

FALL NEWS



A walk through the forest with Ernst Christian

A retired "Förster" (manager of the forest) took us on a hike through the forest. He explained what a strong connection Germans have to their forests. From the reactions of those involved, you could tell that they really enjoyed it. A woman who comes from Baghdad wrote: "This was my first trip to the jungle... I loved walking in nature."

Fall starts with a hefty momentum!

As you can see from the photo, autumn has arrived and, after a break in August, things are humming again in the premises of the Ludwigshafen Mennonite Church. Every fall there are some participants who don't return because they are taking a course in the city, have gotten a job, have experienced family growth or because they simply don't feel like it anymore. On the other hand, new people always join in fall, so there is no shortage of participants.

Reoccurring Theme

One thing that we have heard repeatedly as to why people make the heart-wrenching decision to leave their homes and undertake often life-threatening journeys to a place they know very little about is, that they do it for their children. One of the ways we try to honour this hope for a better future is by offering help with homework to children of refugees. One can only imagine the helplessness of a parent who's child struggles in school when the parent can't understand the language to even begin to help their child. And so, twice a week, we welcome children from grade school to grade 10 into our space where high school and university students provide help with their homework. What we find particularly exciting is, that some of the very children for whom the parents fled, are now helping others succeed.

For my children

Saria (not his real name) is the youngest of 12. Two of his siblings have passed away, the rest are still in Syria while his nieces and nephews have all left for Turkey. That piqued my curiosity! There was more broken German, hand gesturing and motioning of handcuffs being put on. After a while, I pieced it all together. His nephews and nieces left because they or their husbands didn't want to fight in the war, and returning to Syria would mean imprisonment.

It partly explains the mystery of so many young men fleeing to Europe during the early part of the Syrian war. They had very few options—either being conscripted into the army of a regime they didn't support or getting paid to fight for a foreign entity which was fighting somebody else's war in their country.

But there was another question that lingered. Why was Saria the only one of his siblings to flee Syria? Being the youngest of his 11 siblings, he was the only one who had young, school-aged children. His home city, Aleppo, was the first city where aerial bombing was extensively used and consequently, there was no possibility for schooling. He left with his family so that his children could get an education.

Now he and his wife with their 7 children live in a 2-bedroom flat in Ludwigshafen—where his children are getting an education. This fall, his oldest son started to work at the Friedenshaus helping other children from refugee families with their homework.



Some generous gifts

A private donation and an additional donation from Mennonitisches Hilfswerk made it possible to purchase two umbrellas and garden furniture. This means the courtyard can be made better use of. Lots of good conversations with a cup of coffee or tea take place under these umbrellas, as well as lessons when it gets too warm inside.

The donation for a coffee machine, a counter and a year's supply of coffee beans came from the Mennonite Missions Committee. The enthusiasm among the participants is great. One woman who particularly loves her coffee was so excited that she took a very close look at the machine. By mistake, she touched the espresso button. She liked the coffee so much that she immediately made herself another one. During the coffee break she drank at least three more. Interestingly, she didn't take one the next day - perhaps her heart was still fluttering from the espressos the previous day :).

