Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

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Heeding God's Call to the Middle East: An Interview with the Kuhn's

Mike Kuhn, one of our core faculty and Assistant Professor in Discipleship and Biblical Theology, shares about his ministry time of training leaders at ABTS as it nears an end. His wife, Stephanie, also shares about her ABTS-related ministries during their time in Lebanon.

How did you hear of ABTS?

Mike: Actually, we heard about ABTS from different friends and acquaintances over the 25+ years of being in ministry in the region. After my deportation from Egypt, I became one of the pastors of Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. I was there for six years and shared my desire to see internet theological courses for hard-to-reach places. As the Lord would have it, our missions' pastor happened to be in France on a trip and had a conversation with Paul Sanders [previous ABTS provost]. The missions' pastor returned to Knoxville and encouraged me to go see what ABTS was doing with online education. So, I did. In 2012, Stephanie and I came out with a two-year commitment to help TEACH/ LEARN. Afterwards, Elie Haddad [ABTS President] asked me to stay on as a professor at ABTS, so we committed to that for four years.

Would you describe your ministry at ABTS?

Stephanie: I've loved getting to know students and staff, and what an honor, really, to walk with some of them through different phases of life over the past six years. For three years I served with the Student Affairs Team, and that was a privilege. I've been also involved with getting the LSESD Child Protection policy up and running. And, I am teaching English as a second language. Each of these opportunities provided places for me to learn and grow, and hopefully to encourage people to stay the course.

Mike: I've taught a number of courses including the Biblical Foundations for Discipleship, the Missional Church, electives like the Gospel of Matthew, Contemplative Prayer and Theological Response in the Arab Context. I also taught MENA Christianity in the MRel program. I've really enjoyed the experience of teaching at ABTS partly because the students come from different backgrounds and locations. That makes ABTS an intersection of Arab cultures. The students also come from different religious backgrounds so they come to the Bible or a theological question with different perspectives. I love that diversity and I feel my time at ABTS has been one of God's great blessings in my life.

What is the best thing about your ministry here?

Mike: I have been privileged to see God working through the Arab church in response to the influx of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. We know it hasn't been easy for Lebanese to do that, but the leadership of the Church has very patiently exhorted and encouraged the Church in that way. Then, the students themselves also got involved in mentoring and discipling Iraqi

During a Child Protection Policy training

and Syrian small groups. Some of them graduated and went into ministry here in Lebanon or other places. I love seeing how God is using the Arab Church to reach people of all different backgrounds here. I've also greatly enjoyed being part of a diverse faculty with loads of ministry experience.

Stephanie: I have gotten a deeper appreciation of what it means to be a part of a Global Church. Somehow, being in Lebanon and so close to the historic church, helps me to understand more about the blessing and impact the universal church can have. For example, as an American, I see more clearly that what the American church does affects the Church here, and I would like to see that what the Church decides here affects us in America. Reciprocity and mutuality!

What have you learned from your experience here?

Stephanie: I have learned that I LOVE Lebanese food! I have also learned that I love the classroom and teaching adults. I have always loved providing safe places for students to question and make mistakes for further learning, but here at ABTS, it's been one of the highlights for me.

Mike: I think I have learned at a deeper level that discipleship is about identifying and changing our internal beliefs—beliefs we act on whether we are conscious of them or not. I have become convinced that this is what Jesus was doing with Peter. He was helping Peter face who he really was – not who he thought he was and then patiently leading Peter to change internally. Teaching in the discipleship module has helped me develop this idea and express it in the classroom.

Where did you see the fruit of your ministry?

Stephanie: Seeing fruit is a "funny" thing. I'm pretty sure God might have different ideas about the matter, but I'll give it a shot. I am thrilled that ABTS is pushing ahead with the education and training for child protection on its campus and in its ministries. My hope is that abusive cycles will be broken and transformation of the heart will continue to be the aim and goal of all education. For me personally, I see ABTS can play a major role in this.

Mike: I prefer to identify the fruit of ABTS and the ministry here. One thing I recall is going down to Nabaa [section of Beirut with a large refugee population] with an ABTS student, who is a graduate now, and watching him lead a small group discussion around a text of Scripture. He was very animated and engaged. He knew everybody's first name and brought them all into the discussion. Plus, he handled the text very well. It was gratifying to see ABTS's ministry bearing fruit here.

What are your future hopes?

Mike: We hope we can promote a more realistic understanding of the Middle East back in our home country. That's something we hope for in churches, in mission agencies and in the general public. Personally, I would like to be involved in writing, teaching and speaking that impacts the way people think about this part of the world. Of course, I would also like to come back and teach in the Middle East.

Stephanie: I am hoping to continue to remind the greater Church that our brothers and sisters of the Middle East have much to teach us! I, too, hope to come back in whatever capacity the Lord opens up, maybe continue the education and promotion of protecting children.

Mike and Stephanie's ministry time at ABTS ends in August. They will then return to their home country. We ask you to pray for their transition and their future ministry, and join them in praying for ABTS to be a blessing and light to many nations!

Mike praying with Sudanese students

DID YOU KNOW?

Our Institute of Middle East Studies publishes a Regional Brief during the first week of every month.

You can read the latest one here.

Also, to access all blog posts by IMES and to sign-up for weekly updates visit IMES.blog

Student Activities and Informal Training

During their stay at ABTS, students are busy with their academic responsibilities. Extracurricular activities also make up a significant part of their theological training. Many students are part of different clubs. Some of these are the spiritual club which organizes prayer and worship meetings, the entertainment club which organizes recreational activities, and the missional club that leads the Compassionate Care Ministry.

Another aspect of student formation is informal training workshops. Most recently, all of our students participated in a training session on trauma and healing, which took place on April 5, 2018. Nada Haddad, a local Christian counselor, led the training. We find many cases of trauma within our Middle East churches. Unfortunately, they are usually not addressed directly because of our honor and shame culture. This training is to prepare our students to help people facing trauma as they start their healing process. They learn how to be delicate and attentive to the traumatized instead of snubbing them and asking them to "shake it off". It also encourages the students to build a relationship of trust with them, especially in a church context. The Lebanese Church, for example, has welcomed so many Syrian refugees over the past years and continues to do so. Many are traumatized because of the war, and they need the Church to reflect that His mercies are new every morning. This is certainly helpful in the context of the Compassionate Care Ministry as our students work with Syrian refugees in the Zahle camps.

First-year female student Hiba from Syria says, "I didn't use to know before that trauma is a psychological disorder that needs treatment, just like any other disease. A traumatized person doesn't necessarily have to be in a mental hospital. It has helped my husband and I examine ourselves. We have been through the war and lost all our belongings in Syria. Could it be that we are traumatized? In all, the training has helped me spot whether someone I know is showing signs of trauma so I can immediately offer help."

The Missional Club

The Spiritual Club

The Entertainment Club

Interested in leadership development for workers in the Middle East?

The purpose of the Middle East Consultation (MEC) is to equip participants to respond in prophetic and Christ-like ways to the many challenges facing Christians and Muslims in and beyond the Middle East. For its part, MEC 2018 *Jesus Christ and The Religious Other: Toward A Biblical Understanding of Islam* takes on the challenge of religious diversity, a fact of life in the 21st century.

MEC 2018 will be held from June 18 until June 22. Apply today!

Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from our Staff Members

Roula Al Azzi, *Executive Assistant*

Our students' graduation and this year's Middle East Consultation are coming up soon. Please pray that everything will go according to God's plan. Pray, especially, for the safety of the people who are coming from abroad to be a part of those events. Also, pray that the discussions and dialogues raised up during MEC 2018 would create openness among its participants and lead to change within their communities. May it primarily give the glory to God.

Alexandra Abou Rjeily Bridi, *Administration and Human Resources Manager*

We currently have a few vacant positions, and we are recruiting. We are looking for an IMES Team Leader and a Guesthouse Operations Assistant. So, I ask you to pray that God would send the right people. Moreover, as the graduation ceremony approaches, please pray that this academic year ends smoothly. I also ask that you pray for God to reveal His plans for my life in ministry in the coming few years.

Rana Wazir Zailaa, *Registrar*

Pray for the staff, faculty and students as we prepare for the graduation ceremony. I also ask you to pray for the future ministry of this year's graduates.

Jesse Wheeler, *IMES Projects Manager*

Please pray for MEC 2018 that it may have a significant impact on those who attend it so that they may be equipped to further God's Kingdom. On a different note, my family and I are expecting a new baby, so pray for us as we welcome him into the world.

Jennifer Hayek, *Events Coordinator and Operations Assistant*

We have begun following a new recycling initiative, so please pray for its take off and its faithful implementation within ABTS campus. Also, lift up the Facilities team in prayer as we host the upcoming Middle East Consultation 2018.

Marcelle Saad, *Student Affairs Assistant*

Please pray for this year's graduates as they begin a new chapter of their lives within a couple of months. May all that they had gleaned here be translated unto their practical ministries. Please pray for our returning students too. They will be visiting their home countries during the summer, and they will serve there.

Chaden Hani, *Peacebuilding Researcher*

Pray that IMES would be able to make a change in Lebanon through its peacebuilding initiatives. Pray that we may be able to build a unified society. Please pray for a bigger number of students to enroll in ABTS programs so that they may influence their societies in turn.

Abed Zein Al Dine, *ABTS Online Coordinator*

This academic year, nine online students are expected to graduate. They have finished all of their courses; they only have to finish other components such as mentoring and theological reflections. I ask you to lift them up in prayer.

Cinderella Zinati, *Senior Accountant*

I ask you to pray that God would continue to provide the resources needed for the advancement of the ministry of ABTS. Also, please pray for God's will in my personal life.

Rola Salloum, *Librarian*

We are working to add ten more shelf units for Arabic books to our library, so please pray that God would provide the means to make this happen.

Arthur Brown, *Previous faculty member transitioned to Regional Leader of BMS World Mission*

Pray for us as a family preparing to leave Lebanon and move back to the UK this summer, after 13 years in Lebanon. It is going to be an extremely difficult time for us as a family. Also, please pray for BMS World Mission (our mission and partners of ABTS), as we seek to serve the global church in a variety of ways in some of the toughest locations.

Loulwa El Maalouf, *Development and Partner Relations Manager*

Pray for God to grow the seeds that we are planting. May we see our students being shaped as He pleases. Pray for Him to prepare the hearts of the people whom they will be serving during their summer vacations and after graduation.

Fadi Salamoun, *Facilities Manager*

Please pray for the hardworking facilities team as we prepare for MEC 2018 and for everything to run smoothly with minimal obstacles. Also, pray for the hiring process of new staff members for our team.