



### Preparing Leaders for Missional Engagement

By Elie Haddad, ABTS President

A Turkish theologian and a friend of mine, describes the theologies that frequently govern the ministry of churches serving in a majority non-Christian context like ours. The first is a *theology of retreat*, where churches function in survival mode, just wanting to be left alone. That's when ministry becomes mostly about congregational care, or self-care. The focus becomes inward with not much impact outside the four walls of the church. Alongside that theology is a *theology of fleeing*, where the focus is on how to leave to a better place where there is no hardship or persecution. The thinking is that there is no future for our families in this difficult context, so the right thing to do is to leave to a place where it is safer and easier to raise a family and do ministry.

I do not want to denigrate these theologies, and neither does my Turkish friend. There are such examples in the Bible, and the Holy Spirit has used these theologies to spread the Gospel. However, my friend presents a third theology that ought to motivate our churches, a *theology of prophetic engagement*. This is when churches discover a sense of purpose for why God has put them in their context and discover their vital role in reaching their communities with the message of the Gospel. These

become missional incarnational churches.

Churches that are focused on the outside as much as the inside.

Churches that are convinced that they need to bring the presence of God to their communities. Churches that see themselves as agents of the Kingdom of God, agents of transformation, and agents of reconciliation for their surrounding societies. Churches that consider all their members as missionaries sent out to their world.

This is our mandate at ABTS, to equip leaders for such missional incarnational churches, leaders not only for church-based ministries but also for marketplace-based and workplace-based ministries, sent out from their churches to live and proclaim Christ in the world. We serve the Church in the Arab world by preparing leaders who become catalysts for transformation in their own churches so that these churches become transformed and transformative. Our ultimate vision is to see God glorified, people reconciled, and communities restored through the Church in the Arab world.



## The Missional Church in the Arab World

ABTS students had the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of “missional church” in the MENA context during the integrative research project carried out as part of the [“Missional Church” module](#), which included the following courses: Church and Mission, a Historical Overview of the Missional Church, the Theology of the Missional Church, and Leadership for Change. The research required that they apply the acquired knowledge to their sending churches in their respective countries. We interviewed six of our 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students about their understanding of the missional church for their context. These were their answers.

**Hanna, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student from Egypt** | When I go back to Egypt for summer break, I will be involved in youth and women ministries at my church. We have a community culture and people are very social, especially in Upper-Egypt. Activities like visiting people in their homes and contacting women who miss church are common. My church assigns people to visit women and encourages them to come to church. However, it saddens me that these visits are not empowered by a missional vision. These women need to be involved in ministry, we need to keep them busy rather than just inviting them for church meetings one week after another. My plan is to visit these women with the purpose of encouraging them to take part in small duties through which they will understand that they too can play a vital role in the church. I want to inspire them to have a missional heart.



**Student from Morocco** | The “Missional Church” module made me realize that the whole church is called to be missional and not only the few individuals who we are used to calling ‘missionaries’. I was able to realize that everything I will be doing upon my return to Morocco is part of God’s story, a story that can only be told through a missional church. Anything I do separately from the church and its mission will not have an impact. I was inspired by my courses by the fact that God’s mission is ongoing throughout history, and we are part of it. I pray God uses me to make history. I will be initiating new ministries that do not currently exist at my church, such as the Sunday school meetings for children, young adults’ meetings and Bible study meetings.



**Dina from Egypt** | The first question that came to my mind while writing the strategy by which we want to encourage our church to become more missional was “what is the situation like in our neighborhood?” To answer this question in my church and in my context, most of the church’s neighbors are Christians, but how many attend churches? A very small number! This implies that our church is currently focused on itself, without a reason to look outside its walls and share its blessings with its surrounding neighbors. The first step is to assess the current situation. We should be able to look at the current situation through Biblical lenses. And

second, we need to move towards transforming this reality in accordance with God’s vision. (continued on page 3)

**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 “Missional Church” module equipped me with practical tools that enable us to make actual plans as my husband and I get ready to go back and serve in our church in Egypt this summer. Following our graduation in June, we will be organizing bible studies, church meetings, and sermons on transformation inspired by the experience of Nehemiah.

**Micheline from Lebanon, serving with her husband in Syria** | The course I took with Dr. Chris Wright during the “Missional Church” module has really inspired me. I learned how God’s mission goes all the way back to the Old Testament, because it was His people’s role to reach out to the nations. But unfortunately, we lost the spirit of missions in the Middle East. All of our region was once Christian, but now Christians are a minority, because the Church was divided and unable to show the love of Jesus. Now we are in a time of change. It is a time when people are seeking God. Our church in Damascus started with 4 people and today we have 26 servants following up on 300 displaced families who fled from Maaloula, Syria. Today we have a mission to show Christ’s love. This has inspired me to help my church adopt a missional vision by sharing what I have learned through the “Missional Church” courses at our church in Damascus.



**Student from Algeria** | The church in Algeria is very dependent on western missionaries, however it is not missional in its vision. Based on what I learned throughout my theological education, I will seek to base the ministry in my country on Biblical values rather than on social patterns in our culture. I learned that as a leader I should tear down racism that exists between Arabs and Tamazight in Algeria. It is not very common for Arabs and Tamazight to come together but our mission is to build bridges between them. Furthermore, our churches have a great number of members, however only few are active in ministry, therefore my role is to encourage people to have a part in God’s mission for His church in Algeria.

**Yaagoub from Sudan** | My congregation in North Sudan is not aware of what it means for the whole church to be missional. I believe my role is to inspire people to live up to their calling. The “Theology of the Missional Church” course was very beneficial. While our church is considering sending Sudanese missionaries to other countries, it is not part of our vision to actually send missionaries to churches and communities in Sudan with the same missional heart as in foreign missions. I have been the youth pastor for 3 years and was able to maintain good relationships with the youth. I can use these relationships as the starting point to introduce, at a minimum, the true definition of being a missional church. I have faith that the younger generation will contribute to the transformation.



**Join the Middle East Consultation (MEC) 2014, June 16-20!** With only two months to go until IMES hosts this year’s Middle East Consultation, entitled “Discipleship Today: Following Jesus in the Middle East and North Africa”, preparations are gearing up. Applications and bookings are coming in and the schedule for what promises to be a unique event is falling in to place. If you are interested in attending year’s MEC 2014, please contact us at: [IMES@ABTSLebanon.org](mailto:IMES@ABTSLebanon.org). *[Read more about the MEC 2014 on www.abtslebanon.org](http://www.abtslebanon.org)*