Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org July 2018

A Word from the President: A Look Back, A Look Forward

The month of July at ABTS is the ideal time to look back and reflect. June marked the end of the academic year. Seventeen students graduated and went back to their communities. Some are resuming their previous ministry roles. Others are being launched into new ministries. Their approach to ministry, however, has been totally transformed. They allowed God to use their time at ABTS to shape them into effective spiritual leaders who are skilled in using their Bibles and in engaging their communities with meaningful and transformative ministry.

The rest of the residential students also went back home for the summer to reconnect with their communities and to apply what they have learned so far. They will be reflecting back on their summer practical ministry when they continue their studies in September.

For the online and distributed learning students, there is no break in the academic year. They continue their learning throughout the summer months.

June also marks the highlight of our year, the Middle East Consultation. This June, we began a two-year theme focusing on *Jesus Christ and the Religious Other*. We started to explore how our understanding of religion affects our witness as followers of Christ. Expert sociologists, theologians, and missiologists helped us gain a deeper understanding of the issues. This year's consultation was very rich in content, and we look forward to the continuation of this theme next year. A consultation report is available at IMES.blog.

Elie with his wife Mireille, & Sabet, a graduate from Sudan

What marked our year as well was the steady growth of our Peacebuilding initiatives. The first initiative is *Khebz w Meleh*, which brings together Christian and Muslim youths to share meals, to openly discuss their faith together, and to take action for the common good of their local communities. This is the second year of this initiative, which is now expanding beyond Lebanon to become regional.

The second initiative, the *Church-Mosque Network,* was started this year. This initiative encourages committed Christians and Muslims in neighboring communities to interact more intentionally together, to discuss common challenges, and to seek ways to work together for the common good in the community.

The third initiative, the *Forum for Current Affairs,* was also launched this year. This initiative brings together key evangelical church and organizational leaders for strategic conversations on the prophetic role of the Church in response to surrounding political, economic, and social realities.

These peacebuilding initiatives are led by our Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES) that has branded its approach as *kerygmatic* peacebuilding. The term *kerygma* means proclamation. We continue to explore in depth how our peacebuilding initiatives can be Christ-centered. Special

attention is given to the incarnation of Christ and the ongoing incarnational work of Christ through the Holy Spirit and the Church; the cross of Christ as the foundation for cruciform peacebuilding; and the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Christ as the foundation for hope and renewal.

Looking back, we cannot but be amazed at what God has accomplished in our midst this past year. It is far beyond what we planned or anticipated. This has been the case every year. God expands our ministry way beyond our expectations. However, July is not only the time to look back. It is the ideal time to look forward, to prepare ourselves for where we believe God will be guiding us next.

The need for solid leaders for the Church in the region continues. With the various crises and conflicts, and with the changing political, economic, and religious climate, God has been challenging the Church and shaking it to the core. Christianity in the region is in decline. Ironically, however, the Gospel is gaining ground and penetrating into new people groups every day. Leaders who understand what God is doing, and who are able and skilled in leading their communities into more meaningful engagement within their societies, are highly needed. As is the need for more contextual theology and missiology that can provide meaning to God's activity in the region.

This has many implications for the ministry of ABTS. First, we need to keep refining our residential program in response to the changing realities and the unfolding new challenges. The content, shape, and approach of our curriculum need to remain relevant. Likewise, we need to keep nurturing a faculty team that can provide leadership and direction for this process.

Second, we need to strengthen and grow our distributed learning programs, to make our training more widely accessible within the Arab world without compromising on quality or content. The way critical thinking is cultivated from a distance is different, and the way transformation is fostered requires a lot more intentionality.

Third, we need to expand the peacebuilding initiatives by mobilizing the local churches and encouraging them to take ownership of some of these initiatives, and by the regional growth of these initiatives through the work of our graduates.

Fourth, we need to keep building on the DNA of ABTS as a place of innovation and experimentation to look for new and creative ways for equipping strategic leaders for the Arab Church. One example of that is a conversation that has already started among a few of our seminaries in the region. We are investigating the possibility of launching a collaborative regional doctoral program that provides a unique opportunity for research that is rooted in the region.

All of this comes with the predictable difficulty of increasing the impact of the ministry of ABTS while maintaining a sustainable operation. We appreciate your prayers for us as we aim to fulfill God's mandate for us to *see God glorified, people reconciled, and communities restored through the Church in the Arab world*.

"We need to keep building on the DNA of ABTS as a place of innovation and experimentation to look for new and creative ways for equipping strategic leaders for the Arab Church."

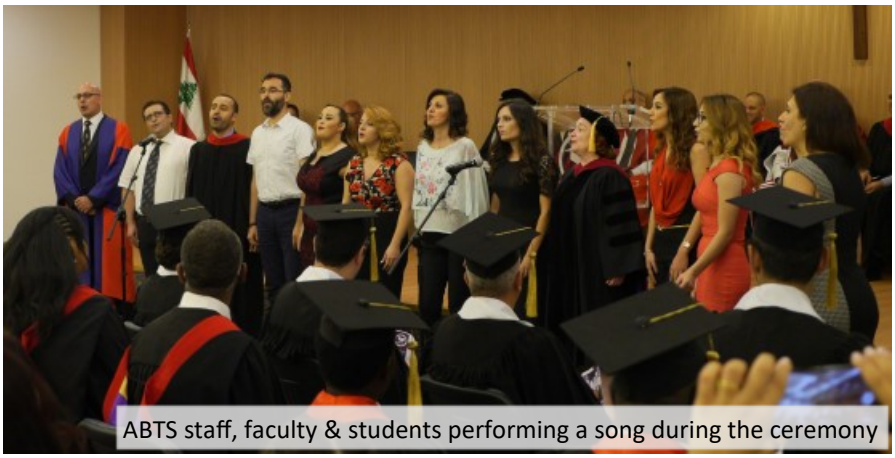
ABTS provides new students with laptops to help with their studies. Upon graduation, the students take the laptops with them for use in their respective ministries.

A contribution of $750 can provide one student with a laptop and Office software.

Donate

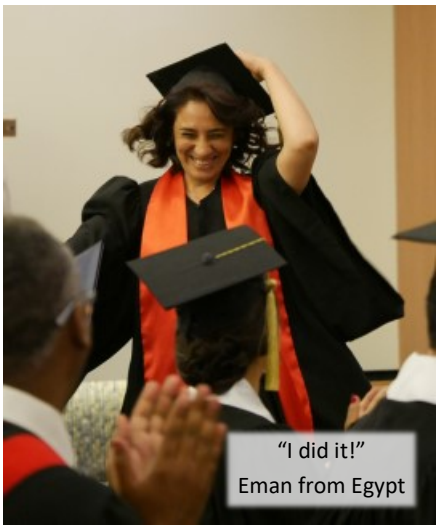
ABTS Graduation Ceremony 2018: Launching 17 Students into the Field

"We came to this home with different ideas, callings, and visions; but what brought us together and united us is our deep desire to serve our Savior in whom we believed and followed," reflected Nabila from Sudan.


ABTS staff, faculty & students performing a song during the ceremony

ABTS family and friends gathered on June 24 to celebrate the graduation of 17 students with degrees ranging from Certificate in Ministry to Master of Divinity and Master of Religion in MENA studies.

During the ceremony, the student speaker from the Master of Religion (MRel) program, Louise Brown, shared about her journey in the program, which she described as "an academic Master degree for people actively serving in the region or among Arab or North African communities around the world." Louise spoke about how her project in one of the program modules was transformed from hypothetical to practical, and how this degree helped it come to life to reach out to a broken world. The student speaker for the Theology department, Nabila, spoke about what the students had learned during their years at ABTS. She shared about the importance of understanding sacrificial love and serving one another. Nabila highlighted some of the lessons that her classmates learned. They learned about growing in humility and following the example of Christ in ministry, about being not only Christian leaders but also good citizens for their community and country and modeling that to others. They also learned about measuring the extent of their experience of God's grace by the extent of how much grace they extend to others.


"I did it!"
Eman from Egypt

The main speaker for the evening was Camille Melki, the Executive Director of MEATE (Middle East Association for Theological Education). Camille read from the first two chapters of Acts and reminded the graduating students that "the direction of ministry should be from the *upper room* (Acts 1:14) towards the public and not the other way round." He continued, "many times, we let our passion, excitement and motivation take the lead, and then we call on Jesus to come and partner with us… Do not beat him to the ministry and then invite Him to join. Let the calling and invitation come from Him." He also reminded the graduates that the *upper room* is the source and reservoir for the ministry. It is a place to renew our strength and be re-launched. It is a source of strength. The *upper room* is where the peace of God is.

This year's graduation ceremony was dedicated to the memory of Sam Moore, a longtime faithful friend and supporter of the ministry of ABTS. His contributions have made possible the building of the Sam and Peggy Moore Conference Center where the graduation took place.

Our 15th Middle East Consultation

MEC 2018 titled, *Jesus Christ and the Religious Other: Toward a Biblical Understanding of Islam,* was hosted from June 18 to 22 at ABTS. The consultation aims 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.

MEC 2018 featured the launching of *The Church in Disorienting Times: Leading Prophetically through Adversity*, a book based on material from MEC 2017. Moreover, participants from more than 20 countries, from the region and around the world, gathered in the Moore Conference Center and Guesthouse at ABTS seeking to better understand and to be better equipped for their different Middle East related ministries.

As David, a participant from the US, expressed, "if you are interested to learn more about the Middle East and the area this is the best learning opportunity you can get. You won't be alone in this; you meet people from all over the world who have the same passion and you learn together. If you want to get into ministry in this area, this is the place to start. It is much more than an immersion."

Read more about MEC 2018 by Martin Accad and the IMES team at IMES.blog.

Prayer Requests from ABTS Alumni

Iraq **-** Pray for the official registration of the country's Evangelical churches, specifically, for the Church Ara is pastoring and that they may afford to pay the rent for the church building.

South Sudan **-** Our graduates were united in asking for prayers for the peace and healing of the country. Also pray for the Lord to give wisdom to the leaders of South Sudan, and pray for the needs of those who are in ministry.

Lebanon **-** Please pray for ministries among Syrian and Iraqi Refugees. Michel, serving in the North of Lebanon, asks for prayers for the discipleship of new believers, to see them grow in faith and devoted to ministry.

Algeria **-** Pray for strength, wisdom and solutions during a time where the situation is sensitive for the Church. Pray for the ministry to continue to grow. One family asked for protection in the new challenging area to which they moved.

Syria **-** Pray for the Churches and ministry in different areas of Syria. Few Syrian alumni, who are in the diaspora, asked for prayers for their ministries and families.

Tunisia **-** Our alumni asked for prayers for Tunisia to rise economically and for freedom to endure through a divine plan. They also asked for prayers for the brothers and sisters who are persecuted and troubled. On another note, pray for strength and time for the radio ministry.

Egypt **-** Pray for the ministry among refugees from Darfur, for their discipleship and preparation for sharing the Good News among their families.

Morocco **-** One graduate asks prayers for God to send him a wife who helps him in ministry and shares his vision. Also, pray for the ministry to become more strategic and to grow, and pray for the Lord to open up new areas in Morocco.

ABTS is a ministry of the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD). ABTS and LSESD benefit from the support of MEBO, a 501(c)(3) corporation based in The Woodlands, TX, that coordinates efforts among our US friends.