

THE LORD IS AT WORK

Dear friends and sponsors of the Foundation *Korbgemeinschaft*,

More than two months have passed since the terrible earthquakes in Syria. I should now like to share with you a few observations that strengthen my optimistic view and allow me to look towards the future with confidence.

Lots of solidarity from religious believers in the West

After my latest call for donations on February 7, prompted by the terrible destructions by the earthquakes in northern Syria, I have fortunately received a lot of solidarity and encouragement from many old friends and also from hitherto unknown persons. From the reactions of religious believers to the need, I could see that during the period of Lent many took these weeks of prayer, contemplation and charity seriously. They brought Lenten offerings and donated, some of them rather generously, for those in need in Syria. More than EUR 150.000 have been received in the donation account of the Foundation *Korbgemeinschaft* and four large containers of humanitarian goods have already been sent. Material for two more containers is still waiting in storage, ready to be loaded and dispatched.

Quite a few priests have sensitized the religious believers to the plight of the people in Syria and motivated them to help. Their initiatives have been very successful. There have been collections, parish coffees, Lenten soups, birthday celebrations with a special collection purpose and many other fundraising activities. At this point I should like to express my deep gratitude for this brotherly and sisterly solidarity. The sympathy of the friends and their active engagement gives me a lot of confidence and hope that we can expect continued support and commitment for the work of the Foundation in the future.

Another observation I should like to mention in this context: The retired people, especially the women, are truly a treasure in the church and in society as a whole. The volunteer work they perform is amazing. The love which they have in their hearts, their commitment to the salvation of humanity, their efforts for peace, their compassion for the weak, for children and women, for the needy, the sick, the disabled, etc. deserve great praise, respect and appreciation.

Strong commitment of young people in Syria

The financial and material donations received have benefited and still benefit people in need, mainly in Aleppo and Latakia, who were severely affected by the earthquakes, but also people in Damascus, Homs, Hassake and Tartous. In Syria, many young people help to ensure the fairest and most efficient distribution of the humanitarian goods and financial means made available through the Foundation *Korbgemeinschaft*.

What the young volunteer team is doing in Aleppo is a model of excellence. Their hands are open for anyone seeking help, regardless of their denomination. The focus is on helping the most vulnerable in society as quickly as possible (children, the injured, the elderly, orphans, people with special needs). All relief supplies that come in are sorted and distributed in a targeted manner, completely selflessly and as a matter of course. They distribute clothes that we send from here, food packages and also financial help. Sometimes they visit people in their makeshift shelters. They visit old people's homes, orphanages, homes for the handicapped, they bring gifts and food and they even organize small celebrations to cheer people up and to give them moments of happiness.

I observe the great joy of this first group of young helpers formed in Aleppo. The team works closely with our Foundation for the benefit of those in need. The team members thank us for enabling them to help the desperate people, to do charitable deeds and to bring joy and comfort into their sad lives. Most of those seeking help are Muslims. What is impressive about this volunteer group is the deep Christian spirit of all its members. They are there as individuals and as a team for other human beings, they are not indifferent to the needs of others, but they work to alleviate the pain. When the recipients thank them for their help, they always reply: "You only need to thank God for His mercy!" The group currently consists of 25 young women and men, and they serve around 150 families every day. They document their activities by means of receipts, photos and videos.

Our Foundation is happy to support such highly motivated young people who put the concerns and the mission of the Church into reality. There is already a similar group in Latakia and there are also plans to soon set up one in Homs. Such groups deserve our respect and our full support.

The partners of the Foundation *Korbgemeinschaft* are not only these teams of young people, but also some active Catholic and Orthodox parishes.

The Bakery is still functioning and doing a great social job

Many of the friends also ask me about the Bakery, whether it was damaged by the earthquake. Thank God nothing happened to the Bakery. Some bakeries in the area have had to be close down for economic reasons. As a result, the *Bakery of Grace* even increased its production from time to time. Very often the daily quantity produced has been more than 3.5 tons.

I consider the Bakery to be God's work through our hands because it provides food, comfort and reassurance to all people in the region. Despite many challenges (energy shortages, expensive transport, the need to cover maintenance and personnel costs), the Bakery is still functioning. The bread is of very good quality and taste, a kilo still costs 200 SYP (currently 0.02 EUR, at an exchange rate of 1 : 9,500), despite the runaway inflation. Much is given to the poor for free. People get the bread without endlessly waiting in long queues, as is the norm in front of other bakeries. Enough bread is always produced and there is the

willingness and the capacity to further increase the production quantity considerably. Of course, this requires high support payments to cover costs. But there are always charitable people to support this work. To me, without any doubt, this is the work of God through our hands. At this point I should like to thank all of you for your generous help, which has a very positive effect on consoling and healing the depressed souls.

The situation in Syria is not yet showing any significant improvement, although the political climate has recently given rise for some hope. But when I see how the people in Europe react and act with passion to the plight of the people in Syria, about which the local mainstream media hardly report these days; when I look at the commitment of many convinced Christians in Syria who work with great zeal for the cause of the Church; when I see how much good is happening through the Bakery and the many other projects that *Korbgemeinschaft* has initiated, then I strongly and clearly feel God's action: GOD IS AT WORK, HE shows his divine works through our human hands. Today we seek those hands that can carry out God's plan for human salvation. Jesus rose so that we may rise. He gives us His grace so that we can pass on this grace for the salvation of all people. Today we do not necessarily experience the grace of God through the rich or the highly respected, but above all through people who have open hearts for God and at the same time for other people.

I should like to end this letter by expressing my deep gratitude to everyone who supports our projects. Thank you for the deep trust, for the generous gifts, for the great love that generates a lot of hope and comfort. I have often wished to thank each supporter individually, but I haven't found the time yet to do so. I hope to get the opportunity one day. Please rest assured, however, that I do have the name of every donor. Each one is included in my prayers.

I entrust you all to the protection of the Mother of God, the Holy Mary, who helps us in every need, and I wish you a blessed Feast of the Ascension full of grace and joy from the Lord.

Your Fr. Hanna Ghoneim

Vienna, May 18, 2023

P.S.: I am sending you a small selection from among several hundreds of pictures that I have received from Aleppo and Latakia, illustrating the work done there by the teams of young volunteers.

ALEPPO



LATAKIA



DAMASKUS



TARTOUS



HASSAKE

