



# ARAB BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

ABTS Newsletter

December 2015

### Middle East Consultation 2016: 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. In response, the Institute of Middle East Studies at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut, Lebanon is pleased to announce its 13<sup>th</sup> annual Middle East Consultation, June 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>.

The current refugee crisis, triggered to a large extent by the ongoing war and instability in Syria and surrounding countries, has provoked a wide range of reactions in diverse contexts. The local Church has frequently sought to respond in prophetic and Christ-like ways to the new realities before it. And in the process, many churches have been thoroughly transformed as they welcome into their midst those who would have been traditionally considered 'other'. In Europe, many churches are exploring creative ways of demonstrating hospitality to their new neighbors. Around the world, the refugee situation has become a highly politicized discourse requiring the church to respond with Kingdom mindedness.

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, MEC 2016 seeks to encourage healthy practices between and within different expressions of the local Church in the Middle East, Europe, and beyond. MEC 2016 will be creating space to reflect on the challenges and opportunities facing the MENA Church in the present and in the years ahead that result from the demographic changes currently taking place. In addition, we will be creating the time and space for church and ministry leaders to step back and reflect not only on what God has been doing in and through His Church in recent times, but to envision the Church of the future in and beyond the MENA region.

This year we anticipate a consultation driven by our local, regional and global participants who are actively involved in ministry with refugees or committed to developing Christ-centered responses to the growing refugee crisis in the Middle East, Europe, and beyond. The consultation will include first-hand testimony by those involved in refugee ministry within and beyond the MENA region, as well as theological, Biblical, and sociological reflection on the stories being

Photos of last year's consultation, June 2015



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told. In doing so, we hope to explore the possible implications for the regional and global Body of Christ. In addition, practical workshops and roundtable discussion groups will empower consultation participants to further develop their own responses to the crisis. Keynote presentations will furthermore provide a solid theological framework through which to form effective, Christ-centered responses to refugee communities in diverse settings.



"The phenomenal influx of Syrian refugees into churches in Lebanon is creating unprecedented challenges and opportunities. Not only is it having a transforming impact on the lives of hundreds of refugees, but it is also redefining the church's understanding of itself and

of its mission. With the phenomenon becoming increasingly global, there is currently no forum comparable to MEC 2016, where the global church can gather to talk about all the exciting factors associated with this developing reality. Come join the conversation from 20-24 June 2016 at ABTS in Lebanon." **Martin Accad, Director, Institute of Middle East Studies**

Throughout MEC 2016 we will be exploring two critical questions:

- From a theological, biblical, and sociological perspective, to what extent do non-Christian refugees need to be integrated into the previously-established Church?
- How might a biblical expression of church - made up of new believers from non-Christian backgrounds - be fostered in such a way that it would flourish within a non-Christian context?

MEC 2016 comes at a critical time in history for the Church in the region. Furthermore, what is already happening in the Middle East has the potential to happen elsewhere. Will the Church - will our churches - be ready?

"I am so excited about the Middle East Consultation 2016. It seems to me that God is calling His church to respond in a new and prophetic ways to the refugee communities, wherever they may be found. In the Middle East churches have stepped up to the mark, in many cases rediscovering who they are called to be in the midst of very challenging circumstances. Europe is currently experiencing the largest people movement since World War II, and it is the church that is taking a lead role in advocating for the rights of these people and demonstrating God's compassion in action. MEC 2016 will provide the opportunity to step back and not only reflect on what God has been and is doing in and through His church, but also to envision the church of the future – a church where people of diverse social and religious backgrounds find unity in Christ." **Arthur Brown, Assistant Director at the Institute of Middle East Studies and MEC Coordinator**



We look forward to hearing from you and to welcoming you to what promises to be a unique a vitally important consultation.

**Application, logistical information, and program updates are available on the following pages:**

**English:** [www.abtslebanon.org/mec2016](http://www.abtslebanon.org/mec2016)

**Arabic:** [www.abtslebanon.com/mec2016](http://www.abtslebanon.com/mec2016)

## Would you consider supporting a local or regional leader from the Middle East to participate in MEC 2016?

MEC 2015 was such a significant and transformative event for all those who participated in it. This was perhaps especially the case for participants from the Arab world who experience the challenges of discipleship in the Middle East and North Africa region on a daily basis. IMES would like to ask you to prayerfully consider supporting someone from the region to attend MEC 2016.

We are aiming to support 20 key leaders to attend MEC 2016, people who would otherwise not be able to be with us. If you would like to help please contact us at [MEC@ABTSLebanon.org](mailto:MEC@ABTSLebanon.org), indicating how you would like to help.

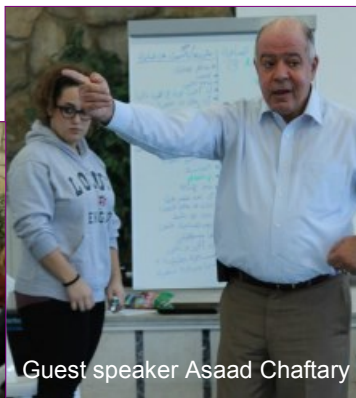
**ABTS Mission:** *To serve the Church in our region as it realizes its Biblical mission of having Christ acknowledged as Lord by offering specialized learning resources and equipping faithful men and women for effective service.*



## The Student Affairs Department Seeking Holistic Student Formation and Growth

Our Student Affairs Department runs a number of programs throughout the year to nurture an environment for transformation, from mentoring and counseling to hosting retreats and running educational seminars. Student life at ABTS is diverse, with students from countries all over the Arab world. Led by Dean of Students Bassem Melki, the five members of our Student Affairs team pastor and care for our students during their time with us.

**Over the November 13-14 weekend, our students headed further into the Lebanese mountains for a retreat.** The students, their children, faculty and staff enjoyed the beautiful scenery, fun games, roasting marshmallows, and periods of worship. The topic of the weekend was forgiveness, an important subject both in at the time of Christ and in today's modern Middle East. Guest speaker [Asaad Chافتary](#), a Christian who spent his youth leading a militia during the bloody Lebanese Civil War, gave his powerful testimony to the gathered students. As a militia leader he killed, persecuted, and tortured many as the conflict grew. Yet after the war and his own personal downfall, he came to know Jesus and the extent of the sins he had committed against others. He now dedicates his life to educating others on the principles of reconciliation and forgiveness, even in overwhelmingly difficult situations. Our students were greatly encouraged by his testimony. The retreat also focused on planning and preparing for an additional Student Affairs ministry: the Compassionate Care Ministry program.



Guest speaker Asaad Chافتary



Student Retreat

Twice a month a student-led team travels to East Lebanon to serve among Syrian refugee children living in camps through the **Compassionate Care Ministry**. Our students play games with the children, teach Bible stories, sing worship songs, and show the love of Christ to these children who fled the war. We are grateful for a recent generous gift that now enables our students to bring food and aid packages to the families.



Compassionate Care Ministry



A new program this year, **the ABTS Children's Library**, was created initially to help the children of our theology students improve their English. Lebanese schools heavily emphasize English and the children of international theology students from Arab countries have been struggling to keep up with the more rigorous Lebanese curriculum. However, this library project has grown to include ABTS staff and faculty children, with 20-25 children coming each week. A growing collection of nearly 400 children's books have been sent to us from generous partners all around the world. A group of English and Arabic-speaking volunteers leads the program each Saturday, with different volunteers and parents reading books in English and Arabic during the story time, followed by a themed craft and the opportunity for each child to check out two books – to be returned the following week.



Student's child checking out a book



Partnerships Manager Wissam al-Saliby and his wife Ashley



IMES Director Martin Accad and his wife Nadia



Registrar Rana Wazir

### Prayer Requests

**Bassem, Dean of Student Affairs:** “We pray for the intervention of God’s Spirit in our students’ lives. We pray for wisdom, for our students to see issues as opportunities for God to change them for the better.”

**Elie Haddad, ABTS President:** “We ask for prayer for our students to have clear ministry visions, to understand how they can serve despite the uncertainty in the Middle East and North Africa and how they can make a difference for the Kingdom.”

**Karen Shaw, Assistant Professor of Cross-Cultural Ministry:** “Students who are parents find it difficult to give adequate time both to their full-time study and to their children. This is hard on both parents and children. Pray for optimal use of the time available and successful adjustment.”

**Rabih Hasbany, Translation Coordinator:** “We ask for prayers for one of our Egyptian students who is currently suffering from a stomach infection. He had to return to Egypt for treatment and will be missing almost three weeks of classes. We ask that you pray for his recovery while he seeks treatment.”

**Stephanie Kuhn, Student Affairs Committee Member:** “Praise God for the Children's Library, for a great start to a new academic year, for a profitable student retreat, and for ways in which students are growing and adapting to life in the ABTS community. As for prayer requests, we want to ask for prayer for our students during the holidays as they are far away from home and their communities. Pray that they will find joy, renewal, and refreshment during their holiday break.”

**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](http://www.mebo.org).