



## God's Healing Power

- » Wholeheartedly with the people
- » Called to give eyesight
- » Connected to the world through signs



FOCUS ON HEALTHCARE



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Cover photo:  
Patients in the Hospital  
of Hope/Cameroon

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*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, ...  
that we may have peace, and by his wounds we are healed.*

*Isaiah 53:4-5*

## Dear reader!



Michael Kißkalt with  
Dr. Angel, Vuyyuru/  
India

On Good Friday and Easter, we celebrate the overcoming of guilt, illness and suffering through Jesus Christ. We are still trapped in it, but our liberation and healing has begun and God's healing power will ultimately overcome all evil. For us, this is not just a promise for sometime in the afterlife, but the content and calling of our ministry as EBM INTERNATIONAL in the here and now. Wherever we are active around the world, healthcare is a natural part of our work: in supporting hospitals and clinics, but above all in providing the simplest care and educational work in local villages, where people live and work. The Gospel heals the whole person: Body, soul and spirit. We have experienced this and want to share it.

In our health projects, we are open to all people, regardless of their religious affiliation or their financial (im-) possibilities. We make sure that we are at the cutting edge of medical care and develop these projects in such a way that they can stand on their own two feet in the long term despite the possibility of free treatment.

In this magazine, you can read about a hospital in Cameroon, an ophthalmologist in Sierra Leone and a leper colony in India which is devotedly cared for by our partners in Gotlam. I recently visited some projects there. The situation of Christian hospitals in India in particular is very different: some are very well equipped and can guarantee a high standard of care. Others, such as in rural Vuyyuru, urgently need support for the purchase of new basic instruments.

Thank you for all the prayers and concrete support for this important branch of our mission.

Yours

*Dr. Michael Kißkalt, Secretary General*



### WHO WE ARE

EBM INTERNATIONAL is the European Baptist Mission. We work with 30 Baptist member unions and partners on four continents. As a mission organization, we share God's transforming love through around 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/about-us](http://www.ebm-international.org/about-us)

# Wholeheartedly with the people

*Sarah Bosniakowski has been living and working at the Cameroonian Baptist Union's Hospital of Hope in Garoua since 2017. A volunteer placement at a health station in 2009/10 made a lasting impression on Sarah and so, after training as a nurse, she went to Cameroon again - this time as a missionary. Julia-Kathrin Raddek reports on how she is doing there and what she is doing.*

A rooster crows. The sun is shining. It's 32 degrees and dusty. We are in one of the outer districts of Garoua, northern Cameroon. Here, ten minutes from the city center, it feels like a village. There are no paved roads until we reach the city center. A few people walk by the side of the road, along with animals. Goats, cows, chickens. There are lots of motorcycles, cars are rarer. Otherwise, it is rather quiet compared to the city. Sarah lives here with her Cameroonian husband Elie and their daughter. Connected via the internet, we talk to each other and can see each other. Apart from the rooster, I hear and see none of the things described above. But Sarah does. She is radiant and vibrant and tells me her story vividly.

In the very hot and dry north of Cameroon, the medical work supported by EBM INTERNATIONAL has been in existence for many years and has grown considerably, sustainably shaping and supporting the region and its people with its diverse work. It is a real ray of hope for the people. Sarah has been working here as a missionary for EBM INTERNATIONAL since 2017



The team at the hospital in Garoua

and, as a trained nurse, is contributing her gifts.

## Care without money worries

The population of northern Cameroon in particular suffers from severe poverty. Medical care can quickly become relatively expensive. And the general rule is: money is asked for first, then the person is cared for. Treatment can easily use up a hard-earned monthly salary and food, rent, clothing, children's school materials or petrol cannot be paid for.

It's different at the Hospital of Hope. People know that and that's why they come. Here, people and their suffering are seen and cared for. Afterwards, they discuss together what the financial situation allows. Many opt for a loan, which they pay off at best. In other cases, the Poor People's Fund takes over the complete financing of medical care. For Sarah and her team, the following always applies: "There are no hopeless cases, we help where we can", even though the situation sometimes seems hopeless.

## From coma back to life

Sarah tells us about a little boy. He arrived in a very critical condition and fell into a coma for three weeks. The doctors and nurses did everything they could. Contrary to all appearances, the boy woke up again. When the little patient visits with his father weeks later, Sarah can hardly believe her eyes. A lively boy was standing in front of her and she almost didn't recognize him. In this hospital, the family actually experienced hope and healing.

## Immerse in the culture

What motivates Sarah every day is the deep certainty and the feeling that she is in the right place. 100 percent, she says. That was also the case back then, when she didn't know how and where she would go after her training as a nurse. At least she knew that she would go on. And so she recounts, as if it were only yesterday, how she spontaneously heard about an advertisement for a job as a nurse in Cameroon, completed all her application documents and after a short time suddenly



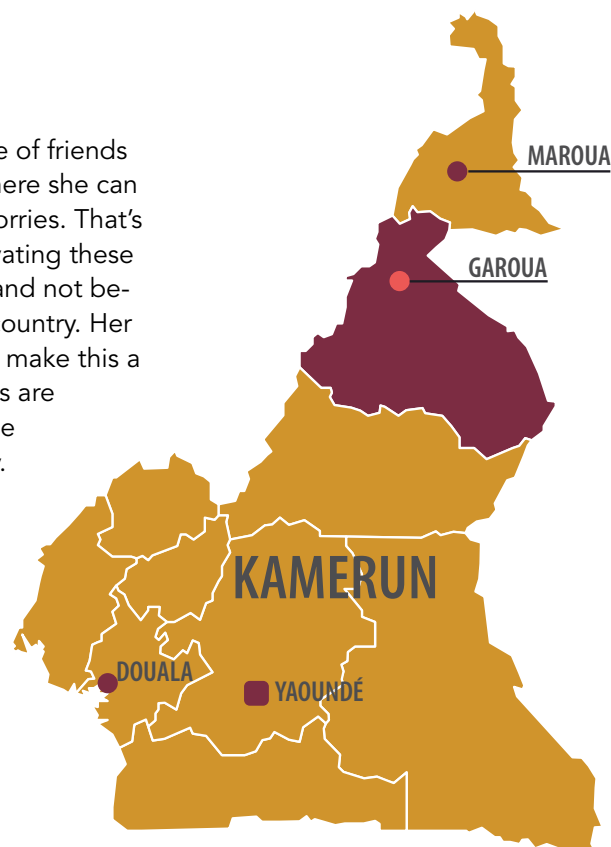
Sarah Bosniakowski and Elie Wouleo  
Kazla with Nilah



knew where her path would take her.

Seven years have now passed. Every time she arrives back in Cameroon after a stay in Germany, she finds it difficult to speak German. Then she is completely back. Where she has lived since 2017. In the language (French) and with the people. In the culture, which is so very different and endearing. In a country where she sometimes misses her favorite chocolate and a nice schnitzel. In a country where Sarah still finds it difficult to deal with the fact that, as a white woman, she is given preferential treatment in the knowledge that a local woman is missing out because of her - at the petrol station, for example. Nevertheless, over the years she has always made a conscious decision to immerse herself fully in the culture. Accepting it with its advantages and disadvantages. Her circle of friends is also made up of locals. Her church is a Cameroonian Baptist congregation. This was also important to her

from the outset: a circle of friends who share her faith, where she can let go and share her worries. That's why Sarah enjoys cultivating these friendships after work and not being alone in a foreign country. Her husband and daughter make this a lot easier. New contacts are also automatically made outside the community. People come to visit, because Sarah lives hospitality. She has an open, cheerful heart and her house has an open door. People sense this and gladly accept it.



### On a mission for women and children

Sarah's tasks in Garoua are varied. She spends most of the week working in the hospital. The patients sense how much Sarah cares about them. When she treats and advises "her" women during prenatal care,

they

know that Sarah is fully committed to them. Sarah sees the women with their whole lives, asks questions and shows them that they are valuable. This trusting manner sometimes leads to tears flowing



The community in the Baptist church





Thorough documentation is important



Invoices, lists, reports - this is what a day at the office looks like

and there is also a lot of laughter and joking. The educational work among young women and girls is also going well. It is about proper hygiene, contraception, pregnancy and other important issues. In recent years, more and more women have been coming regularly to receive support and advice during their pregnancy. The vast majority of births are without complications for mother and child. That is also a hopeful message. Sarah also accompanies the vaccination of the children once a week and offers a German club at the neighboring elementary school. The weekly office days are also important. There she writes reports, newsletters, pays bills and takes care of everything else that arises.

### Trust in God's ways

Sarah has learned a lot during her time as a missionary and is amazed at herself when she talks about her work in German churches, beaming with joy and bubbling over. "I'm not really like that at all," she says. But it seems that this time has done something to Sarah and that makes her happy. And so she looks to the future with hope. Whatever may come, wherever the path will take her, she knows that she will feel it. She has faith in that.

*by Julia-Kathrin Raddek*



The green of the trees transforms the hospital grounds into a hopeful oasis



# So that even more people live healthier lives

Unfortunately, in many of our partner countries, adequate medical care is not accessible to the entire population or is simply unaffordable. Poor and disadvantaged population groups in particular hardly have the opportunity to receive treatment. Our healthcare projects are changing this.

## India: Day of action for eyesight

Every year, the Church of the Resurrection in Tallarevu organizes an eye camp: on this day of action, a team of specialists arrives especially for this day to treat all kinds of eye diseases. The special thing about it is that patients who otherwise have no access to medical care can also come to the camp. They are supported by many helpers, brought to the camp by busses free of charge and provided with food throughout the day. Last year, 280 people came and received treatment: 80 received glasses with the right prescription free of charge, 35 underwent surgery and were able to see again. This service is a strong sign of charity in society!

## Enabling medical care

EBM INTERNATIONAL supports almost 30 projects worldwide that serve people in the field of healthcare. In India, for example, this includes hospitals, eye operations and medical assignments in leper colonies. In the medical work in Cameroon, our missionary Sarah

Bosniakowski is particularly committed to young mothers and babies. Vaccination campaigns, check-ups, malaria prophylaxis and comprehensive educational work save many lives. In the CAIS project in Ijuí/ Brazil, a team looks after deaf children and young people. They learn how to deal with their disability and acquire important skills for an independent life.



Patients at the Hospital of Hope in Cameroon



Eye camp in India



Ijuí/Brazil: Classes in the sign language LIBRAS

**In our Easter campaign, we are asking for support for the projects in which children, women and men receive medical help. Your donation to EBM INTERNATIONAL's healthcare can make a big difference:**

**25**  
EUROS

cover the cost of protecting 5 people from malaria at the Hospital of Hope in Cameroon.

**40**  
EUROS

will enable cataract surgery at an eye clinic in India, giving those affected their sight back.

**65**  
EUROS

will finance the LIBRAS sign language course for one month for a deaf person in the CAIS project in Brazil.

**Your donation makes a healthy life possible:**

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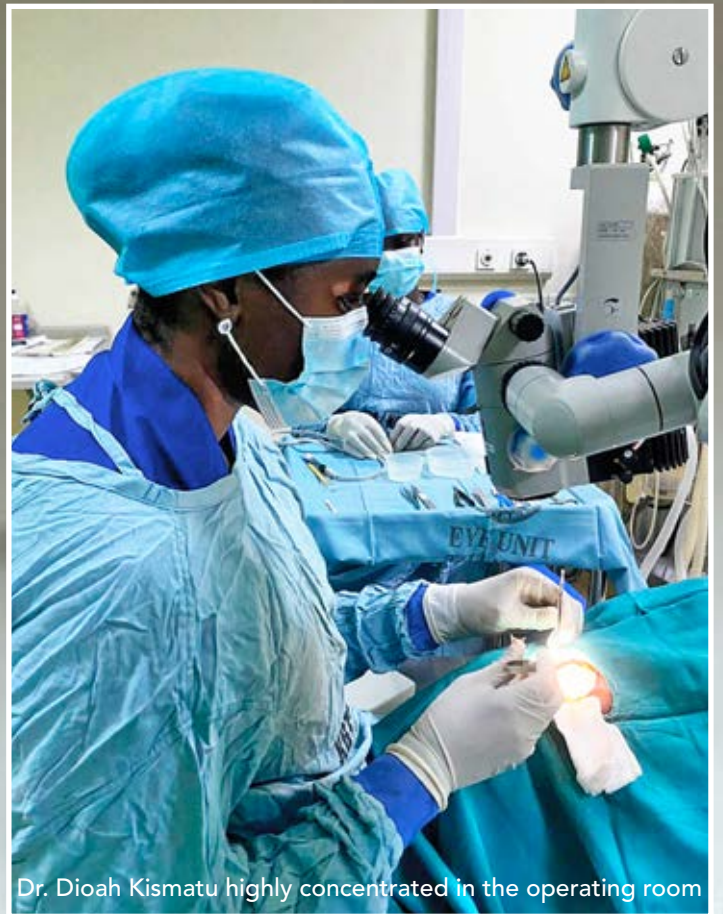
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You can donate quickly and securely online on our website, for example via PayPal, direct debit or credit card:

[www.ebm-international.org/spenden](http://www.ebm-international.org/spenden)

**Thank you for your gifts and your prayers!**





Dr. Dioah Kismatu highly concentrated in the operating room



# Called to give eyesight

*There have been many difficult times in the more than 40-year history of the eye clinic in Lunsar/Sierra Leone: The civil war (1991-2002), the Ebola outbreak in 2014 and the corona pandemic affected the hospital's operations. The former missionary hospital had an impact beyond the country's borders. In recent years, the ophthalmology department has been vacant. Now an ophthalmologist has taken up her post. We tell you how this came about.*

The eye clinic in Lunsar is one of three clinics supported by the Sierra Leone Baptist Union. The combination of professional ophthalmology, humanitarian aid, preaching the gospel and compassion for the people meant that patients from all over the country and from the neighboring countries of Guinea and Liberia came to the Baptist Eye Hospital in Lunsar to have their eye diseases treated. However, without specialist staff and after several crises in the country, the clinic lost its importance.

## A special journey through life

But this changed in 2022, when Dr. Dioah Kismatu had just finished her medical studies. She received a lot of valuable support along the way.

She was given a focused and determined nature in the cradle. Medicine too. Her father is a gynecologist and her mother a real estate entrepreneur. Both took great care to ensure that Dioah constantly improved her school performance. After she finished school, she received a scholarship to study medicine in

Cuba at the age of 16. She studied general medicine in Spanish for seven years.

Far away from her family, she did her best and worked with enthusiasm. Her studies were eye-opening, as she says. It enriched her. She was particularly influenced by the approach she was taught: saving lives and having a heart for people. This strengthened Dioah's desire to return to Sierra Leone. She wanted to use all the knowledge she had acquired for the benefit of her fellow nationals and give something back to them.

## Back in Sierra Leone

When the young woman was back in her home country and working as a junior doctor, she found the lack of medical care in Sierra Leone a hard arrival in reality. There are only five specialists in the field of ophthalmology in Sierra Leone, out of a population of around 8.8 million people.

Once again, she had someone at her side who supported her. Dioah's

mentor in ophthalmology, Dr. Jalikatu Mustapha, invited her to take part in the first corneal transplant in her country. Afterwards, she reports enthusiastically: "Witnessing a woman regain her sight after more than two decades of blindness touched me deeply. It strengthened my determination to study ophthalmology and to be part of such life-changing experiences."

It was also her mentor who pointed her towards the position at the eye clinic in Lunsar. Now the last doubts about whether further training to become a specialist was the right path had vanished. The training is financed by EBM INTERNATIONAL and ensures competent care for patients.

Dioah is now in her second year of specialist training and is putting her whole being into it: "I look forward to working with others to ensure specialized and affordable eye care for all people in Sierra Leone."



Building of the eye clinic in Lunsar



# A library for the children in Uppada

*Six young people are currently working in Malawi, Sierra Leone, Argentina and India through "Hoffnung International", EBM INTERNATIONAL's volunteer service. The value of the experience abroad, the contact with a different culture and the enrichment of one's own life of faith is great. One of the volunteers is Joshua. He reports on his time so far in a children's home in India.*

I am Josua, 19 years old, born in France and moved to Pinneberg in Schleswig-Holstein in 2015. I graduated from high school there and now I've been sent out by EBMI to volunteer in Uppada, a small fishing village in the state of Andhra Pradesh on the east coast of India. I have a wide range of tasks. For example, I supervise the girls' study hour at the children's home every day. Some things are, as is typical here, more flexible and spontaneous: I help out at school, especially with English, I cook from time to time and do small jobs. And then, of course, we play, dance, laugh and play again. The children love volleyball and of course cricket. We also play lots of other games such as tag, hide and seek or kabaddi (an Indian team sport).

Recently, I was able to start a special project: We wanted to open a small library on the campus of the children's home. I personally love books (because I had the chance to read a lot from an early age). The children I work and live with come from poor backgrounds and don't know how to read in their free time.

Despite the difficult circumstances from which the girls and boys come, they are incredibly inquisitive and, above all, courageous. Many of the children have experienced violence and alcoholism in their families. Nevertheless, they look to the future. That is incredibly impressive and very encouraging for me personally. When I look at the little things I've been annoyed about in the past and the small events that have discouraged me, it's



Volunteering at the children's home: Josua Ertz

ridiculous in comparison.

I also pray about this: that God will give me a little of this spirit of carrying on. Because it is precisely with this attitude, with God's help, that the children here move forward every day. Despite these wonderful experiences, not everything is perfect here. Recently, for example, two boys ran away from the children's home and we don't know whether they will come back.

I invite you to pray! The children are incredibly courageous, yet many of them have emotional wounds and some of them are broken. Please pray for the children in Uppada and in India, that God will give them strength, courage and love.

from Josua Ertz



The assignment location: The campus of the children's home in Uppada

## VOLUNTEER SERVICE

Anyone interested in volunteering with EBM INTERNATIONAL can contact the coordinator Kathy Behrens at [kbehrens@ebm-international.org](mailto:kbehrens@ebm-international.org) or by telephone on +49 33234 74-435

Further information, flyers and personal reports are available on our homepage [www.ebm-international.org/serve](http://www.ebm-international.org/serve) or on [www.hoffnung-international.de](http://www.hoffnung-international.de)





The Poolbagh colony has developed into a small town

Help for people with leprosy in India

## An almost forgotten disease

*When Manjula (name changed) was 15 years old, she discovered an unusual pale pink spot on her thigh. She thought nothing of it, applied an ointment and continued to take care of her duties. The young woman helped her family look after their animals and sell milk. A few days later, another spot appeared on her right cheek.*

Her parents took her to a doctor who gave her a herbal remedy for treatment. It brought no improvement. Soon she could no longer move her fingers and lost feeling in her hands. At the state hospital, she was referred to a leprosy hospital. But Manjula refused to go there: Leprosy means ridicule and suffering.

### The fear of exclusion

The number of leprosy cases has fallen sharply in recent decades. Nevertheless, around 200,000 people are infected with the disease every year. The number of unreported cases is probably higher, as many affected do not see a doctor for fear of social ostracism. This is precisely the problem: if leprosy is detected early, it can be treated very effectively with medication and even cured completely.

### Abandoned

Leprosy is considered one of the oldest known diseases in history and is mentioned in many ancient writings. People suffering from leprosy have always been excluded from society and exposed outside settlements and towns. In the Middle Ages, infirmaries were set up outside the towns to isolate the diseased. As leprosy was also called Lazarus' disease at the time, so-called Lazarus houses were built, from which the word for a sick bay developed in German.

The Bible reports how Jesus broke through the severe stigmatization and exclusion of the sick by doing something completely unthinkable at the time: He turned to them lovingly, touched them and healed them.

### A place of inner and outer healing

In India, the staff at the Poolbagh leprosy colony near Gotlam also treat the sick people with love and appreciation. Even there, people with leprosy are still ostracized for fear of infection. Yet leprosy has been curable for over 40 years and is no longer contagious after a short period of treatment.

Dr. Anil Benjamin, head of EBMI partner Bridge-of-Hope, reports how terrible it is for sick people to be completely excluded from society and their families. They are treated as "untouchables", are not allowed to do any work (except begging) and have to live in leper colonies.





The residents receive medical care at the colony



Children also grow up here

### Care and dignity

Poolbagh is one of these colonies. It was established 30 years ago through the initiative of Bridge-of-Hope. This place enables around 50 families to live in dignity and provides help for those affected. Around 150 people currently live in the colony. Many children were born there, grew up healthy and were later able to leave the colony.

The residents are looked after by volunteers. They carry out most of

the day-to-day tasks independently. Bridge-of-Hope provides them with rice and the most important medicines and bears the costs for the medical treatment of ulcers and the necessary bandages.

### The story of Manjula

When Manjula was diagnosed with leprosy, one thing was clear to her: she did not want to give up her life. So she continued to take the herbal medicine and hoped for improvement. But at some point, small holes

appeared under her toes. She could barely walk. When people found out that the young woman had leprosy, they shunned her. No one, not even her family, would let her stay with them. Manjula then went to the leprosy hospital and received treatment. However, due to the prejudice and marginalization in her home village, the doctors advised her to join the Poolbagh colony.

Manjula was admitted there at the age of 22. At first, she lived in



Support with medication and rice





The residents organize the rice distribution themselves

a simple hut made of wood and leaves. Over time, the leper colony became her new home: she met a man who also had leprosy. They married and had a son, who has since grown up.

Today, Manjula is 45 years old, widowed and still marked by her illness. She continues to live in the leper colony and receives rice and medical help. However, the care she receives from the Bridge of Hope team is at least as valuable: Loving

words, support in her everyday life and the knowledge that she is accepted and loved even in her illness.

by Michael Fischbeck and Lars Müller



Manjula

## Leprosy is curable

Leprosy is a bacterial infectious disease that can cause irreversible nerve damage, leading to paralysis and sensory disturbances. In itself, leprosy is not a highly contagious disease, as only prolonged and close contact with infected people can lead to infection. The problem is that the bacterium has an incubation period of up to 20 years. This means that the first symptoms after infection with the pathogen may only appear after two to 20 years.

Leprosy is still particularly widespread in poorer regions in South East Asia, Brazil, India and Africa - where medical care is poor. Malnutrition and a weakened immune system promote infection and make the course of the disease much more difficult. Initially, light or reddish patches form on the skin, which feel

numb. In this phase, the disease can still stagnate and can also be treated very well with medication. Only with advanced damage to the nerves there is a pronounced loss of the sensation of pain and temperature, which is why diseased people often suffer unnoticed injuries, which then become infected. Ulcers, wounds, deformities and mutilations of the limbs can be the result.

If treated early with medication, patients can be completely cured of leprosy and are also not contagious. However, if permanent disfigurements or mutilations are already visible as a result of injuries, those affected are shunned and ostracized. This extreme alienation from friends and family is a great emotional burden for those affected.



# NEWS

News, dates and information about our missionary work

## Gift ideas not just for Mother's Day

A tip for anyone who wants to give a gift and donate to the mission at the same time:

Our friends from Pearls of Africa produce jewelry and decorative items in Uganda. EBM INTERNATIONAL projects also benefit from the proceeds. Churches, associations or book tables can order product packages on a commission basis.

Further information and the webshop at:  
[www.pearls-of-africa.org](http://www.pearls-of-africa.org)



## Meet us at the BEFG National Council!



From May 8 to 11 (Ascension weekend), the BEFG national council will take place at the Kongress Palais in Kassel. We will be there again in the exhibition area and look forward to meeting you in person.

Even if you are not there as a guest or delegate, you can experience us live:

On Wednesday, May 8, we invite you to our Friends Meeting at the EFG Kassel-West, starting at 4:30 pm. International guests and insights into the mission await you. Please make a note of the date – more detailed information will follow.

## Book: Hello, call for you.

Fundraising campaign for the benefit of the congregation in Izmir: Bodo Riedel, former religion teacher, editor and author, has republished 36 short texts on questions of faith. They deal with fundamental questions such as "Why do I live?" or "Do I have to pray?".

Bodo Riedel has long been associated with our missionary work and is dedicating the proceeds to church work in Izmir/Turkey. We have ten copies available and will send them to you in return for a donation. Simply call +49 33234 74-441 or write to: [promotion@ebm-international.org](mailto:promotion@ebm-international.org)



Bodo Riedel  
Hello, call for you.  
Available in German only



## Our EBMi donation shop is here!

Ever given a goat as a gift? In our donation shop you can choose this and other practical gifts from our projects, such as school meals, a cataract operation or seedlings for climate protection.

[www.ebm-international.org/spendenshop](http://www.ebm-international.org/spendenshop)



## Still available: Posters and prayer booklets

Our prayer booklet provides information and prayer requests from our projects for your personal prayer time, intercession in the church or in your home group.

We still have the German A2 poster with the motto for 2024 and will be happy to send it to you – even in larger quantities, while stocks last. Simply call +49 33234 74-441 or write to: [promotion@ebm-international.org](mailto:promotion@ebm-international.org)





# NEWS

News, dates and information about our missionary work



## Sierra Leone: Second year of assignment for Christina Döhring

Pastor Christina Döhring is in her second year of teaching at the theological seminary in Jui/Sierra Leone. She not only invests in the knowledge of her students, but is also personally involved as a mentor and friend. The economic and political situation in the country is very tense. We are grateful that Christina is serving the people there together with her husband Ralf and their son.

## The Soppa family: Arrived safely in Malawi

Margrit and Micha Soppa were able to leave for Malawi with their children at the end of July 2023. They have now settled in well there. Pastor Micha Soppa works as a lecturer at the Baptist College in Lilongwe, where he teaches biblical Greek, among other things. Margrit is a qualified nurse and will be working in the medical field.



## Sustainable and high-yield agriculture for Malawi

Karin Schwarz's work on the Balaka farm in Malawi is attracting growing interest at home and abroad. Together with volunteers of different ages, her team demonstrates how sustainable agriculture can succeed and what an authentic relationship with God can look like. The great hope is that the young people will take what they have learned back to their villages to provide their families with a better livelihood.

## EBMI Mission Council 2024 in Bad Oeynhausen



Interested parties from East Westphalia and the surrounding area can look forward to our Mission Council, the meeting of those responsible for EBMI mission work from all over the world, taking place this year from May 1 to 4 at the EFG in Bad Oeynhausen. We cordially invite you to the respective evening programs:

**Wed 01.05.** 19:30 Opening

**Thu 02.05.** 19:30 Service

**Fri 03.05.** 19:30 Theme evening "70 years of EBM (INTERNATIONAL). Learning from the past for today"

**Sat 04.05.** 19:00 h Closing service

All events are held in English, translation via headphones subject to availability. It is not necessary to register for the evening events. You are welcome to support the missionary work with a collection at the event.



Karin Schwarz

# Connected to the world through signs

*For deaf people, even simple tasks are difficult to manage: they need company when visiting the doctor, going to the authorities or in everyday situations in order to be able to communicate easily. Thanks to the commitment of the Baptist church in Ijuí/Brazil, the CAIS project for the deaf was created to help those affected and their families and to reach them with the Good News.*

Already 20 years ago, Edison Dransfeld, then pastor of the Baptist church in Ijuí, used LIBRAS sign language to make church services accessible to the deaf. The first church services were even offered entirely in LIBRAS. Through contact with the deaf, Edison Dransfeld quickly realized how difficult everyday life is for many of them. He developed the desire to found a center to help these people professionally and sustainably. As church, they were not in a position to take on all the tasks and quickly reached their limits. So in 2004, they founded CAIS (Center for the Integral Care of the Deaf) in Ijuí and began accompanying and supporting deaf people and their families.

Today, 23 children receive weekly lessons in LIBRAS and Portuguese so that they can communicate better in everyday life, at school and with their families. In addition, almost 60 people are regularly supported with visits to the authorities, doctors' appointments and food. Director Silvia da Costa is a social worker and, together with the deaf teacher Paulo and a driver, is strongly committed to the deaf and their families. They are currently only able to offer lessons two days a week, but their big wish is to reach even more people and teach five days a week. They have therefore applied to the

government to be recognized as a public institution. This would enable them to receive public funding and help even more people. The more people learn LIBRAS, the more deaf people can be reached with the gospel. More translators can also be available in the churches to serve these people.



Director Silvia da Costa with Paulo Matter

## Background: History of sign language

As signs and gestures are the only means of communication for deaf people, there have always been certain forms of sign languages that have become established in groups. Sign languages are already mentioned in ancient writings. The Jewish Talmud, for example, mentions the marriage of deaf couples in sign language.

Unfortunately, deaf people were often marginalized and discriminated against because they could not communicate "normally". Deafness was often even seen as a mental disability or punishment from God. It was not until the 16th century - particularly in Spain - that sign language began to be used in education, mostly to teach spoken language to the deaf. In the middle of the 18th century, the first public school for deaf children was established in France, which developed and taught its own sign language.

From the middle of the 19th century, sign language was downright fought against in Europe and banned from schools. Deaf people were only supposed to learn spoken language and use it as a means of communication. This stopped any further development and consolidation of sign language in Europe (in contrast to the development in Brazil).

During the National Socialist era in Germany, deaf people were systematically persecuted, sterilized or even murdered. It was not until the middle of the 20th century that a new acceptance of sign language emerged in Europe and various official sign languages developed regionally. In Germany, German Sign Language (DGS) was not officially recognized as a language until 2002.



# The dream of becoming a teacher comes true

*Paulo Augusto Matter is a trained educator and teacher of the Brazilian sign language LIBRAS. At CAIS, he teaches LIBRAS twice a week to deaf and hearing children from the age of six, young people and adults, as well as Portuguese for the deaf. He talks about his work in a written interview.*

## **EBM INTERNATIONAL: Why did you become a teacher for LIBRAS?**

Paulo Augusto Matter: As I am deaf myself, I learned LIBRAS when I was 13 years old. At school, I didn't understand anything the teachers or my classmates said, there was no way of communicating. I was very irritable and didn't want to go to school anymore. But my mother encouraged me to carry on and learn LIBRAS. This not only enabled me to finish school successfully, but also to study education and LIBRAS literature.

After that, I wanted to become a teacher because I dreamed of teaching LIBRAS to other people, especially children. So that deaf people can lead a normal life without communication barriers. And also because I realized that there was a lack of professionals in this field.

## **What does it mean to be deaf in Brazil?**

This is a big challenge because people sometimes think we are incapable or mentally handicapped. In reality, we simply speak a different language than other people. In Brazil, there is a significant shortage of LIBRAS interpreters in schools, public institutions or hospitals. Deaf people are often dependent on the presence of a family member to accompany them, but there are also cases where there is no support at all. CAIS helps in precisely these areas and also with communication with family members.

## **How does the life of a child and their family change when they come to CAIS and can learn LIBRAS?**

### **What is LIBRAS?**

In 1855, the French teacher Ernest Huet came to Brazil and founded an institute for the deaf there. He promoted the independent development of sign language, as he himself was deaf. This was the beginning of the Brazilian sign language LIBRAS (Língua Brasileira de Sinais - Brazilian language of signs), which is still used today.

Just as different spoken languages have developed and changed, different sign languages have emerged around the world, even with their own dialects and regional characteristics. In terms of grammar, expression and complexity, sign languages are a language in their own right and can be equated with any standard spoken language.

We experience a big change very quickly. The children often had no or only very limited opportunities to communicate. Some have even come up with their own sign language at home. This is sad and stressful for the families. Children who are unable to communicate are often very restless, irritable and disobedient. They can only understand their parents to a limited extent and cannot express their own wishes and needs. Everything changes when they begin to better understand the world they live in. Over time, they become calmer and listen better to their parents.

## **What does this mean for the children's lives?**

Children who learn LIBRAS can go to school with interpreters and understand all subjects. Later they can study and have a job like any other. Learning LIBRAS and hearing the gospel is something very special for them and gives them better prospects for the future. I hope that they will be able to teach other deaf people



Paulo here with his students is making the international sign for I Love You



Paulo with his students during the LIBRAS lessons

in the future and communicate better. I also hope that more hearing people will learn LIBRAS so that deaf people can lead an easier life in the future and communicate better in everyday life. Especially in churches, it would be so important for hearing people to know how to communicate in LIBRAS so that they can translate for the deaf and teach them.

#### **On the subject of church: how do you organize spiritual life in the CAIS project?**

Once a week we have a service in LIBRAS, where I preach. This is quite normal for me, because LIBRAS is my mother tongue, so I can talk to deaf people about the gospel quite naturally, answer questions and explain the word of God to them. We have our own room in the church where we celebrate services in LIBRAS, with songs, prayers, testimonies and sermons. On Sundays, we take part in the joint service with all visitors with the help of interpreters.

I have hope that more deaf and hearing people will learn LIBRAS and feel God's call to teach and preach the

gospel to deaf people around the world. We pray that God will call more deaf pastors to reach these people.

**Thank you for the wonderful insight into your valuable service!**

*from Lars Müller*

#### **Christian sign language churches in Germany**

There are several Christian Sign Language Churches (CGG) in Germany that hold their services entirely in sign language (an overview can be found on the website [www.cgg-online.de](http://www.cgg-online.de)). Some also use the premises of local Baptist churches (EFG Hannover-Walderseestraße, EFG Leipzig, EFG Mülheim a.d.Ruhr, EFG Siegen-West).





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The ancient city of Pergamon – today Bergama

## New meeting center in ancient city

**Bergama** – a city better known to Christians by its Greek name: Pergamon. Here, where Christianity once flourished, you can now only see mosques. But since our Turkish staff member Onur moved to Bergama with his family, things have started to change. An international cultural center has been established and continues to grow. A Russian women's group meets for regular church services, children and adults come to do handicrafts, bake and make pottery. Art exhibitions and discussions take place here. A colorful place with a promising program and all kinds of opportunities for encounters. And these that are essential for Onur and his team. Because they often get talking about their faith. A genuine exchange takes place. At eye level. This enriches and encourages them. Onur, his family and the whole place.



Onur and Marina Kocabay

