# Arab Baptist Theological Seminary
# كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

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## The Ministry of ABTS: A Look Forward

**By Elie Haddad, ABTS President**

ABTS exists to serve the Church as the Church serves the world. The world around us is changing very rapidly. What God is doing in our region, despite the conflicts and the calamities, is unprecedented. If the Church wants to remain relevant to its context and maintain a vibrant witness then the Church needs to revise its approaches and methods, and adjust its language and discourse. To achieve this, the Church needs well-shaped leaders who have a heart filled with love for God and His mission, a critical mind, and sophisticated skills. Essentially, the Church needs leaders who are able to read and understand the signs of the times and are able to mobilize their church communities to respond in creative and relevant ways.

2016 Graduation Ceremony in June

The main task of ABTS is to equip these kinds of leaders. This is why our training, in addition to the core of Bible and Theology, extends to a variety of disciplines that help leaders think more critically and holistically. To this end, we regularly refine our existing programs and curricula, and we are frequently thinking of new, creative, and more accessible ways of equipping more people for ministry.

One of the ways that ABTS is responding to the changing needs of the Church in our region is the ABTS Online program that we launched last year. This is an Arabic-language online Certificate in Ministry, equivalent to one year of residential study. This program is reaching new groups of leaders where no such training was previously accessible. We currently have more than fifty students in this program, with the enrolment increasing every term. We are experiencing a high rate of retention in this program, which is remarkable for an online program. We have identified two reasons for that. First, we are only admitting to the program students who are already engaged in ministry, and, second, the students are finding the material practical and relevant to their ministries. We expect the first cohort to graduate from this program by the end of this calendar year.

The next challenge for us is to think through new ways of using distributed learning. Our ABTS Online students are already requesting more advanced training beyond the one-year Certificate. In addition, our Lebanese part-time students find it challenging to enroll in a residential program designed for full-timers. We need to come up with more options for training and more diversity in delivery methods. With the long experience that we have in residential studies, and with the new experience that we are gaining in running online programs, we are well-situated to invest in more creative blended distributed learning schemes. This will be at the center of the next phase of innovation at ABTS.

Another area that we find ourselves recently drawn into is peacebuilding. Our Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES) has piloted several such projects in the past. IMES has become a leader in interfaith dialogue in the region, which has helped build new friendships and has opened up new doors for

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ministry. Our next challenge is to move our interfaith work from being exclusively at the leadership level to reaching the grassroots level. Developing new peacebuilding programs and working at grassroots level and at church level is the next step. This is a key change for ABTS, moving beyond equipping leaders for the Church into engaging with the Church and modeling for the Church.

Our region is in deep need for peace and reconciliation. Many organizations and NGOs attempt to do work in these areas. Our task is to think through how we can have a Christ-centered and Gospel-centered approach. What does the Gospel have to say about our situation? How does the Gospel motivate us and equip us to be these agents of peace and reconciliation? This will be an exciting phase for us as we wrestle, alongside the Church, to find meaningful and powerful ways for the Gospel to engage with our peace-deprived societies.

It is obvious that we find ourselves in the middle of spiritual warfare at this time. We can easily observe the forces of evil at work around us. News media do a good job in communicating that side of the story. However, we have to look a bit more closely to see how God is actively at work in the region. The news media do not communicate this story. It is exciting to be in the middle of this spiritual war serving on God's side. We pray that God will continue to shape us and mold us to be used by Him for His purposes in a deprived region that He deeply loves.

## 2016 Graduation Ceremony: Releasing 21 workers to the fields!

On Sunday, the 26th of June, at 6 pm, the audience were seated in the Elias Salibi Hall in anticipation of the 21 students who would march forward in a procession towards getting their degrees. And there they entered, one after the other, accompanied by the sound of solemn music and the applause that rose to a crescendo.

The graduation ceremony began with an invocation speech by research professor pastor Hikmat Kashouh followed by a word of welcome by pastor Charlie Costa, Chair of the ABTS board of trustees. Two of our graduates, along with talented musicians who are part of the staff of ABTS and of the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development, led us in a blessed time of praise and worship.

Magi from Egypt, who earned a Master of Divinity, was the student speaker of the Theology program, and Brent Hammoud was the student speaker for the MRel program (Master of Religion in Middle Eastern and North African Studies). The Dean of Students, pastor Bassem Melki, took us by surprise as he stepped down from his place followed by another three professors and graduating student Elias Abi Rached. Five of the ABTS staff came from among the audience and joined the choir that accompanied pastor Bassem Melki in a colorful spiritual sung in acapella.

The graduation message was delivered by Dr. Paul Haidostian, President of Haigazian University. Finally, the students, four of whom are MRel graduates, were presented with their long-awaited degrees, and the sound of applause initiated from the delighted audience once more. Before those 21 students walked out as full-fledged graduates, pastor Samuel Kharrat, gave them the benediction.

The time after the graduation was spent in celebration with the graduates who will continue their journey working for the Kingdom. As the words of the spiritual go: "Lord, I keep so busy workin' for the Kingdom […] Ain't got time to die."

Would you consider supporting the equipping of future leaders for the Arab Church? We invite you to partner with us in fulfilling our mission of serving the Church in the Arab world, by providing scholarship support to one of our students. Contact Partnerships Manager Wissam al-Saliby today to know how you can contribute.

## Shifts in Perspective and Relationships with Faculty Equipped ABTS Graduates

How do you begin to gauge the transformation that can take place over the course of three years? For a group of leaders of the Church in the Arab World, men and women who left their families, cultures, and ministries for a season of equipping far from home, it can seem like a lifetime of invaluable education and experience has been squeezed into a span of thirty-six months. This time of preparation has woven together new opportunities and unexpected challenges, long hours of research and hands-on ministry experience. It has been characterized by relationships with faculty, fellow students, and local churches that shaped and impacted each student deeply, and three years of enduring investment have born more fruit than graduates of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary could have imagined when they began their journeys. *Continue reading this article at www.mebo.org.*

## Christ, Transforming His Global Church by Meeting Us in Our Syrian Sisters and Brothers: Highlights from Middle East Consultation 2016

Between 20 and 24 June 2016, ABTS witnessed the largest ever MEC with over 230 participants attending from all corners of the globe. The five days of the consultation included presentations from multiple contexts, round-table discussions, and workshops on critical issues related to the refugees and the role and nature of the church both in and beyond the Middle East. One participant shared the following: "It has really widened my perspective and I've been very glad to talk to the people from Syria who have been present here. I was very glad to visit the refugee shelter the other day and really talk to the people who are affected by what's happening in Syria. What has made me really think more about how I personally can develop and also help our churches [in Europe] that are resistant to receiving refugees in their countries was what Juliet Kilpin said – that we should really make an effort to see Christ in others. I don't think [the consultation] will only have an impact on the Middle East but also on Europe, Canada and the US."

Read the report about MEC 2016 on the blog of the Institute of Middle East Studies www.imeslebanon.wordpress.com

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