and bear fruit in our relationships with people. Wherever we devote ourselves wholeheartedly to God's plan, he gives us a hundredfold and a thousandfold in return.

We wish our friends and readers a merry and blessed Christmas season, a good start to the new year and many small and large harvests.

Yours, Burghard Schunkert

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Photo: LIFEGATE

Children from the LIFEGATE special school with Rasha Abu Aitah, our friendly headmistress

Dear friends!

It's a mixture of sensations. Relief, unwinding and apprehension—that's pretty much how the situation in our country is these days in the run-up to Christmas. It is a great relief that the guns in the Gaza Strip are mostly silent and that the last surviving Israeli hostages were released in October. After two years of daily tension, accompanied by alarms, sirens and rushing to shelters day and night, we are now experiencing a new normality that is slowly taking hold. Although the supply and security situation in the Gaza Strip has improved significantly compared to the period before October, it remains critical and fragile. This makes it all the more positive that shops and restaurants are reopening in the undamaged part of the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank and Israel, the first coaches carrying foreign guests are appearing, and we are delighted to be able to welcome visitors back to LIFEGATE in Beit Jala.

There are considerable doubts and questions as to whether the imposed ceasefire will hold in the long term and what will happen next in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Israel. Will the Palestinian population respect the State of Israel and will Israelis respect a Palestinian state on their doorstep? In addition, the security situation in the border region between Israel, Lebanon and Syria is very tense. Almost every day, attacks cause destruction, injuries and, in some cases, deaths. The Revolutionary Guards in Iran are arming themselves heavily in order to be prepared for

a new war after the war with Israel in June. And the current Turkish government is communicating that, following in the footsteps of the Seljuks and Ottomans, it wants to assert its power interests in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. In addition, the current US administration is concluding military, political and economic deals with the rulers of the Arabian Peninsula, which further increases the uncertainty.

We know from the Bible that the history of the peoples in our region and of God's chosen people, Israel, has never been easy. Conflicts and wars, but also times of peace, security and development have alternated. God chose Jerusalem as a special place of activity, and Jesus was born into a Jewish family to redeem the whole world. All nations and people in our world who want to live in peace with the people of Israel share in the blessing and peace that only God can give. All who curse Israel and seek its destruction are dealing with none other than God Himself. The God of the Bible is a just God, and He does not let the people of Israel (and us) get away with injustice and godlessness, either then or now. But trusting in Jesus Christ – especially in these times of disorientation – we are hopeful and celebrate His birthday with Him. We pass on the peace and hope that He continually gives us every day.

Thank you very much for all your wonderful support in 2025 – stay with us in the new year!

Josiane, trainee in the LIFEGATE kitchen

Josiane is 19 years old and has been learning how to prepare delicious meals in our kitchen for two years. Before that, she attended the LIFEGATE special school for four years. Due to her selective autism, Josiane does not speak to us, but she hears us and responds to everything we say. It is her decision with whom and when she wants to speak, and we accept and respect that. Josiane speaks at home with her mother, and we hope that one day she will speak to us too.

Josiane is very motivated in her training as a chef and has become a key figure in the preparation of the 100 meals that have been cooked daily at our facility since January 2024 and provided free of charge to people in need. In addition to her practical training, we are preparing Josiane to work in a hotel or restaurant kitchen one day, enabling her to have an independent future.



As an apprentice, Josiane is a 'cornerstone' of the LIFEGATE kitchen.

New training opportunities for young people

For some time now, our team has been considering which apprenticeships we can add to the ten we already offer in order to provide opportunities for young people with various disabilities. In January, we plan to expand our training programme with several new offerings.

Young women (including those in wheelchairs) can learn manicure and nail care and design at LIFEGATE. This training can also be extended to facial cosmetics. A small hairdressing salon is to be set up where young women will be trained in hair cutting and styling. They will also be able to practise both professions at home later on – their extended families, neighbours and relatives are potential customers. A barber's shop may be added later.

Since we often have real mosaic artists as guests at LIFEGATE, we are all inspired and enthusiastic, and will introduce this craft as a vocational training programme. The young people will be taught how to create these works of art. The focus will be on motifs from our country. And perhaps beautiful mosaic gifts will soon appear in our shops in Germany?

We are busy learning how to make soap from olive oil. Starting next year, we want to train young people to make olive oil soap. Only natural ingredients are used in our soap, and we would like to sell it locally and internationally.

A piece of fertile land on the grounds of our guest house is at our disposal. Here we want to start a gardening project with young people.



Baker Nadia is part of the team at the LIFEGATE wholemeal bakery.

supplied with high quality bakery produce. Here, we hope that more bakers from Europe will come and help us refine what we have learned, expand our product range and perhaps even produce gluten-free baked goods, which are almost non-existent in our country. Young people should be able to find training and later employment in this trade. A German organisation would help prepare a foreign specialist and support them for several years.

Collaboration with Joni and Friends and other organisations

We carried out several wheelchair distributions during the year, supplying a local retirement home and hospitals with aids. As with our wheelchair distribution in Armenia, another campaign is planned for next year in Egypt. We also have contacts in Turkey, where another wheelchair distribution is planned. We are particularly pleased about our contact with the organisation MAKOM BA'LEV (translated as 'a place in the heart') in Israel, which works with people with disabilities. Regular exchanges and courses with MAKOM BA'LEV and Joni and Friends are in preparation for 2026. In November, we were once again able to hold a family retreat for families with children with disabilities in our guest house. It was a good and blessed weekend for all of us. We are very grateful for this blessed and collaborative work with Joni and Friends and are bringing our LIFEGATE experience to new countries.

Travelling through the villages around Bethlehem

It began with a visit from a small delegation who asked us to come to their village and meet the people who have many children and young people with disabilities at home. We listened carefully, asked if there was a therapist, nurse or social worker in the area, and asked to invite them along when we visited. On the agreed day, many people were waiting for us and were delighted that someone was interested in their concerns. 'Several organisations have been here before you,' we were sadly informed, but no one had ever come back. We returned a few days later. The social worker had prepared a list of visitors, and we went from house to house with a small team. The first wheelchairs and aids we brought with us were met with great joy. People are now mobile and can leave their homes. Special mattresses to prevent pressure sores were also distributed. We were able to involve a speech therapist, a nurse and a social worker from the village in our activities. We now want to invite the parents to encourage them to form a self-help group and perhaps set up a small therapy centre if the quarry owners in the village pay a monthly contribution towards the therapists' salaries. Our experience in the country has taught us to carry out all projects together with the people and to guide them towards sustainability that is in their own hands. New hope is growing in the village, and it is a joy to contribute to this. We will keep at it.

Your help counts ...!

Thanks to your help we were able to ...

- ... finance the LIFEGATE special school in autumn (€150,000);
- ... support our medical and therapeutic work with children and young people (€50,000);
- ... finance our work with parents and home visits over the past few months (€30,000).

These concerns make up a certain part of our monthly costs, which are in total about 80,000.- €. They are the most urgent of our concerns and we'd be especially grateful for your support.

With your help, we'd like to...

- ... complete the sensory garden on our property (€40,000);
- ... start several new apprenticeships at LIFEGATE in January (€120,000 for one year);
- ... finance parent work and training for employees (€50,000).

Thank you very much for your support!