ARAB BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org February 2016

"A Fish Out of Water"
A Master of Religion Student's Residency

Joy Fuller, a new student in our Master of Religion in Middle Eastern and North African Studies program (MRel), has written a short piece describing her recent experience in the MENA Christianity module. Her travel around Lebanon, her discovery of the historical Arab Church, and the diversity of her peers had a lasting impact on her understanding of the global Church.

A Fish out of Water, was published in 1961. The title itself has entered the world of familiar sayings and idioms. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the idiom as "to feel awkward because you are in a new situation that you have not experienced before."

My husband and I live on a small farm in southwest Virginia and we pastor a new church-plant. We also run a small, non-profit missions organization with a concentration on Africa and India. Recently we have become "empty-nesters" as our 3 adult children have moved out of the house and into their own situations. This transition has left me feeling like "a fish out of water."

Joy in class during the January residency

For several years, I have mulled over a return to my studies, thinking about an MA. The "empty-nest" phase has given me space to look into this option. I first heard about the English-language MRel program when I visited Beirut a year ago. My husband and I were there to visit several pastors who were working with Syrian refugees. I was intrigued by the program structure of 4 core modules. So when this Southwest Virginia girl enrolled in the MRel program at ABTS's Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES), she was definitely "a fish out of water."

Having graduated from Texas Christian University many years ago, the idea of a return to studies left me feeling quite vulnerable. I was 'feeling awkward in a new situation' particularly because my coursework would take me to the Middle East. However, this program seemed to offer a broader understanding of the Middle East and North Africa region and a context for contemporary events happening in the world today. In fact, the program is designed for those who want to work in the MENA region. Even so, I believe it is beneficial for anyone wanting to learn and understand current events. This program better equips those people serving others in difficult situations, such as, but not limited to, the multitudes of refugees across the world. It also serves to help the largely uninformed Church in the West.

The MRel program consists of four modules: Christianity, Culture, Islam and History, Politics and Economics. The program is mostly conducted online, with two-week residencies halfway through each

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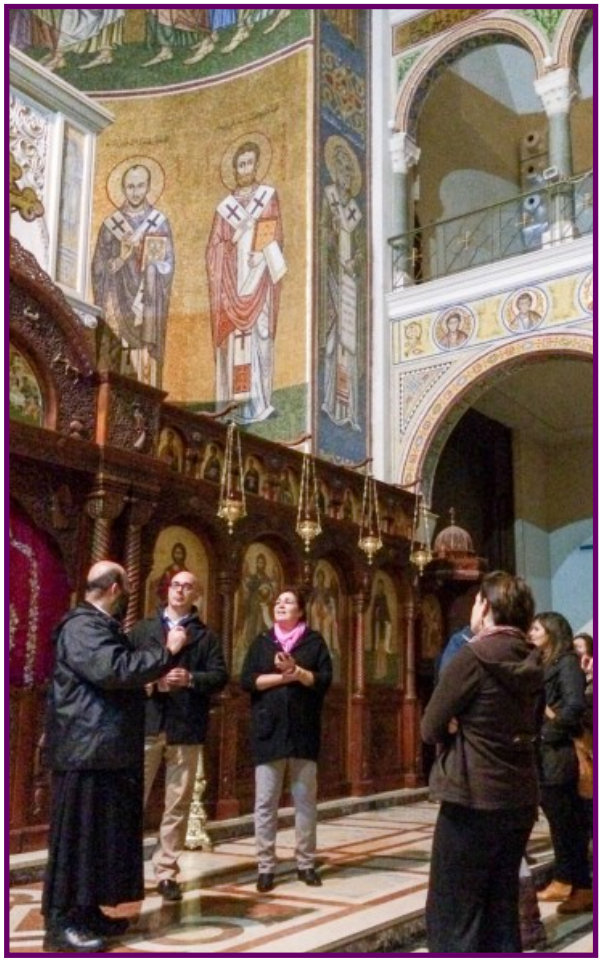
module. My first module was MENA Christianity. In the pre-residency portion we read about Christianity and the Church in the Near East, mostly from the 2nd century to the 19th century, including the eight Church Councils. We wrote papers, posted them on an interactive site, and dialogued with our classmates. In January 2016, we all met face-to-face in Lebanon for the first time in the two-week residency portion.

I thoroughly enjoyed all of my classmates. They were not as intimidating as I had imagined. They were very genuine, smart, thoughtful, lovely people who were sold out to the ministry of Jesus. We were all from various cities, countries, and backgrounds. Sharing two weeks together was a rich experience. My professors were not nearly as scary as I had anticipated either. We toured multiple monasteries, talked with Orthodox, Melkite, and Catholic leaders from the churches in the region, visited ancient sites pertaining to our Christian faith and viewed age-old texts and manuscripts. It was an honor to learn about the different expressions of faith within our shared Christian heritage.

Being in Beirut has given me an appreciation for all who have gone before me - for those who have suffered and been persecuted for the faith. I was humbled. Rather than being "a fish out of water" gasping for breath, I am finding new friends, new perspectives and fresh air.

MRel students at the Catholic Salvatorian Monastery and Manuscript Library in South Lebanon. The guide was librarian Father Makarios Haidamous. Some of the manuscripts were over 1000 years old.

Above and below: MRel students at the Catholic Church of St. Paul, in Dar'oun Harissa, learn how to read icons in a lecture given by one of the MRel faculty.



***ABTS Mission**: to serve the Church in our region as it realizes its Biblical mission of having Christ acknowledged as Lord by offering specialized learning resources and equipping faithful men and women for effective service.*

Left and right: Class visit to the Syriac Catholic Patriarchate and Library in Harissa, to learn about the role of iconography in the Eastern churches.

Curious about our Master of Religion in Middle Eastern and North African Studies program?

The two-week residencies are only part of the multidisciplinary instruction and learning of this English-language, distance-learning program! Get more information about this flexible and accredited postgraduate degree here! Email us with any questions at IMES@abtslebanon.org

Community Prayer Requests

Fadi Salamoun, Facilities Manager: Praise God for our new facilities and the successful move! Also a new prayer request as we get ready to set up our new guest rooms and bring on new staff in our Facilities Department. Pray that God brings us the right people, that we build a team to meet our high standards for quality, service, and overall operational effectiveness. We ask that you pray for God's hand in all of this.

Rose Khouri, Communications Officer: I ask for prayer for our students struggling with stress, especially our Syrian students. Not only do they have to balance family life, ministry, and full-time studies, but they are burdened by the suffering of their families and their fellow Syrians back in their home country. They are also burdened with an uncertain future, both for their ministries and for their families.

Mike Kuhn, Lecturer in Discipleship and Biblical Theology: Please pray for a united ABTS community. Unity is always difficult to maintain with our different cultures, backgrounds, and denominations.

Elie Haddad, ABTS President: Pray for wisdom and discernment for ABTS as we try to understand how we can serve the growing Church in North Africa better.

Georgette Tamer, Researcher: Please pray for an end to the garbage crisis in Lebanon. The garbage piling up on our streets is threatening the health of our society and creating political and social tension the longer this crisis remains unresolved.

Alexy Abou Rjeily, HR Manager: Pray for our staff, especially two couples who are expecting the births of their new children in the next month. Elias and Joyce Ghazal are expecting the birth of their son in early March and Jesse and Heidi Wheeler's second son is also due in early March. Please pray for us as we recruit new staff members to our growing seminary and for our Arabic-language school which is opening up a new branch to support our seminary as we seek financial sustainability.

The Middle East Bible Outreach (MEBO) is a 501(c)(3) corporation based in Atlanta, GA, that coordinates efforts among our US friends and partners to generate awareness and much needed financial gifts and prayers to support the work of ABTS. To learn more, visit: www.mebo.org.

Download past issues of our monthly newsletter at www.abtslebanon.org/newsletters

Middle East Consultation

20th -24th June 2016
Beirut – Lebanon

THE REFUGEE AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

Exploring the Impact of the Present Crisis on our Understanding of Church

The church in the Middle East is experiencing a time of unprecedented change. There exist significant challenges, and yet at the same time unimaginable opportunities. How has the local and global Body of Christ been responding to the current refugee crisis? What are the implications of this crisis for the church of the future?

The Middle East Consultation 2016 (MEC 2016) will explore the long-term implications of the significant number of refugees from non-Christian backgrounds who now regularly fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ. By doing this, IMES seeks to encourage healthy practices between and within different expressions of the local church in the Middle East, Europe and beyond. In response to the demographic changes currently taking place, MEC 2016 will be creating the time and space to reflect on the challenges and opportunities facing the MENA church in the present and to envision the church of the future in and beyond the MENA region.

MEC 2016 will include first-hand testimony by members of refugee communities, those involved in refugee ministry within and beyond the MENA region, as well as theological, Biblical and sociological reflection on the critical issues facing Christ's Body in light of recent events. Come and be part of these critical discussions.

To find out more
and to submit an online application
please visit: **www.ABTSLebanon.org/mec2016**
You can also email us directly at:
MEC@ABTSLebanon.org

Regular updates will be available on the IMES Blog:
IMESLebanon.wordpress.com
Please sign up to receive our weekly blog posts and updates on MEC 2016

St. Michael's Church, 'Jungle Refugee Camp' Calais, France. Simon Jones 2015

ABTS since 1960

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