Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

February 2018

Khebz w Meleh International Conference for Peacebuilding: Catch the Vision and Take Action

During one of the morning workshops

Responding to questions from participants

In 2016, after a two-year pilot phase, Institute of Middle Eastern Studies (IMES) launched the *Khebz w Meleh (KwM)* — Bread and Salt — initiative, inspired by The Feast, UK. Using high-quality, informal and non-formal educational approaches, KwM helps religiously diverse young people to explore faith, create friendships and seek the common good of their communities. It supports young people to grow in understanding of their own faith and the faith of others, while at the same time building peace and cross-community social cohesion.

Drawing on *Khebz w Meleh*'s experience and seeking to equip leaders from several regions, *Khebz w Meleh* hosted participants of 15 different nationalities for a three-day conference at ABTS. Over 65 participants were taken on a journey, from Friday 2nd till Sunday 4th of this month, that enables them to develop similar youth-focused peacebuilding initiatives that are tailored for their own contexts in their own communities within their respective Arab countries. This was made possible by our partners who supported this International Conference and our graduates who helped us invite Christians and Muslims from their communities in Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, South Sudan, Jordan and other countries spread across the MENA area.

The conference started with an introduction to the ethos and values of The Feast/KwM, by The Feast founder Andrew Smith, encompassing the 11 guidelines for dialogue as well as the goal of loving our neighbor, being actively engaged in bringing about peace, and being ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us.

It also covered topics pertaining to: dialogue in a post-conflict situation, young people as agents of change and as peacemakers, a biblical reflection on inter-faith peacebuilding, dialogue between refugees and host community, amongst other topics. On the last day of the conference, participants worked together as country clusters to contextualize what they have learnt. Then they designed and planned pilot projects to put into place in their home communities.

Nabila from Sudan, shared, "I sometimes used to think 'Why bother trying to reach world peace? We will never reach it. However, after participating in this conference, I realized that peace is the state of being reconciled with God, with my own self, and with my neighbor. Peace is what I naturally live and seek as a follower of Jesus! Peace is possible."

A participant from Egypt shared about what he had learned, "God works through us to reach other people and to be a

During team action planning

blessing to our communities. We can do that by gathering youth from different religions and affiliations. In order to build a healthy community, we need to start with the youth."

Manal El Tayar, Peacebuilding Initiatives Manager at the Institute of Middle East Studies, mentioned: "My personal expectations of what we would be able to achieve together were exceeded. We were able to begin exploring how each of the countries represented will adapt the KwM initiative into their local contexts. For instance, one participant, who came from Yei, South Sudan (where genocide is taking place) underlined the need to do peacebuilding among the various Christian tribes that are killing each other." She also shared that: "We've received thank you letters from each of the countries represented, sharing how deeply this [conference] has impacted them. This alone is exciting."

Arthur Brown, *BMS World Mission Regional Leader for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa* and *member of the KwM Advisory group* and of *the Feast International Committee,* related that one of the most exciting outcomes for him was "the deepening of relationships between the KwM team and the Feast team (UK)". The "large international interest in youth-focused interfaith peacebuilding that was disclosed through the participants' contributions as well as other INGOs and network representatives that were present was also significant".

Our prayer is to see the participants serving the Kingdom by adopting KwM activities that draw on the faith traditions and experiences of the young people involved in order to increase hope, reduce fear and ignorance, promote justice and equality for all, and seek the common good.

Building Bridges within the Church: Master of Religion Residency

MRel students with Catholic Bishop Paul Rouhana

The MRel (Master of Religion) MENA Christianity module residency period took place on ABTS campus from January 8 to 19. Twelve students (six of whom are Arab) came from different parts of the world for an intensive learning experience. The residency included lectures, discussions, group work, field visits and dialogue with Eastern Christian leaders. We present you with the accounts of some of our MRel students on their residency experience.

Joanne from the UK

I have lived overseas quite a lot and stayed at several Middle Eastern countries. I have a great love for the Middle East, but I realized that I don't understand it as well as I would like to. I heard about MRel because of my work in the travel department at Open Doors. I first started following the IMES blog where the MRel was announced, and I thought it would be great for my daughter. Then I looked at it properly, and I thought "Wow, that looks really interesting!" I started praying about it, and here I am! My daughter still wants to come. She is quite jealous [jokingly].

Check out this video of our graduate Brent Hammoud who describes his experiences in the Master of Religion in Middle Eastern and North African Studies program.

I think something that really impressed me was seeing all the churches that were destroyed, and they just keep being rebuilt. The light is not being put out. Life is not leaving despite the war, despite earthquakes; the Church is still here.

The thing that I have learned most is how much history there is in the patristic readings. It allowed me to trace how what we believe now comes from the early church. As Protestants, we have a lot to be grateful for, but sometimes we forget. I am beginning to realize how much we have in common as Western Christians with the Eastern Church. Meeting with all the different patriarchs and listening to them has really changed my perspective. One of the reasons I am doing this is to help people in the West to understand the East a bit better.

I pray that I would know what God wants me to do. Do I stay where I am which is flexible and easy? I pray that He will either give me the peace to stay or tell me where I must go next. Also, pray that I would get the most from this course; that's what I really want.

Student from the US

At first, I lived [in Iraq] full time for five years, getting to know the culture and the language and trying to share the gospel. However, during the last four-and-a-half years, I have been travelling between there and America because I have a child who is in a US school. This [residency] has been one of the richest cultural experiences that I have ever had, especially when it comes to understanding the true history of Christianity.

There is a church in Downtown Beirut called St. George Greek Orthodox Church. It is built on top of some ancient churches. It is covered in icons all the way around and on the ceiling. Our professor [Fr. Elia] explained to us who each person was, whether martyr, confessor or church father. We went all the way around and got back to the front to where the altar is. Then we looked up and saw all the scenery painted on the ceiling. Then we looked down and saw the ruins of the ancient churches. Then our professor made a statement saying, 'This is the best picture of the Kingdom of God because it is made up of those who have gone before us, the people in heaven and us today all giving honor and glory and praise to Jesus.' For me, that was the moment when I truly understood why the fathers are important, why the martyrs are important – because it gives us a fuller picture of what the Kingdom of God is. Because God lives outside of time and because those who die are not dead before Him, they continue to praise and worship Him.

I think that the biggest way [the residency] will affect my ministry is that from here on, I will be collaborating with a local church in Iraq to spread the gospel. The church should at least be a resource for discipleship, for understanding culture and vocabulary.

Visiting an old Monastery in Lebanon

Psalm 18:36 says, "You enlarged my path under me, so my feet did not slip." Pray that God will help me to overcome the obstacles that will come in the next six months and that He will give clear direction to choose among all the many opportunities I could pursue.

Caitlin from the US

I am currently working as Project Coordinator on the Development and Partner Relations team for LSESD. I moved here originally with a heart for street kids at the Home of Hope in Kahale. I had a dream that I would serve here for three months and then God said, "No, we're going to stay here for a while."

The residency brought new insight about the Church [in the Middle East]. I am a firm believer in ecumenism. However, some people get very heated about their traditions. I had the opportunity to speak to Fr. Elia [Holistic Formation Faculty for MENA Christianity] for a good amount of time, and all he shared with me was biblical and Christ-like. I shared with him about my struggles, and he pointed me to Christ through it all – to the Bible, which is Evangelical, but he is an Orthodox monk! It is truly wonderful.

I think the residency will help me to connect with other Christians around me, whether they be Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant. I will have more understanding of where they stand and how we can connect.

MRel students get to define their own topics for the module project. Pray for me to narrow down my topic so my paper can be deep, thorough and worthwhile.

Called to serve in the Middle East and North Africa? Apply to the MRel program here.

MRel students at the American University of Beirut

For the 15th year in a row, IMES is holding the annual Middle East Consultation with the purpose of equipping the Church to respond in prophetic and Christ-like ways to the many challenges facing Christians and Muslims in and beyond the Middle East.

Would you consider supporting a local or regional leader from the Middle East to participate in MEC 2018?

MEC is a significant and transformative event for those who participate in it. We are aiming to support 20 key leaders to attend MEC 2018, people who would otherwise not be able to be with us. If you would like to sponsor MEC 2018 participants, please contact us at information@ABTSLebanon.org.