



ARAB BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

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Newsletter - December 2014

Middle East Consultation 2015

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

The Institute of Middle East Studies at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary is pleased to announce 2015's Middle East Consultation (MEC 2015) on June 15-19.

Last year's MEC was an enriching and edifying consultation that identified a number of significant challenges related to discipleship in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Based on the findings of MEC 2014, this year's consultation will focus on specific challenges related to "identity" and "belonging" that followers of Jesus face 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 those leaders who seek to disciple them.

It became apparent through the course of MEC 2014 that we live in a world where belonging to multiple social and cultural traditions is the reality for many. Identity can be understood as a complex and multi-dimensional aspect of human life, formed in response to a variety of dynamic social, cultural, historical, political, religious and spiritual experiences and commitments within today's globalized and interconnected world. In light of this, some of the questions to be explored as part of MEC 2015 include:

- What emotional and psychological trials are experienced by those choosing to follow Jesus within the MENA context?

MEC 2014 Photos



Daily keynote addresses



Testimonies from the field and reflections



Round table discussion

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- How might new followers of Jesus understand, develop and define their new-found identity 'in Christ', while at the same time taking seriously their particular socio-cultural and religious context?
- What factors allow disciples to have confidence in their identity to the degree that they can become effective witnesses within their own community capable of discipling others?
- How might a disciple's personal narrative be convincing for members of his or her family? How might family, marriage and child-rearing issues be addressed?
- And, how might the regional and global Body of Christ support Christ-followers from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds within and beyond the MENA context to grow and become influential leaders?

The core of MEC 2015 will consist of listening to in-depth testimonies from those who live in the midst of specific challenges pertaining to identity and belonging. The consultation will also provide an opportunity to reflect upon and analyze the diverse social and religious dynamics at hand through a process of theological reflection via round-table discussion, as well as conversations with global thinkers from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Leading missiologists will give keynote presentations on a range of related themes, which will in turn be reflected upon and discussed by those personally facing such challenges in the 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 sure will impact the future of Christ-centered witness in and beyond the MENA region.



IMES Director Martin Accad on the themes of this year's consultation:

"The themes we will be exploring during MEC 2015 stem from the real-life challenges facing followers of Jesus from the MENA region that we heard during MEC 2014. Our identity emerges as a result of multiple factors which eventually define who we are, where we come from, and how we understand the world around us. These varied dimensions have a significant impact on what it means for each of us to be 'in Christ'. For people from our region, the complex social, religious, cultural, familial, political and historical dynamics add further to the challenges of finding an authentic identity as followers of Jesus. MEC 2015 promises to be a unique opportunity for attendees to come to terms with some of these issues. We anticipate an exciting and invigorating consultation which we hope will bring hope into some of the most difficult challenges facing the church in our region."

For more information about MEC 2015 and to apply, please contact IMES@ABTSLebanon.org. Additional details will be announced at www.abtslebanon.org, IMESLebanon.wordpress.com and on our Facebook Page www.fb.com/ABTS.Lebanon.

Staff and Faculty Prayer Requests

This month we remember Rudolph Hayek, a beloved ABTS graduate and staff member who went to be with Lord last December. We ask for prayers for his family and friends as this anniversary approaches, as well as for our community which continues to feel his loss.



Please pray for our first year students from outside of Lebanon as they struggle to adjust to the culture, the language, and the academic life.

Please pray for a blessed vacation and holidays for our staff, and for God's protection over those who are traveling. Several staff members will be visiting family and friends in the US, Canada, and Europe this Christmas.

We praise God this month as we finish a very good year. We are blessed with an excellent staff.

In ABTS's tradition of hospitality, some of our faculty and staff invite students to their homes over the Christmas season. In addition, on Friday, December 19th, our staff and faculty are organizing a special Christmas dinner and group activities on campus for our students. Please pray that our students feel warm and at home during this Christmas while they are away from their families and churches.

Student Prayer Requests

From ABTS student Elias: Right now we are in the initial development stages for a men's home group for Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. There is already a well-attended meeting for women but we have had difficulty in starting one for men because they are always busy with work, mostly in the construction field. After visiting with many men, we decided to hold the meetings on Sunday evenings. Currently we are planning on running a

small Bible study. We also plan to teach them how to read and write in both English and Arabic as most of them are Syrian Kurds and primarily speak Kurdish. Please pray that God will lead us to the right men. And please pray that God will reveal Himself to them and enable us to help build them up.



From our Sudanese students: On December 3, we shared an urgent prayer request on the ABTS Facebook page where we wrote that the Sudanese government was forcibly taking property from the Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church. In an update on the situation, the Khartoum governor established a committee of several church leaders, headed by the deputy governor, a Christian, with the purpose of solving the dispute arising over church property. Our Sudanese students request your prayers for the peaceful resolution of this dispute, an end to the destruction of church property, and for the believers to continue to witness to Christ.

From an ABTS student: My husband, myself and several ABTS students were invited to join a ministry in a village in the Bekaa Valley, with the organization Bridges of Love. We all travel there twice a month. We put on activities for 160 kids from the Syrian refugee camps and for Bedouin children, and explore stories of biblical



prophets. We joined this ministry three months ago and have been receiving great feedback from the kids. We ask for your prayers for the safety of our team as they travel to distant locations. We also ask for prayers that we can continue with our commitment to this program, as it's hard for us to leave our families every two weeks. Additionally we ask for prayer as we seek to show love and solidarity to the children's families.