



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

“A gate of life”, to help young disabled people in the West Bank



Art features among the many activities offered by Lifegate: this beautiful plate was painted by Kholoud, a young and highly talented artist!

“Lifegate” is a German Christian organization located in Beit Jala, near Bethlehem. It helps disabled children and youth in the West Bank as part of a project initiated in 1991. With its team of Palestinian and German collaborators, Lifegate addresses this challenge. **Its work is based on hope and love for all men that has its roots in the Christian faith** and permeates the work of all its employees.

On the initiative of two of its members, **Frank and Rita Deiters**, permanent delegates to the Holy Land of the **Lieutenancy for Switzerland**, this Lieutenancy Order has supported a Lifegate project. These two members came to know about Lifegate and were deeply impressed by its work during a trip to the Holy Land with their family in 2010. Frank Deiters, the couple's son, had accompanied them and had decided to stay on as a volunteer for three months. He was so impressed by their work that he offered his services as a volunteer from 2011.

250 children and young people with disabilities participate in weekly support programs. These include support for young children, with a kindergarten for children with physical or mental disabilities, a specialized school and a vocational training workshop for disabled young people, who are prepared in twelve trades. Lifegate helps with the integration of disabled children into regular schools, and its staff provides home care to elderly and those in need of support. Lifegate provides comprehensive medical and therapeutic care for children and young people because there is no statutory social insurance system or a specific allowance for disabled persons.

65 Palestinian Christians work for Lifegate. In the overall population of the Holy Land, Palestinian Christians represent less than 1%, and by giving them a permanent job, Lifegate wants to encourage them to remain.

Burghard Schunkert, founder and director of Lifegate, describes its current activities: "One of the specific programs our institution offers is to help prepare children of different age groups to integrate into a regular kindergarten and regular schools: this has allowed five children to leave Lifegate and access local schools. We were able to set up in the new wing of our school a new special needs class that allows us to teach 60 children divided into 6 classes. We are pleased to be able to allow children of the Lifegate kindergarten to continue their studies and we have some external children who are on our waiting lists".

"In 2016 – he continues – about **50 young people were prepared by Lifegate for their future profession** and in doing so helped to find their place in society." Most of the young people trained by Lifegate have already found a job in businesses in and around Bethlehem. Apart from professional training, these young people have learned to read and write Arabic and have followed courses in mathematics and general knowledge. In addition, a new course in our workshops for occupational therapy students from Bethlehem University was one of the highlights of this summer."

Mr. Schunkert also noted the **support that Lifegate offers to Syrian refugees in Jordan**, which describes as follows: "This spring we were able to help many people with disabilities thanks to medical equipment that we built ourselves at Lifegate or which were donated to us. Our employees, accompanied by therapists, traveled to a refugee camp in Jordan, to deliver much needed wheelchairs and medical equipment. Meanwhile, the Lifegate team that takes care of medical equipment was also requested in neighboring countries. We respond to these requests, when we can, with joy."

The work of Lifegate is funded by donations, the sale of the products and services available in their workshops, such as shoe repairs. In the future, a dental clinic, a laundry service and a catering service should help generate even more funds.

Jean-Pierre de Glutz

Lieutenant for Switzerland

Donata Krethlow-Benziger

Chancellor

(January 30, 2017)

We learn more about Lifegate Rehabilitation and the situation for disabled children in Bethlehem with Burghard Schunkert, director at Lifegate.

Can you tell us more about the development programs Lifegate Rehabilitation offers?

Lifegate has been working for 26 years in the field of Rehabilitation for children and young people with disabilities. Our everyday work is carried out with a holistic approach. We look into all the areas of a person's life and start to develop them where we identify a need. We offer education in kindergarten, school and vocational training center (we teach 14 professions), medical intervention and therapies, intensive work with families and siblings, home visit programs. Our statement: Every child and every person is a wonderful creation of our God and has right for love, acceptance, development and access to development and education.

Beside our daily program for up to 200 people with disabilities, we offer with our disabled people a laundry service for the public, a dental clinic for specific difficult children and young people (but also for everyone who likes to come), a catering and food service, a leather and shoe repair workshop for outside customers. Our therapy department with all the necessary therapies is also open for the public (outpatients) from Monday to Saturday. We have a very skilled helping aid and wheelchair department and we deployed our team and services several times to aid the Syrian refugees in Jordan, Egypt and Iraq.

We start our week with a devotion from the bible, we have a weekly prayer meeting and we share the love of Christ in our everyday thoughts, actions and words. We are working for the people and for peace and understanding and against no one. We believe in reconciliation between Arabs and Jews and we Christians can act as a bridge between them. Our faith is our source for love and power.

Do you have any specific activities in support of families with disabled children?

At Lifegate we help the families to help themselves with income generating projects, like: Second hand clothes stores, sheep breeding, greenhouses, chicken and egg production, etc. We prefer when the idea comes from the family in fields they have already experience. We encourage families a lot to become our partners in the development of the child. Therefore we have mother and father programs at Lifegate where parents learn more about their children and how to help them.

What is life like for a disabled child in Bethlehem?

Better than anywhere else in the Palestinian area, as Bethlehem has some institutions and places to support children and families. At Lifegate we try our best to cooperate with other institutions and not to duplicate services. Wheelchair users have a hard time and we discuss with the municipalities

the need of safe street crossings for wheelchair drivers, blind people and people who walk very slowly. We receive promises but no action.