



# ARAB BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

ABTS Newsletter

April 2015

### ABTS Students Ministering to Syrian Refugee Children

*"I don't think these kids living in these refugee camps miss their homes as much as they miss their old lives, their friends, and playing football in the streets of their hometowns in Syria. In a matter of days these children lost everything."*

The Syrian ABTS student, describing above why she is so passionate about ministry to her fellow Syrians, is one of the many ABTS students serving Syrian refugee children in eastern Lebanon through ABTS's Compassionate Care Ministry.

Twice a month, ABTS students travel to minister to Syrian refugee families living in tents in Zahle. The students engage 250 Syrian children, playing games, teaching Bible stories and worship songs and, most importantly for these children fleeing destroyed homes and families, loving on them. One of our students commented, *"When these children see that there are people who really love them, that really want to play with them, have conversations with them, want to listen to them, and that we care about them, they are so happy."*

ABTS's Compassionate Care Ministry started in 2009 as Iraqi refugees were pouring into Lebanon, and expanded in 2011 to encompass the newly arriving

Syrian refugees. In partnership with Heart for Lebanon, a Christian Lebanese humanitarian non-profit, ABTS students lead this bi-monthly ministry. They handle the logistics, planning, dreaming, and praying themselves. Ten to fifteen ABTS students prepare lessons, select worship songs, write skits, and plan games for these Saturday visits. Each visit, the students interact with around 250 children, ranging from three to twelve years old. Benjamin, an Egyptian second-year student, said *"I became involved with this ministry when I started studying at ABTS. God gave me a vision to work with the Syrians. I help plan and organize the service for the children. The kids love the games and sketches we do with them."*

ABTS students are always welcomed warmly, according to Abram, a second-year student from Sudan. *"When they know we are coming, the families form a big circle around us and their kids. They encourage us with their smiles and their peace warms us until we have to leave again, when they always ask us to come back."* The children love to sing and listen as ABTS students teach about the Bible. They especially love the songs with hand motions. The kids even memorize Bible verses each week that accompany the lesson. They enjoy playing simple



ABTS students ministering to Syrian children in Zahle

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games like limbo, tug of war, and catch. A Syrian student added, *"The kids love to color and draw because they don't even have these simple materials, so they wait for us to come to do these types of things."*

Abram shared with us that when he asked some of the children what they had to be thankful for during a previous visit, *"some older boys wrote down, 'I thank God because he kept us from the shells and explosions in Syria and got us out unharmed' and 'I thank God for the presence of my father.'"*

A female Syrian student told us, *"I jumped at the chance to participate in this ministry as I was praying for Syrian children and wanted to do something tangible to help. I consider this my responsibility as a theology student. Studying at a seminary is not just about learning theology. If I am not acting on what I'm learning then these studies are empty."* She and the other Syrian ABTS students have been great assets to this ABTS Ministry team, as other ministry leaders come to them for ideas and cultural information so they can understand Syrians better. She is able to connect to these children on a deeper level, as she explains, *"I have the same accent, the same language, the same jokes."*

The Compassionate Care Ministry is not only working in the lives of the Syrian refugees but in our students' holistic formation as well. Dean of Students Bassem Melki noted, *"Interpersonally, where there is fear and not enough wisdom or skill, you see God at work in our students' lives to have the will to jump in and do this. I see God transforming the students as they pray not just for the blessings of their ministry's impact, but to be individually ready to serve where God leads. As*



*students are engaged in this project, they are being trained in needed skills, and their lives are being enriched so that they can enrich others in their future ministries and in the future Arab Church."*

ABTS also sees God at work in providing for the food and supplies for Syrian families from our partners and friends. Our partnership with Heart for Lebanon ensures the sustainability of this ministry.

A student from Algeria shared, *"When it was time for us to leave, a fellow student from Egypt, Sameh, asked the crowd of children on a loud speaker, 'Can someone say something to God?' As the kids shouted out different things they were thankful to God for, the parents also thanked us for coming to play with their kids."* We praise God that not only are the kids learning to thank God, but their parents are learning as well as they watch us interact and love on their children. ♦

#### Prayer Requests for ABTS's Compassionate Care Ministry in Zahle

Benyamin, second-year Egyptian student: Please pray that God will give us the strength to continue under pressure and that He will continue using us in this ministry.

Abram, second-year Sudanese student: Refugees are fearful still. Pray for opportunities for the students to sit with the families and share with them. Pray that the Word would bring more fruit.

Syrian first-year student: Please pray for grace—that God will give us grace to do everything with integrity. God has messages to give these people and He is using us so we should serve with integrity as we spread this message.

Fouad, second-year Sudanese student: Pray for us as we serve and bring this message to these families and please pray for the needs of these Syrian refugees. When we are among the Syrians it is hard for us to hear the stories of these peoples' lives.

Ali, ABTS staff and Compassionate Care Ministry advisor: Pray for wisdom for the ministry leaders to know how to better strategize for this ministry, especially as the ministry grows. Pray for wisdom in developing strategies that accentuate and build good relationships with churches. And please pray for our students' safety.

**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.*

## Middle East Consultation 2015

### Discipleship Today: Identity and Belonging in the Middle East and North Africa

We are busy with preparations for the upcoming MEC this June. Our IMES staff members and Event Coordinator are busy lining up both MENA-region and global keynote speakers, as well as reviewing applications from potential guests from around the world. We have confirmed speakers including an expert on leadership in the North African Church, a leader from a Christ-following community in Bangladesh, Evelyne Reisacher, professor of intercultural relations at Fuller Theology Seminary, and Tim Green, an expert in Intercultural Relations. Faculty from Fuller Theological Seminary, the Institute of Middle East Studies, and influential leaders working in multiple MENA-region contexts have been tapped to explore specific challenges related to “identity” and “belonging” that followers of Jesus face in the Arab world.

**Apply to MEC, June 15-19 [here](#).**

Over 100 ministry leaders from North America, Europe, MENA and Asia have already registered.

Join us as we hear testimonies from local and regional followers of Christ on how the global Body of Christ can support Christ-followers from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds within and beyond the MENA context to grow and become effective leaders.

The International Journal of Frontier Missiology published a report by IMES on last year’s Middle East Consultation 2014 – “*Discipleship Today: Following Jesus in the Middle East and North Africa*,” which includes an outline of MEC 2015. [Check it out here](#).

For up-to-date information on MEC 2015, go to the IMES blog [imeslebanon.wordpress.com](http://imeslebanon.wordpress.com). ♦

## MIDDLE EASTCONSULTATION2015

### Discipleship Today: Identity and Belonging in the Middle East & North Africa

The Institute of Middle East Studies at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Beirut, Lebanon, will again be hosting its annual Middle East Consultation. MEC 2015 will focus on specific challenges related to “identity” and “belonging” that face followers of Jesus within the MENA context. These challenges are particularly important given the diverse socio-religious and cultural backgrounds of Christ-followers in the region and of the leaders who disciple them.

We live in a world where belonging to multiple social and cultural traditions is the reality for many. Identity is a complex and multi-dimensional aspect of human life, formed in part as a response to a variety of dynamic social, cultural, historical, political, religious and spiritual experiences and commitments within today’s interconnected world.

MEC 2015 will consist of listening to and reflecting on personal testimonies from those who live in the midst of specific challenges pertaining to identity and belonging. Conversations with diverse global missiological thinkers and practitioners, as well as round-table discussion groups will provide a unique context for reflection on the practice of discipleship in the MENA region.

This hermeneutical dynamic (or process of accountable theological reflection) provides a framework for mutual enrichment within the worldwide Body of Christ, one that we are convinced will impact the future of Christ-centered witness in and beyond the MENA region.

To apply for MEC 2015, please visit

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