

„Worldwide, people have the same questions“



Urs Schmid: „There interested people who expect an attractive offer.“

LIFE SEMINARS 7 years ago, Urs Schmid, doctor of theology and pastor, developed the first LiFe seminar. Meanwhile it is spreading around the world. What makes this seminar special in comparison with other courses on faith, and where does its secret to success lie? By Fritz Imhof.



Urs Schmid, how does someone today come to believe in Jesus?

In our postmodern times, people are interested in direct experiences rather than theoretical truths. They pay special attention to what happens in personal relationships. The success of the LiFe seminar lies in how Christians are able to accompany friends and colleagues on their way to faith in Jesus. It's not about winning debates on questions concerning faith but reaching the hearts of neighbours – even if we cannot answer all the questions.

How did it all begin? What triggered the development of the LiFe seminar?

The actual trigger was the question: How can members of a small group talk with friends and neighbours about their faith in Jesus? I then prepared a seminar where Christians together with their guests experience five basic meetings. Contrary to other courses, it isn't mainly about the content of the Christian faith. It is rather about the fundamental question, why Christians believe. That is why personal testimonies and central themes are important. In 2001 the first LiFe seminars started at the Christian Center Buchegg in Zürich. We discovered that guests gladly accepted the invitation.

“It's not about winning debates on questions concerning faith but reaching the hearts of neighbours – even if we cannot answer all the questions.”

Did participants at the first LiFe seminars get to believe in Jesus?

At the fourth meeting, many participants were in fact consciously open for a relationship with Jesus. This became known, and as a result, other churches attended courses so that they could also carry out LiFe seminars. And they also experienced that people got to believe in Jesus. Around an active church there is usually a circle of interested people, who are waiting for such an attractive offer.

Are the contents of the seminars today still the same as at the beginning, or did they develop further?

The topics of the LiFe seminars developed through my long-standing activity as a travelling evangelist. They are the topics that are still burning issues today: “How can we be happy?” – “Why does God allow this?” – “What is the meaning of life?” – “Discovering the gift of God!” – “Life in new dimensions!”. The answers of the Bible to the people's most important questions have turned out to be real evergreens in recent years. They have also established themselves in the other languages into which the LiFe seminar has been translated.

Urs Schmid

Born in 1953, married to Lilian, three adult sons, doctor of theology, engaged since decades as a lecturer and evangelist in the theory and practice of evangelism and revival on the academic level and in practical church planting. In recent years he has developed training material for evangelism in churches and the LiFe seminar has proved to be especially fruitful. The five-part introduction course on faith has already been translated into twelve languages.

So the seminars have spread internationally?

From 2001 till 2009 we held the seminars mainly at the Christian Center Buchegg, developed them and trained interested churches in Switzerland. The resonance was so positive that pastors abroad heard about it and wanted to translate the LiFe seminars into their languages. In countries such as Rumania, Albania and Bulgaria the development was as dynamic as in Switzerland. Also in the Ukraine, Russia, Egypt and Japan. Meanwhile, LiFe is translated into 12 languages and further languages are under way.

How long does it take to train someone who wants to carry out a LiFe seminar?

The training has changed over the years. At first it took a complete week with 15 lessons. The present LiFe multiplication training comprises seven modules, which are usually carried out on a Friday evening and the following Saturday. Supported by a LiFe mentor, churches can independently carry out the multiplication training for their church members and start LiFe seminars. Starting summer 2018, the training lectures will be available online. The most important LiFe training is “learning by doing”. Mentors accompany the planning, realization and evaluation of the seminars with the goal of improving the quality and sustainability each time.

Who gives the trainings in the other countries?

Usually I or other qualified LiFe trainers travel to the churches of these countries and we run the trainings with the church leaders, members and interested pastors from other churches. We lecture in English with translation into the corresponding language.

In Siberia or Ireland, don't the contents have to be different?

Today, the questions are the same everywhere. Just as there is Coca Cola, McDonalds and Starbucks all over the world and we see the same (YouTube) films and news programs, the people in Ireland and Siberia, but also in Japan, Egypt and Angola focus on the same questions. We are living in a postmodern culture that is gradually converging globally and asking the same questions everywhere.

Are there LiFe seminars in national churches?

Yes. The experiences in national churches are hardly different from those in free churches. It always depends on whether there is a home group or an active group of Christians that wants to carry out a LiFe seminar. And so, for example, members of the reformed churches at Altstätten, Bubendorf, Egerkingen, Schlatt, Weiningen etc. have had very positive results with LiFe. Ministers use LiFe topics specifically during confirmation classes, for parents of confirmands or for groups of seniors.

Why are these LiFe seminars necessary, aren't Alphalive courses good enough?

I am enthusiastic about Alphalive courses! They are a wonderful instrument that has proved its worth all over the world. The success of Alphalive courses shows the need, apart from the sermon in the worship service, to talk about faith on a smaller scale. At the LiFe seminar the access is easier for people who are searching, because they are always invited and accompanied by friends. With five meetings, LiFe is short and also makes sense if a guest cannot always attend. Often LiFe is a first step towards Jesus and a low-threshold contact with the church. Later, the faith needs to be deepened, which can happen during an Alphalive course.

“We are living in a postmodern culture that is gradually converging globally and asking the same questions everywhere.”

In this way, the two instruments complement each other perfectly.

What costs does a church have to expect when carrying out a course?

Originally, we had fixed fees. But because we realized that rigid fees can be a hindrance, we now provide the LiFe training in return for a voluntary compensation, donation or offering.

Questions to the LiFe Seminar

What is a LiFe seminar?

A simple and successful method of evangelism in small groups.

What does the name "LiFe" mean?

"LiFe" is short for "life fully experienced" (derived from John 10:10b).

What impact can a LiFe seminar have?

- Christians discover their calling as "fishers of men" and "disciple makers"
- Searching people are accompanied and discover life with Jesus
- Preachers and leaders discover their gift for evangelism
- Churches discover the power of joint praying

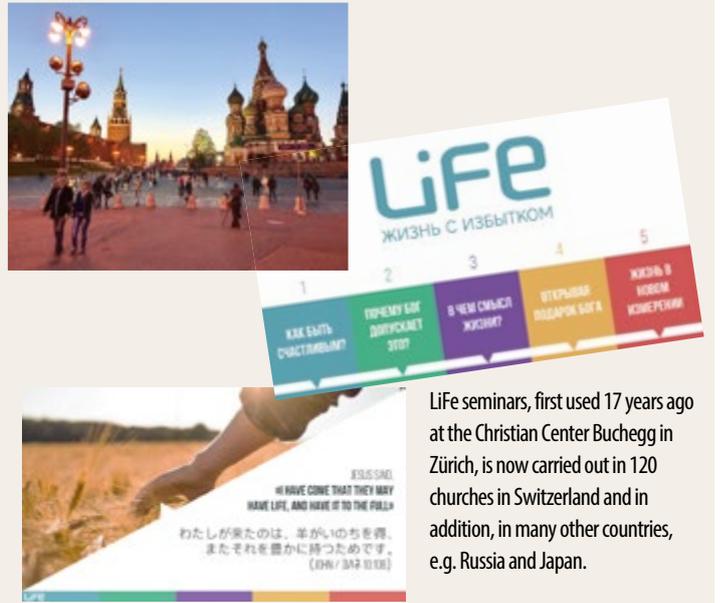
How many churches in Switzerland use the seminar?

Meanwhile, over 120 churches work with the LiFe seminar.

In how many languages and countries is there seminar material, in how many countries is it in use?

The LiFe topics are translated into 12 languages and are used in over 15 countries.

www.life-seminar.world



LiFe seminars, first used 17 years ago at the Christian Center Buchegg in Zürich, is now carried out in 120 churches in Switzerland and in addition, in many other countries, e.g. Russia and Japan.

How has the LiFe multiplication training developed with church staff as instructors?

Evangelism lives through church members and pastors who have the longing to be on the way as fishers of men and disciple makers. So we have encouraging feedbacks from Christians who after their first positive experiences with LiFe, have done mouth-to-mouth advertising. Enthusiastic pastors tell their pastor friends about LiFe and become trainers themselves. That is how LiFe came to Albania, from Albania to Siberia and to various cities in Russia. From Russia the seminars came to Russian-speaking messianic Jews in Tel Aviv.

What is your general perception of the development of evangelism in this country and worldwide?

Around the world, there are large differences. On continents such as Africa or South America and in some countries of Asia, Christianity and evangelism is experiencing an impressive upswing. On the other hand, the churches of South Korea, which had experienced a revival that started in 1950, are already very challenged today in their effort to reach the children of believers. It is a well-known experience: The poor and needy are much more open to evangelism than people living in prosperity and security.

Around the world, are there large differences in the methods of evangelism?

In some regions the traditional evangelism based on the model of Billy Graham with big events and calls are very popular and also very successful. With "life-on-stage" musicals, evangelism for the masses is flourishing anew in these parts. But there are many countries without positive reports of large evangelisms. Where Christians are restricted or intensely persecuted, big events are not possible.

What are your experiences with the LiFe seminar in such remote regions as for example Siberia?

Especially in such an environment, the seminars have a positive resonance and are very gratefully accepted. The seminars are provided free of charge, they do not need a special location or much advertising or a famous speaker. That is why LiFe seminars are also suitable for churches that have to manage with limited financial resources or where terror is a threat, or in Russia where public advertising has become difficult.

“On continents such as Africa or South America and in some countries of Asia, Christianity and evangelism is experiencing an impressive upswing.”

In the West there are hardly any larger spiritual awakenings. What do you miss in the churches of Switzerland?

In Switzerland, in Europe or America we are living with "too much civilization". The churches have to consciously choose from an abundance of possibilities and give evangelism the highest priority, otherwise they will not see fruit.



Worldwide the same: Training for the LiFe seminar at Locarno ...



...and in a city in Egypt.

But in many places disappointments have spread because of unsuccessful evangelistic events.

Usually that happens because there is no knowledge about the “Engel Scale” and its significance for evangelism in local churches.

“Engel Scale”? Please explain!

The name Engel Scale is not linked with the “heavenly angels”, but with the missiologist James F. Engel. He examined the question how not-yet-Christians experience the process of evangelism, and he designed a corresponding scale. This shows the development of a person via eight steps, till he reaches a living faith in Jesus. Then it describes the four further steps that are necessary for Christians to learn how to live as disciples, in order to “make disciples” themselves. Jesus didn’t summarise the assignment for his disciples with the sentence “save the lost” but with the words “make disciples of all nations ...”. Whoever understands the “Engel Scale”, instead of being disillusioned, no longer has illusions! For it is an illusion to think that there are simple recipes for evangelism!

For many churches, training with the “Angel Scale” has been a great help, and now year after year, they experience how people develop on their way towards faith, accepting Jesus and becoming active members of the church. The scale helps us to understand our task better and to see the value of evangelism in a much broader context. It is important that we are not just focused on “conversions”.

How does one revive a commitment for evangelism in a church?

In my opinion, the Sunday preaching has the most impact. Through the proclaimed word, God can work in the hearts of people, motivate them and prepare them to serve others in this important way. Additionally, encouraging examples awaken a new passion to save people. If in a small group, each member tells how he or she came to believe, new joy about God’s love, mercy and grace comes up. And joy is contagious!

Many thanks for the conversation.



[Registration life-seminar.world](http://Registration.life-seminar.world)