3/2025

MAGAZIN

THE JOURNAL OF EBM INTERNATIONAL

Jesus' light for young and old

>> Finding security – shaping lives

>> In the light of the sun of righteousness

>> Learning for life, faith for the heart

MISSIONARIES SHARE THEIR MOMENTS OF LIGHT

IMPRINT

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In this magazine, we have used artificial intelligence to translate foreign-language reports and improve texts editorially.

In order to protect children or brothers and sisters in the faith who may be at risk, we have changed the names of people in this magazine without further indication.

Cover photo:
Social Center Diadema

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For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; ...
Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. *according to Isaiah 9,6-7*

Dear Reader!

God's salvation comes into our world through a child. God's reign and peace are present in this weak, powerless child Jesus. We may be irritated by this, because in our human history it is not the small, powerless ones who seem important, but the great, powerful ones. But God turns our circumstances upside down. Anyone who opens their heart to this infant Jesus will experience the love and power that emanates from him and that will ultimately heal this world.

That is why we are honored to focus in the Advent and Christmas season on children in need, in children's homes, daycare centers and social projects in Africa, India and Latin America. On my travels, I am always delighted to see the happy children who are surrounded by the loving care of our partners. Thanks to your support, children who come from difficult situations experience a sense of comfort and enjoy age-appropriate support and education.

We hope that the peace and light of the infant Jesus will reach people specifically in their difficult circumstances. In this magazine, you can read about children in India who grow up in absolute poverty and find comfort and hope for a good future in children's homes. Or about a kindergarten in Malawi that prepares the very youngest for school. Especially sustainable are the microcredits in Cuba, which help people to help themselves. And in Türkiye, even police officers receive small gifts of hope at Christmas. All these projects around the world are kindling little lights of hope that are beginning to shine in the midst of darkness.

Please feel free to send us your feedback, suggestions or requests regarding the current magazine: www.ebm-international.org/feedback

In our projects, we experience that God's peace reaches people all over the world. We are grateful for all those who support our work in prayer, also with the help of the 2026 prayer booklet, which will soon be sent to churches and selected supporters. Thank you for supporting us in prayer and making our projects possible through your donations.

I hope you enjoy reading this magazine and wish you good inspiration

Dr. Michael Kisskalt, General Secretary

ebm INTERNATIONAL

WHO WE ARE

EBM INTERNATIONAL, founded in 1954 as the European Baptist Mission, works with 30 Baptist member unions and partners on four continents. As a mission organization, we share God's transforming love in about 300 projects so that people can live in hope.

In our global partnership with local Baptist churches, together we call upon Christ to bring justice, renewal and hope to the world. We are committed to achieving this goal on the basis of equality through sharing and learning, giving and receiving.

More information on our website:
www.ebm-international.org/en/about-us

The social center in Diadema gives new perspectives

Finding security and shaping lives

In the middle of the Brazilian city of Diadema lies a special place: a social center that has been giving children, young people and families new perspectives for more than 20 years. Here they experience community, receive education and support – and encounter God's love in word and deed. João, Bernardo and Cecilia are three young people whose lives have been permanently changed by the social center.

João laughs a lot, jokes around with friends and enjoys spending time with the other children and staff at the social center. It is nothing short of a miracle that the eight-year-old can play so freely today. Because like so many boys and girls from the favelas, he has also experienced violence and neglect.

His stepfather shouted at João and his brother a lot at home. The boys had to be quiet, otherwise there would be trouble: then the food was canceled or the children had to wait outside in the cold until they were allowed back into the apartment. When things got really bad, the man would beat João with his belt or a wooden stick. The whole situation placed João`s mother under an excessive burden and she didn't intervene.

When João bravely confided in the staff at the social center, experts took action together with the city's child protection network: A complaint was lodged and the boys were placed in the care of their maternal grandmother. João and his brother like being there and are happy that they are well looked after by their grandmother and an aunt. They can play freely, watch TV, bathe every day and go to church. João later tells a social worker: "Jesus protected me in my old home!"

Well connected and recognized

The close cooperation between staff at the social center and state authorities, such as the youth and social services, has contributed to the rapid improvement in João's living conditions. The center has long since become more than just a contact point for children and young people. All generations benefit from its services: Further education, community, pastoral care, political education, sports and much more.

Joy during shared meals

The aim is to restore people's dignity and give them a new perspective on life. The motivation behind everything is to show Jesus' love in word and deed to the almost 500,000 people in the city of Diadema. That is why, from the very beginning, there have also been church services, children´s meetings and pastoral care for children, young people and their families. Church congregations in Diadema and the Pioneira Baptist Union support the social diaconal work together with EBM INTERNATIONAL. A number of these programs receive public funding. The city and state have recognized that the social center is a reliable partner for improving people's living conditions and helping to reduce major problems such as violence, drugs and lack of perspectives in people´s lives.

Bernardo seizes life

The "Tocando a vida" ("Touching life") project is one of the programs supported by the city's Children and Youth Fund. It is designed for 15 to 17-year-olds to provide them with career guidance, answer questions about adult life and strengthen them emotionally. Twice a week and during additional activities, the young people are given practical insights into possible careers. They are helped to develop a plan for their lives and experience a community that listens to them.

Social learning in the Tocando a vida program

Biblical impulses and study are part of this, because their questions on spiritual matters should receive an answer.

Bernardo participated in this project together with other young people in 2023. At first, he barely took part in conversations and simply sat quietly in his seat. As the weeks went by, the teenager began to trust the staff and talked about his big dream of becoming a basketball player one day. However, Bernardo was very discouraged: He had been through a few difficult times, including breaking his arm. He then missed training and school. Bernardo didn't know whether a professional career in basketball was even possible. Apart from a shattered dream, he had no perspective for the future.

A staff member from the project encouraged him and Bernardo enrolled in a carpentry course at the social center. The instructor there immediately noticed how talented this quiet participant was. Thanks to the encouragement in the carpentry workshop and the encouraging discussions at "Tocando a vida", Bernardo gained self-confidence and a new perspective on life.

Faith and expertise

Through the social center, Cecilia's life also received a new direction. Even as a child, she attended the events and experienced how Christ's love encountered her and she then gave her life to Jesus as a girl. From then on, the social →

center was an integral part of her life – both spiritually and practically. As a teenager, Cecilia took a number of courses, including Office applications and programming. She always was interested in computers and technology. The courses paved the way for her to get a job in administration. The 20-year-old is now studying education. She continues to remain committed to the social center, now as a volunteer who passes on her love and expertise to other children and young people. Cecilia is grateful to God for her development and growth.

Christmas in Diadema

The work of the social center is focused on giving people hope throughout the year—both in everyday life and on special occasions. One highlight is Christmas, which impressively demonstrates how community, practical help, and the message of Jesus Christ come together. People in Brazil also associate the Christmas festivities with love and kindness, but often do not go beyond a superficial approach to this season and its materialism. It is therefore important to the team at the social center to put Jesus at the center of the Christmas celebrations. The children and young people take part in performances and plays, often rehearsing enthusiastically for many months before Christmas.

Everyone comes together for the celebration: children, teenagers, their parents and relatives, staff, and partners from the city's network. They see, hear, and experience the community and the love of God. The children and their families then receive a small gift with something sweet and Christmas cookies. The girls and boys in the sports groups also receive a ball, and the participants in "Tocando a vida" receive a T-shirt. Severely disadvantaged families receive a larger package with clothing, hygiene items, toys, sweets, and a Christmas cake. Then there is great joy—because whether at the Christmas party or throughout the year, young and old alike realize: Here I am accepted and loved.

Michael Fischbeck

Christmas Fundraising campaign

Jesus' light for young and old

Christmas reminds us that Jesus came into the world as light—especially for the weak and the little ones. This light should also shine today on children and families who live in poverty, insecurity, and without hope. In partnership with churches worldwide, we are involved in around 50 projects to ensure that girls and boys experience love, care, and security. All initiatives are firmly embedded in a local church and invite children to explore their faith through children's services and worship, for example in these countries:

India – Children's homes provide education and a home

Twelve children's homes offer parentless children and social orphans not only a roof over their heads, but also comfort and the experience of being loved and valued. The girls and boys are safe from exploitation and child labor and are given the opportunity to receive school education. In the affiliated churches and in the daily routine, there are times for devotion, prayer, and worship services.

Latin America – Social Centers offer comprehensive support for families

In Brazil and Argentina, social centers open their doors to children who would otherwise often be left to fend for themselves. Here they find loving care, a warm meal, and safe places to play and learn. Their families also receive support, practical help in everyday life, pastoral care, and an invitation to experience God's love personally.

Malawi – Mentors for better educational opportunities

In the rural regions of Malawi, many children are denied access to education: often there is not enough money for fees, textbooks, or even a simple uniform. Lydia Action helps to overcome these obstacles. Here, girls and boys receive what they need to attend school. Even more important are the mentors who stand by their side, encouraging them, supporting them in their learning, and accompanying them in personal matters.

Children's home in India

Diadema Social Center

Educational opportunities in Malawi

Christmas campaign: Jesus' light for young and old

These projects are examples of the Gospel in action, bringing Jesus' light into the lives of children and young people. Your commitment during Advent and Christmas is an important building block in financing this comprehensive missionary work: with your donation or offering, you give children a home, open up new educational opportunities, and bring the light of faith to entire families:

40 EUROS provides a girl or boy in Malawi with pens, textbooks, and a personal mentor who supports the pupils in their learning and strengthens their development.

120 EUROS enables a social center in Brazil to give a child and its family loving support – practical help, care, and the experience of feeling God's love.

300 EUROS gives a young person in India a safe home, enough to eat, and the chance to go to school – and therefore a future full of hope.

With your donation, you bring Jesus' light into the lives of children and their families:
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Reference: Christmas 2025

You can donate quickly and securely online on our website, for example via PayPal, direct debit, or credit card:
www.ebm-international.org/spenden
Thank you for your gifts and your prayers!

Children's homes and schools in India

In the light of the sun of righteousness: Rudra's new b

Rudra used to enjoy running around with the other children among the tourists, offering them shells he had found on the beach. What sounds like an idyllic childhood was actually a difficult daily routine for Rudra – he had to sell shells so that his family would have something to eat. The fact that he is well cared for today and attends school is thanks to the efforts of our partner, Jesus Loves Ministries.

The sunrise at Chandrabagha Beach is said to be one of the most beautiful in all India. Indeed, the sun bathes the wide strip of sand and the sea in a warm, golden light. It is easy to understand why King Narasimha Deva I. had a temple dedicated to the sun god Surya built on this stretch of coastline in the 13th century. The temple is now located three kilometers inland in the town of Konark because the coastline has shifted. But the beach and temple still attract thousands of tourists who come to admire the natural surroundings and the magnificent architecture of the building.

Poverty amid crowds of tourists

For the ordinary people living on the Bay of Bengal in the state of Odisha visitors represent an additional source of income. But the families in Chandrabagha cannot survive on the sale of shells and jewelry from simple wooden stalls. As they have done for centuries, the men take their boats out to sea and catch fish or crabs. The women sell the catch or preserve it with salt. When the fishing is poor, both women and men work on construction sites. This is also the case for Rudra's parents. His family is poor, lives in a simple hut, and struggles daily to survive. When a cyclone sweeps across the coast, the situation is particularly dire: simple dwellings are destroyed and many fishing boats disappear in the waves.

The region around the town of Konark, with its Sun Temple and Chandrabagha Beach, is one of the areas where Jesus Loves Ministries is increasingly seeking contact with people and offering them help. The Christian relief organization and long-standing partner of EBM INTERNATIONAL wants to offer children and women in particular a perspective for their lives. The ministries offered include schools, medical

Children like Rudra are cared for and prepared for life

eginning

camps, vocational training, and agricultural programs. They now reach people in need in three states. The center of the ministry is Jesus' love for people. The Bethel Ashram children's home, one for boys and one for girls, is also part of this. Not only children without parents, but also social orphans find a home there. For children like Rudra, whose father and mother are unable to provide adequately for their family, this was a turning point in their lives.

A new home in a spiritual environment

He moved from the coast to the children's home. The emaciated boy who could barely read or write became a cheerful student full of curiosity and the desire to learn. There are special programs designed specifically for girls and boys who have little school experience, enabling them to catch up with a normal school career. Rudra enjoys attending classes and particularly likes sports. Today, Rudra no longer chases

The Bethel Ashram children's home offers girls and boys a home

tourists on the beach, but runs around the sports field laughing with friends – playing the Indian game of Kho Kho, cricket or volleyball. During vacations or on public holidays, he has the opportunity to visit his family.

For Jesus Loves Ministries practical help always includes the gospel. A network of churches cares for people's spiritual needs. Last year alone, around 6,000 girls and boys attended summer camps for children at various locations. They listened to Bible stories and enjoyed spiritual fellowship.

Rudra's life shows how God's love brings new light in the midst of poverty and despair. What began for him personally applies to many children in Odisha through the ministry of Jesus Loves Ministries they experience protection, receive education, and find faith. Thus, what the Bible promises is fulfilled:

"But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings." Malachi 4:2 (ESV)

Michael Fischbeck

NEWS

News, dates, and information about our mission work

Giving meaningful gifts doubles the joy!

Do not give unnecessary things for Christmas, but give real help: school meals for children in Mozambique, a goat for a family in Zambia, eye surgery for seniors in India, and much more.
Simply select one or more gifts in our donation shop, create the appropriate certificate, and your heartfelt gift is ready!
www.ebm-international.org/spendenshop

Medical assistance in India: Harika has overcome cancer

When little Harika was only 15 months old she was diagnosed with Leukemia. Her father, who works for the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, was often away from home, and her mother was pregnant with their second child. It was a time of uncertainty and fear for the family.
Harika was transferred to the Christian Medical College Vellore, where she stayed with her mother for nine long months while treatment began. She then continued her therapy at Shalom Hospital, where she received monthly chemotherapy and was also treated for other acute illnesses.
By Christmas 2024 Harika had bravely completed her last round of chemotherapy. This year, the now five-year-old is attending school for the first time – a milestone that once seemed impossible.

Prayer booklet 2026: "God says: Behold, I make all things new!"

This hope from Revelation 21:5 motivates us in our mission to share God's transforming love with people around the world.
We invite you to pray with us. In the prayer booklet for the year 2026, you will find a selection of projects and many faces of people who work with us and need our prayers. We believe that God brings transformation through prayer.
The prayer booklet will be sent to churches and selected supporters at the end of the year and can be viewed online on our website. In addition, current prayer requests are posted weekly on our prayer channel on WhatsApp or in the "Beten" section of our website:
www.ebm-international.org/beten

Moments of light

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. *Isaiah 9:1*

In the challenges of everyday life we sometimes experience moments when we realize: Jesus is with me here and now. Then light enters the darkness and the situation changes. Ralf Döhring, together with his wife Christina and their son in Sierra Leone, and Magloire Kadjio, regional representative for Central Africa and Sierra Leone, talk about such moments of light in their everyday lives as missionaries.

Light in the darkness of this world

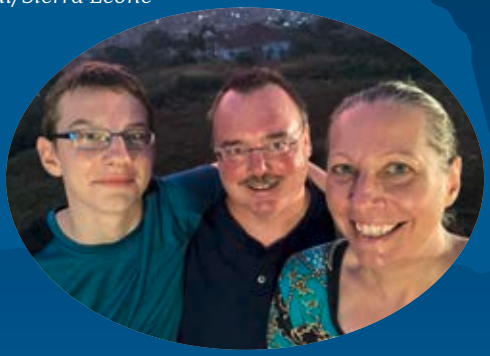
For me, special moments always occur when we see God at work and then react and put into practice what we have learned.

We live in the second poorest country in the world. Injustice, misery, abuse of power, and corruption prevail, leaving behind traces of bitter poverty and misery. Hunger is normal here, and many people, young and old, go to bed hungry and have nothing to eat for several days. As do many of the people around us—students and their families. Wages are low and unemployment is over 50 percent.

At the beginning of the year, once again we had the impression that many people here in Sierra Leone were facing difficult times and had hardly anything to eat. A family in our surroundings said, "We haven't eaten anything for a number of days! We don't know where to get food for the children!" So we bought food—rice, Maggi, salt, fish—and distributed it to these families.

When people and God work together, light shines in the darkness. This gives hope, changes the moment, gives courage, and lets us know: "You are not forgotten – I have you in my sight!"

Ralf Döhring in Jui/Sierra Leone



The Döhring family

Magloire Kadjio with his wife Delphine

Light saves lives

"I would like to recount an incident that a doctor at the Hospital of Hope in Garoua related to me: One night, while he was operating on a patient in the surgery room, there was a sudden power outage. Despite all their efforts, they were unable to save the patient. This was a shock and very sad for him and his team. They asked EBM INTERNATIONAL for help in purchasing a generator to solve this problem. Donations made it possible to raise the money for a generator. The problem of permanent lighting was solved. I am glad that we were able to contribute to the solution.

This reminded me how important light is in our daily lives, both in a natural and spiritual sense, because God saw right at the beginning of the world that the light was good (Gen 1:4). He sent Jesus Christ, who came into the world as light to enlighten humanity.

Thank you, Jesus, for being the light in my life."

Magloire Kadjio in Cameroon

Microcredits in Cuba

Hope has many faces – and sometimes three wheels

One area of EBM INTERNATIONAL's work that offers comprehensive help to people in Cuba are microcredits. They are granted to women and men with a business idea that enables them to earn their own income. Usually, the credits are repaid within the agreed time frame. With the profits from their businesses, the small entrepreneurs provide for their families and even support mission projects in their own country.

Microcredits – a small step towards independence

Cuba's economy has been in a deep crisis for years. Although reforms in recent years have paved the way for small and medium-sized businesses, for many people, starting their own business is impossible without start-up capital. This is where microcredits come in: small loans can bring about big changes. They open up new income opportunities for families, create prospects, and even strengthen the work of local churches.

Since the program began in 2016, 22 project proposals have been submitted, 20 of which have been approved and 11 successfully completed. The projects range from shoe workshops, cafeterias, pig farming, and toy production to transportation solutions using electric tricycles. More than 40 families have benefited directly so far – and many more people through the services and jobs that have been created as a result.

Vincente in his workshop

Ready for passengers or large luggage – Yoel

Vincente – a shoemaker fights his way through

In January 2020, Vincente took the plunge into self-employment. With the help of a microcredit, he opened a small shoe workshop in Cuba's capital, Havana. He makes custom-made shoes for children, adults, and even special orthopedic designs. But the economic situation pushed him to his limits: contracts fell through, materials were lacking, and customers stayed away. Time and again, he was faced with the question of whether he should give up.

His perseverance helped him to keep going despite all the setbacks. He attended trade fairs, offered custom-made products, and slowly built up a loyal customer base. With determination, he paid back his loan and managed to provide for his family. Today, he knows that without the courage to take risks and the start-up assistance provided by the microcredit, →

→ his dream of owning his own workshop would not have come true.

Yoel – on the right track

One particularly impressive example is the "El Buen Camino" project. In 2023 Pastor Yoel was able to purchase an electric tricycle—the first of its kind in his region. At first, many things were new to him. He had to apply for a driving licence, modify his parking space, and find customers. But word quickly spread that he was reliable and punctual in transporting people and goods.

Demand rose rapidly, especially in times when diesel and gasoline were in short supply. His services are also in greater demand than usual during the vacation months (July and August). For people moving house, going on short trips, or simply visiting the neighborhood – his tricycle is ideal for all of these tasks.

Today, Yoel has 30 to 40 regular customers. The tricycle contributes 40 percent to his family's income. He has paid off his loan in full and covered all repairs and maintenance costs. Even more than that, he regularly supports his local church with his vehicle. "This stability gives us security and hope," he says gratefully.

Luis – Toys that touch children's hearts

Microcredits are not only focused on food or transportation. Sometimes projects arise that seem small at first glance but have a big impact. Luis, an experienced carpenter and member of the Cuban Artists' Society, had an unusual idea: to make toys for children that are educational, robust, and affordable.

Educational toys – Handmade

Ebenecell cell phone service in Cuba

With the help of his microcredit, he was able to purchase machines and materials. Soon, his small workshop was producing wooden puzzles, building sets, and educational games that were met with great enthusiasm in schools and families. In a country where toys are often unaffordably expensive or unavailable, this was more than a small blessing. Several families are now involved in production, so that others can also benefit from the income.

"It makes me happy when children can learn and laugh with my toys," says Luis. His project, Cherub Toys, is an example of how creativity, craftsmanship, and a little start-up capital can bring hope to the next generation.

Diversity and creativity

The wide range of projects impressively demonstrates how people in Cuba are seizing opportunities. With imagination and courage, they develop business ideas that address precisely situations where there is a need. In addition to the three projects mentioned above, there are other initiatives. In the small town of Iguará, the Manso family opened the MANÁ cafeteria, which has become a central meeting place for students, travelers, and neighbors. Pastor José established a pig farm. The money this makes supports not only his family, but also the church and children in the surrounding area. The Ebenecell mobile phone repair shop was able to buy new parts with a loan and has been offering reliable service ever since – even after the founder emigrated, it continues to operate. Projects such as La Bodeguita, a small grocery store, ensure basic supplies in times when everything is in short supply.

Hope that lasts

Microcredits are more than just money. They give people courage, open up ways out of dependency, and create new perspectives. Those who receive them feel that someone believes in their idea. And many report how much they feel supported by God and their churches. Whether for food, transportation, services, or creative ideas, microcredits open doors that would otherwise remain closed.

Even if some projects stall due to inflation, material shortages, or disease, the positive results outweigh the negative. Microcredits achieve great things with little money. They are a sign of hope —for families, for churches, and for an entire country that is looking for new ways forward.

Julia-Kathrin Raddek

Christmas in Türkiye

A familiar festival in a new guise

How do people celebrate Christmas in a Muslim country? Marlene Çevik, who has been living in Türkiye with her husband Ertan and their children for more than 35 years, talks about familiar customs in a new guise, cookies for the police, and ways in which Turkish churches celebrate the day of Jesus' birth.

The church as a Christmas gift

When we left for Türkiye almost 36 years ago there were many small house churches, and Christmas celebrations were hardly known. A few years later, especially in the big cities, several house churches rented rooms in hotels or convention centers and celebrated there together with guests. In 2000, the churches grew and the brothers and sisters rented or bought larger apartments or buildings where they could celebrate.

Exactly on December 25, 2001, we, a small Baptist house church in Izmir, were given the old Anglican church in the Buca district to use for 49 years. Until then, it had been used as the city administration's cultural office. It was a very special Christmas gift that we will never forget.

In the early years Ertan, and myself even more so, found it difficult to celebrate Christmas in Türkiye. We missed our relatives and friends, with whom we used to meet up during this time of year and to spend time together. Once our children understood the meaning of Jesus' birth, it became easier for us to celebrate as a family in Türkiye.

In 2002, we celebrated our first Christmas in our "new" church with some of our brothers and sisters: simple and modest, with Christmas carols, a short sermon, and a few gifts.

Celebrating Christmas in a new way year by year

As the congregation slowly grew, we were also able to practice Christmas carols with the children. Since children under the age of 18 are not allowed to attend a Christian church in Türkiye without the written permission of their legal guardians, we usually had and still have few children. We performed nativity plays a few times. However, this proved difficult because some of the children did not come to the rehearsals, which affected the performance. Every year, we look for new ideas for the celebrations. The sermons are always very evangelistic: everyone should learn why Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world, redeemed us from our sins, and wants to give us eternal life.

Our Christmas celebrations are always well attended. Many visitors even have to stand. In some years, there was such a rush that it was not possible to accommodate more guests and we had to turn them away. We delight the visitors' children with small gifts and the children of the church sing one or two songs. Since our church members live in different parts of the city, it is not easy to rehearse, because schoolchildren do not come to church during the week. After the service, we serve

→

Christmas Eve in the church in Izmir

tea with savory and sweet pastries. We continue to do this, but on a smaller scale, after some visitors first ate and then secretly filled their pockets with the rest of the pastries and table decorations.

For many years we have been celebrating Christmas as a church family. We have dinner together, a short service, Christmas carols, and gifts. The game "White Elephant" — a kind of Secret Santa — is always very popular, because everyone receives a gift that can be exchanged later. It's always a lot of fun, and especially the children in the church love it.

Marlene and Ertan Çevik

A Christmas celebration with guests takes place on a Sunday evening, because Sunday is a day off. Since Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are not official holidays in Türkiye, we get together on the weekends before or after Christmas.

Cookies for police officers

Before and during these two celebrations, there are always several police officers, even some in plain clothes, on our grounds and in the church to ensure security against attacks. After the celebration, we usually sit down with the police officers and often have very good conversations while eating the last of the cookies (if there are any left). The police officers who are on duty in a church for the first time are particularly interested.

The custom of an Advent wreath is not very widespread in Türkiye. On the other hand, a Christmas tree is important, but our brothers and sisters are now also happy with fresh pine branches, as the tree and its decorations were repeatedly knocked over by small children.

On St. Nicholas Day, we shed light on the life of St Nicholas and explain the significance of this day. He originally came from Türkiye.

Celebrating Christmas in a Muslim country is, of course, very different from celebrating it in Germany. Nevertheless, it is perhaps even more intense without the excessive consumerism, noise, and many gifts. It is reflection on the birth of Jesus in a stable on the margins of society, into a world that did not want to accept him and did not understand who he really was. In this context, it makes Christmas a very special celebration that brings light into the darkness and consciously unites us as Christians in our faith in Jesus Christ – the Son of God.

Marlene Çevik

NEWS

News, dates, and information about our mission work

Hot chocolate high up in the Peruvian Andes

Ever since missionary work began among the Quechua people over 40 years ago, there has been a special joy in the Andean villages at Christmas: the churches distribute hot chocolate and Christmas cookies to the people. Large pots are placed on a fire pit in front of the church buildings, Christmas carols are sung, and, where possible, the children are given a small toy as a gift. Every year, the churches reach over 1,000 children and adults through this tradition.

The goal of this initiative is far-reaching: to share the love of Jesus in a practical way with people who have very little and can rarely expect any Christmas gifts. This small gesture brings light and joy to people's hearts and is a testimony to what Christmas is really about.

Volunteer service: Reflecting on the time abroad

In August, an evaluation course was held for the eight volunteers in the "weltwärts" program (´Reaching out to the world`) from the group of 2024/25 cohort. Together with three volunteers from the Methodist Church, we were able to look back on our experiences, share stories and photos, and marvel at what God has done this year.

This was the last course of its kind for the time being, as we have separated the volunteer program from the German government's "weltwärts" program in order to allow us to offer more individually tailored placement periods. Anyone aged 18 or over who is interested can apply to us at any time, provided at least six months' prior notice is given.
www.ebm-international.org/freiwilligendienst

Montessori preschool on the Balaka farm in Malawi

Learning for life, faith for the heart

In Malawi's major cities, the concept of kindergartens and daycare centers is well known. In rural areas and remote villages, however, it is less accepted or not accepted at all. In an interview via video conference with Julia-Kathrin Raddek from EBM INTERNATIONAL, Karin Schwarz, a missionary at Balaka Farm, provides insights into the creation and development of the Montessori kindergarten on the farm grounds and highlights the benefits for the Malawian village population.

Julia-Kathrin Raddek: When was this kindergarten established and how many people work there? How many children attend?
Karin Schwarz: The kindergarten opened in 2022. At that time, there were seven to eight children and two specially trained Montessori educators. The start was not easy. The value of early childhood education was not recognized by the general village population. The first educators therefore left the facility in frustration. Now David is working there. He's a certified Montessori teacher and can also train apprentices. Today, there are four people working at the kindergarten: two trained educators (one man, one woman) and two trainees. By 2024, the number of kids had grown to 55, which makes me and everyone else really happy.

A small playground – financed by donations from Germany, built in Malawi

JKR: That's very good to hear! Can you say what led to the increase in numbers?
KS: The first children who attended the kindergarten and then switched to the village school showed significantly better results. They were able to understand English and had a different learning strategy. Parents noticed that the Montessori concept works. Besides we did some advertising: we drove through the streets in a car equipped with children's music and a megaphone and explained to people what the kindergarten costs and what it offers.

JKR: The majority of people in Malawi earn less than 80 euros a month. How much does it cost to attend kindergarten at your facility?
KS: We charge around 3,000 to 10,000 kwacha (about €1.50 to €5) per month, depending on the parents' income. Wealthier parents initially asked us to offer an "elite kindergarten" and were opposed to poorer children attending. In addition, the general population tends to believe that raising children involves drill and memorization. Free-play and independent discovery are not part of this. We had to talk a lot with the parents and "kings" (local authorities, roughly comparable to a mayor) to explain to them that the kindergarten should enrich the entire community and be open to everyone. Most of them now understand the concept.

JKR: How does the kindergarten specifically serve people?
KS: It helps particularly vulnerable girls who have had children at the age of 15 and therefore had to drop out of school. They can bring their children to our kindergarten and at the same time receive training on the farm. In this way, the kindergarten is gradually changing the rural population's attitude toward early childhood education. In addition, the state ensures that all children are vaccinated regularly by sending health teams to the farm. This is particularly valuable because otherwise the children would not be vaccinated at all.

JKR: To what extent is the Balaka Farm concept reflected in the educational approach?
KS: The Montessori curriculum includes topics such as nature, bees, trees, flowers, and vegetables, which fits perfectly with the farm. The

What is the educational theory behind Montessori pedagogy?
It focuses on the child. The environment is suitable for children`s needs and encourages them to discover, to experiment and to learn. The material available is tailored to that purpose. In this way children learn to be independent and enjoy learning. They find out how to push themselves to the limit, to overcome obstacles, to make mistakes and to learn from their mistakes.

children plant beds and water them. They take regular walks on the farm, learn about the cycle of nature, and enjoy the greenery. They can't experience any of this in the villages. They also learn to appreciate ripe fruit, because at home most of them harvest unripe fruit for fear of not getting anything else.

JKR: How is the Christian faith passed on to children?
KS: Faith is firmly anchored in the concept. All staff members are Christians. This is a prerequisite for employment. The children mainly learn Bible songs in English.

JKR: Can you share a special story with us that you experienced in your kindergarten?
KS: Two years ago, a mother with two small children came to us after her husband left her. Her son Happy´s development was retarded and he had comprehension difficulties. Her son Happy had developmental delays and comprehension difficulties. Since the kindergarten was not yet full at that time (7-12 children), Happy was able to receive individual support. He stayed in kindergarten for an extra year for additional preschool training and is now keeping up quite well in elementary school. It was also important to explain to the mother that her child was not being deliberately disobedient, but was slightly retarded. In Malawi, children are often beaten because parents think they are deliberately disobedient. We also involved the grandmother, as the family lives without a father.

JKR: Can the kindergarten be financially independent?
KS: No, the kindergarten can never survive on its own in this poor area. The salaries of the trained educators cannot be covered by the fees alone. It is a mission-oriented kindergarten with trained staff, which is co-financed by donations to the Balaka Farm.

JKR: Thank you very much for your insights, dear Karin!

Meals are fun

Moments of light

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. *Isaiah 9:1*

In the challenges of everyday life, we sometimes experience moments when we realize: Jesus is with me here and now. Then light enters the darkness and the situation changes. Margrit Soppa, with Micha and their children in Malawi, tells of such a moment of light in her everyday life as a missionary.

Margrit and Micha Soppa

In the circle of light of Jesus

Malawi lies close to the equator, so it gets dark almost instantly at around 6 p.m. all year round. Between 5 and 6 p.m., the streets are still busy. Many people are on their way home, some covering long distances on foot or on more or less well-lit motorcycle taxis or bicycles. The headlights of the cars are all the more dazzling.

There is little street lighting. Once home, most households carry out other activities such as eating and cooking by the light of a flashlight or a fire.

What is normal everyday life for many Malawians is rather the exception for us. When we have a power outage and have to use headset lamps in the evening, I feel somehow restricted and a little helpless. I am limited to my current activity, which takes place in the light of my lamp. But at the same time, I am also more in the "here and now".

I can't do so much at once. I have to focus and think about what's important right now. We automatically move closer together, staying where the light is.

I need this in other areas of my life too: consciously staying in the circle of light of Jesus, blocking out everything else and allowing myself to be strengthened so that I can once again be a light for those around me.

When power comes back on, there is great joy in the house—a liberating moment of light!

Margrit Soppa in Lilongwe, Malawi