Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

July 2017

Graduation Ceremony: Launching Twenty-two Students into Ministry

Another year, we celebrate the completion of some of our students' education and training at ABTS. They are now ready to move forward to where God has called them, all the while heeding His voice and witnessing to His *Injeel* (Gospel). On June 25, we held the 2017 graduation ceremony for twelve of our residential students, three of our Master of Religion (MRel) students and seven of our online students, the latter being the first cohort of our Certificate in Ministry program.

The ceremony included a reading from Proverbs 3:1-26 by Joseph Najem, who is a member of our Board of Trustees and Pastor of the Free Evangelical Church, Mathaf. ABTS President Elie Haddad reflected on the theme of the Middle East Consultation, held the week prior, and spoke about how our seminary helps the Church in the MENA region to retrieve its prophetic voice in today's disorienting times. In the graduation message, Ramez Atallah, General Director of The Bible Society in Egypt, asked the graduates to focus on their calling rather than on their gifts. He also exhorted them to decline requests that may distract them from that calling, to refine their mission instead of worrying about its details and to be positive and encouraging without being overly optimistic. We also heard a word from our school of theology student speaker Gladis Koshkarian and our MRel student speaker Suzie Schenkel Lahoud.

Moreover, we had the opportunity to offer our praise to God with the Heart for Lebanon children's orchestra, conducted by Nabil Melki, Director of Field Operations at Heart for Lebanon. These children (photo below) had escaped the ghastly war in Syria and came to Lebanon where they have used their gifts to glorify God. ABTS receptionist Yaacoub Obeid, with his vocals and his '*oud*', also moved the audience with his direct address of "*Ta' La 'Endo Ta*" or "Come, O Come to Him".

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Finally, we leave you with the words of the MRel student speaker Suzie Schenkel Lahoud, who shared an anecdote of a woman at church who offered her a new pair of heels a week after this woman's sandal had broken, and Suzie had offered her sandals instead. To this, Suzie adds, "I share this story because I feel it is somewhat a parable of my life over the past few years. You see, I came to this place thinking I had something to offer – expecting to serve. I offered up my dusty old shoes and received back Cinderella slippers. To me, this degree is not just another diploma. It is theology with shoes on."

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. Contact Development and Partner Relations Manager Wissam al-Saliby to learn more.

MRel in MENA Studies: MENA History, Politics and Economics Residency

From June 26 to July 7, eleven students from different parts of the world gathered at ABTS for the on-campus residency portion of the current Master of Religion module: Middle Eastern and North African History, Politics and Economics, with Rupen Das as lead faculty, Jesse Wheeler as support instructor and Elias Ghazal as holistic formation instructor. This two-week residency lies between two periods of ten-week distance learning components.

The MENA History, Politics and Economics module seeks to develop an inter-disciplinary understanding of the historical, political and economic dynamics that have shaped the contemporary Middle East and North Africa. This course looks at the formative historical developments of the modern era, major macroeconomic issues at present, and the complexities of regional poverty. It also seeks to explore the manner by which such realities intersect with the idea of the Kingdom of God, as a lens through which to understand and engage with the contemporary MENA. As part of the residency, students gain training in contextual analysis, needs assessment and problem analysis, project design, as well as peace-building frameworks and strategies. In addition, students visit special ministry, NGO and historical sites as they learn first-hand from a variety of practitioners in the region.

According to **Rupen Das**, "During the residency, we focus on two issues that are directly connected to the history, politics and economics of the region, namely poverty and peacebuilding. Firstly, we look at how we address poverty. What are the skills, tools and frameworks that we could use in the MENA region?

elements were very interesting, and the theory part (history, politics and economics) was very eye-opening. As for the residency, being able to visit so many different projects and sites (such as the Palestinian refugee camp) as well as seeing and hearing stories from different people was very enriching."

Secondly, we look at what are the different models of peacebuilding, asking what is going on, what frameworks can be used, and how would you be able to address it. Afterwards, students will either write a significant research paper, develop a project design, or engage some kind of action research project to take what they've learnt and begin to apply it."

MRel students shared with us about their experiences during this residency and how they have been impacted by the current module.

Joy Fuller (from Virginia, USA) is in her third module of the MRel program. Of this module she tells us, "The residency brings all things together. I loved the talk of Asaad Chaftari [former senior 'Christian' armed group commander involved in the Lebanese Civil War], especially when he spoke about how we must all take responsibility for ourselves and the wrongs we've done, humble ourselves and ask for forgiveness - without which we cannot have true long-lasting peace. His lecture was so powerful and truly applied to so many ways of our lives.

"Another highlight of this residency was listening to Pastor Milad Haddad in his church in Riyyak, close to the Syrian border. The pastor said that people who had initially resisted helping the Syrian refugees are now in love with them! People actually underwent a heart transformation toward helping Syrians."

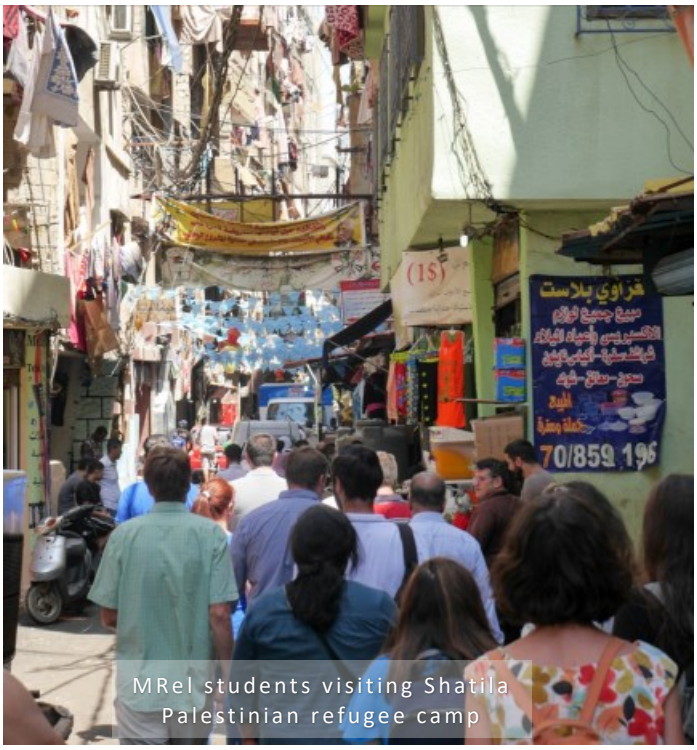
Melanie Baggao (from California, USA and living in Lebanon) is in her fourth module of the MRel program. She shares, "The pre-residency was really interesting. Studying the history, politics and economics of the region solidified a lot of the questions I've had since I came here. It has been a slow process, but taking a deeper look at the history has definitely been great. Understanding some of the sectarianism that I sense and view when I travel through Beirut has been really good too. In this residency, I have enjoyed getting to know the 'inside' work of non-government organizations (NGOs) and asking certain questions, such as 'Is this NGO doing 'Kingdom' work?' and what all that entails."

Brook Christensen (from Ohio, USA and living in Amsterdam, Netherlands) is in her second module of the MRel program. Brook describes this module as so new to her, "focusing on relief, development and project design. All those practical

Raffi Chilingirian (a Lebanese Armenian living in Lebanon) is in his first module of the MRel program. Raffi, who serves at the Evangelical Armenian Church in Dawra, states, "I am taking the MRel because I liked the concept of this module, which has development and history. I love these fields. I would like my module project to consist of a reconciliation program from an evangelical, Armenian point of view with a Turkish Sunni Muslim. It would be interesting to have this as a debate within the community, at least – the Armenian community in general – because the political parties have already advanced in making connections with certain leftist Turkish communities. So, why isn't the church doing this before the political parties? Why is the church left behind, in dialogue at least? That's my challenge."

As to what has surprised Raffi in this module, he adds, "The Armenians were refugees, so I kind of connect with going to the camps of Syrian and Palestinian refugees. The surprising factor for me is that I feel this connection."

Learn more about the MRel at www.abtslebanon.org/MRel



MRel students visiting Shatila Palestinian refugee camp

How Can the Church Be Prophetic in Today's Disorienting Times?

Highlights from Middle East Consultation 2017

From June 19 to 23, 200 participants from over 20 nationalities participated in our annual Middle East Consultation (MEC) entitled *The Church in Disorienting Times: Leading Prophetically through Adversity.*

Each of the first 4 days of MEC focused on one theme—suffering and persecution, emigration, hopelessness and despair, and minoritization. This year, morning sessions have begun with a theological keynote, followed by a regional response and two witness accounts. These sessions ended with a participant from the West who provided a global crosscheck.

We are looking forward to the publication of a book based on the consultation proceedings. For now, we provide you with a glimpse of the presentations and conversations that took place at MEC this year in this Institute of Middle East Studies blog post . Access the blog post at:

imes.blog/2017/06/30/imes-middle-east-consultation-2017/