

News from our team

Fortunately, our team has remained balanced and stable in recent months. Two new cleaners, Safa Mualla and Khulod Abu Rabu, replace Rita Abu Sada who left. Since his visa was not renewed, Richard Stepan returned to the U.S. after eleven years of volunteer service with LIFEGATE. Lydia Schnarr from the YMCA / CVJM University Kassel is doing an internship with us, and Melaneh Claußen joined us from Switzerland for three months and is working in the kindergarten and *LIFEGATE Garden*. Sarah Banzhaf and Merle Kellner support the group of severely handicapped children for one year and work in our shop. Many other short-term volunteers came to LIFEGATE, worked and lived with us for a few weeks. Each person leaves their good mark on our lives and work, and we are very grateful for the wonderful help we receive through these people! Thank you!

Reflections

by Burghard Schunkert

**"Mary came to the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And it came to pass, when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb."**

**Luke 1, verses 40-41**

Ein Kerem ("spring of the vine"), the place where Elizabeth and Zechariah lived, is located on the western outskirts of Jerusalem. The place, with its lush vegetation, picturesque houses and alleys, churches and monasteries, is known to every secular citizen of the city, as it is one of the few places where many restaurants are open on Shabbat. On the other hand, the story of the meeting of the two women related to each other, which is told to us by the apostle Luke, is mostly known only to Christians.

In both families the angel Gabriel had appeared, whom God used at very decisive turning points in world history. Both women are pregnant, and the already older, until then childless, Elizabeth already knows that Mary's was a very special pregnancy. Here we are told of the first meeting of John (the Baptist) and Jesus and a reaction in the body of Elizabeth: the baby leaps, presumably with joy. Later, John, the son of Elizabeth, will live in the desert and call people to repentance to God at the Jordan River, baptizing them as a sign. Jesus will come to him and be baptized (receive the Holy Spirit and the Father's confirmation), although John would have liked it to be the other way around. Jesus goes his obedient way to the cross for the redemption of all mankind. John who pointed to him is executed by Herod Agrippas.

Last week I came by chance for the first time on a walk to a small forest near Latrun. Between the trees were small stone benches to sit and rest, a quiet and peaceful atmosphere I felt in this place. On a sign in Hebrew at a gate was written: "For life" and further explained: this place is for the women who had decided not to have a child and to have an abortion. They can pray for their child here and mourn their child in peace.

May many more babies „bounce“ in happy expectant mothers, I remembered, and come into the world. After all, they cannot decide for their own lives.

We can celebrate the birth of Jesus again this year, thank God!

Happy and blessed Christmas,

Your Burghard Schunkert

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As representation and because of financing of the institution "LIFEGATE REHABILITATION", the association "Tor zum Leben - LIFEGATE Rehabilitation" was founded in the year 1993 in Germany with its board in Würzburg.

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"Tor zum Leben - LIFEGATE Rehabilitation" is a member of the Diakonische Werk of the Protestant churches of Germany and Caritas-Verband for the catholic diocese Würzburg. The dedication of LIFEGATE is based on and supported by personal and long-standing relationships with the Young Men's Christian Association, YMCA, national association in Germany, CVJM.



Children and staff of the LIFEGATE Early Childhood Center at a break during the olive harvest.

Photo: LIFEGATE

Dear friends!

In Israel's parliamentary elections on November 1, the fourth since September 2019, the right-wing nationalist parties led by B. Netanyahu won 64 of the 120 seats in the Knesset. By Israeli standards, this is a clear majority, and thus there is a chance that a newly formed government will be able to hold on to office for one four-year term. However, many people are looking with great concern at the distribution of government offices, which are being sought after and fought over by right-wing "hardliners." We hope that all people living in Israel and the Palestinian territories can, with respect and a measure of give and take, find a way to live with, or at least alongside, each other in peace, and that the political leadership will live up to its responsibilities. The Palestinian Authority, PA, appears to be significantly weakened. Armed militias of various radical groups take advantage of this and commit acts of violence against Israelis and their own population. PA security police officers often stand by and watch. In some cases, they sympathize with certain groups or are otherwise involved with them. In addition, there are many armed conflicts between family clans, which claim victims every week. Many people fear a slide into anarchy. We pray, join hands and work for peace and reconciliation. This requires faith and strength from a living source every day.

We are seeing the impact of the war in Ukraine in our country. As in many other countries, the cost of daily life has increased significantly. The euro and the US dollar have lost drastically in value against the national currency, the shekel, in the last two years.

This is unfavorable for LIFEGATE as we receive our grants and donations in euros. We are making great efforts to stay involved locally and to help ourselves. We are expanding our service sector with new initiatives such as the whole grain bakery or (with the help of local travel companies) the consulting, planning and implementation of trips and seminars in our country. We are involved in providing accommodation for guests at *LIFEGATE Garden*, in the LIFEGATE's laundry, in catering services and in the sale of workshop and bazaar items as well as olive oil in Europe. In these and other initiatives, people with disabilities are active and receive remuneration and thus appreciation for this. This is a good path that we are continuing to pursue.

There are waiting lists in all areas of support at LIFEGATE. Parents, children and young people are waiting for a place in a support group - for a gateway to life. We do not want to send anyone away empty-handed!

We sincerely ask our supporters to stay by our side and at the end of a year we say heartfelt thanks for everything that became possible with your help! We wish you a safe and happy Advent and Christmas time and assurance in faith for the new year and good and blessed common paths.

Merry Christmas, your Burghard Schunkert and the LIFEGATE Team!

### Early intervention at LIFEGATE - the start of a new life

"In our work at the LIFEGATE Center, we want what happens here to be seen". This reflects a concept of our work, and it is something we say to visitors at the beginning of a tour of the facility. Explaining we add: "In a society where people are still ashamed of people with disabilities and even partly hide them and don't want others to know about it, we want to send exactly the opposite signal: Every person is a wonderful creature of our Lord, everyone has a right to love and acceptance, to development, education and a hopeful future - and should be seen." People with disabilities and their families are welcome, the gate is wide open for you - "LIFEGATE" – a gate to life.

It is good to start supporting children in the first years of their life. For years, LIFEGATE has enjoyed a fruitful cooperation with the *Caritas Baby Hospital* in Bethlehem, which is run by the Swiss NGO "Schweizer Kinderhilfe". Here, infants have already been diagnosed by a specialized team of doctors and receive medical and therapeutic care and support in the hospital. Some of these children then come to our "aid consultation" and receive a wheelchair, an upright stander or other special aids from us.

At the age of three, we then include them in our early intervention work, and they are given a place in the LIFEGATE special needs kindergarten. In our support groups, up to eight children are put together according to their age - not their disabilities. In this way, they learn to get along with different people, something that will be very important for their future lives in the world outside. Children with various syndromes that result in physical and mental disabilities, such as forms of muscular dystrophy, Down syndrome, spina bifida, cerebral palsy and the associated spastic paralysis, and many children diagnosed with autism, often share a support group. Two educators work in one group. They are supported by therapists, and volunteers. They face the challenge of teaching the different children individual support steps. This includes first of all life skills (mobility-use through their aids, eating and drinking, toilet training, putting on and taking off a jacket, etc.). The children begin to learn together, and we also follow the curricula used in preschool education in kindergartens across the country. Often our team members have to learn anew with each child how to didactically prepare and convey the topics in such a way that each child can learn and retain it individually.

It always encourages us when we see that after an often difficult settling-in period for a new group of children starting with us in August after the summer



*In the physiotherapy department Izz Haleika is treated by our therapist Majd Hawash and Georg Neumann; Georg helps Majd in the context of a training course.*

vacations, by November and December the children are already happily coming to the kindergarden every morning and no longer miss their parents. We built viewing windows into all group rooms for parents and visitors. Especially for the parents, this watching is important, because they can see how their children behave and what happens in the group. We hope this will encourage them to work with the children at home and spend "quality time" with them.

Also the children as well as the staff see not only the parents but also the guests through the windows. Our world in the Palestinian territories, which has become quite small and isolated, is becoming a little bigger and more colorful. People are interested in us and come over, spend time with us and share, so that children with disabilities are no longer excluded. They are simply part of us.

### Diverse training and new therapy equipment

We like to keep on the move and are therefore always happy about new opportunities to further educate members of the LIFEGATE team and also the parents of our children and thus improve the quality of our work. This year, for example, our friends from the "Paulustherapie" in Halle an der Saale, Germany, were able to provide us with a speech therapist and a physiotherapist to further our training. In two intensive weeks our physiotherapists and speech therapists received an insight into new forms of treatment and were instructed in the use of therapeutic devices (*Novaphone*), which were also donated to us. The "teaching therapists" lent a practical hand, because learning on the patient was an important part of the training. We are very grateful to have professional friends at our side and are already looking forward to seeing them again at the 30th anniversary of the German support association "Tor zum Leben - LIFEGATE Rehabilitation" in Halle on May 13, 2023. A warm invitation to you to be there!

With the help of lecturers and specialized staff from the Palestinian University of Abu Dis, we at LIFEGATE are conducting a twenty-hour training program in the field of special education, which will end with a final examination. Upon successful completion, all participants will receive a diploma from the university for this in-service training module. A group of 14 nurses from the *Joni Erickson Tada and Friends* organization from the USA will be working with LIFEGATE for a short time in December. The young ladies will shed light on the medical background of the various disabilities that exist in our country and will work practically in the support groups.

### Many visitors at LIFEGATE

As already mentioned, our little world becomes a little bigger with every visitor, every person who takes an interest in the people with us. Sometimes there are logistical tasks when several groups of visitors come to us on the same day. For example, on a Monday in November, five groups, with a total of 120 people, came to us, all of whom had booked lunches with us. With the help of our new volunteers, our intern and our orthopedic technician, these people were also able to get to know our work during guided tours through the LIFEGATE building.

Our guest house *LIFEGATE Garden* was so fully booked for the first time since the Corona interruption that we had to move some visitors to friendly neighboring guest houses.

We are especially happy about the commitment of a retired German baker who will join LIFEGATE for three months in early 2023. This means that the "Healthy LIFEGATE Bakery" project can finally get off the ground. We want to encourage other bakers to consider this venture and invite them to join us from April. With this program we want to provide a European training as a baker for our local young people, through some foreign professionals who take turns every three months, for a year or more.

### Thank you for your / your support and a special request

The US Wheelchair Angels, which includes our long-time volunteer Richard Stepan, who returned to the US in November, and the *Joni Erickson Tada and Friends* organization sent aids to us. These aids are now being prepared, modified, and customized for the people who need them, and then distributed over the next few months. A team from *Joni Erickson Tada and Friends* will be arriving in March to assist. We look forward to helping many people gain mobility again.

We would like to thank all of our friends who are offering LIFEGATE products at Christmas markets, in church congregations and among private friends during this time of year. The proceeds of this commitment will benefit the vocational training workshop of LIFEGATE and help young people to have a professional perspective for the future.

Many square meters of the acquired neighboring property still have to be paid off. Each square meter costs € 530. We would like to accomplish this in the next few months and would be happy if many people would finance square meters.

### Your help counts ...!

#### Thanks to your help we were able to ...

- ...compensate the exchange rate loss of the Euro to the Shekel since the beginning of the year (6,000.- €);
- ...receive half of the amount for the purchase of a diesel generator (50,000.- €);
- ...finance eleven square meters of land (5,830.- €).

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

- ...finance the pre-school and training workshop on a pro rata basis for the first three months of 2023 (150,000.- € per month);
- ...train two young people in the bakery trade (30,000.- € for one year)
- ...to purchase a machine for the shredding of plastic parts and subsequent injection molding for the manufacture of new products made of plastic (environmental project; 20,000.- €).

***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.***

Thank you very much for your support!