Arab Baptist Theological Seminary
كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية
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God's Love for Sudan Remains Unwavering

Despite the fact that the Sudanese Church has been hard pressed on every side in the past few years, God has been using it in amazing ways to further His Kingdom in the country. This has especially begun to take place when the Sudanese Church realized its need for equipped leaders. Pastor Philemon is one example. While visiting us in November, Pastor Philemon was interviewed by our writer, Teresa Sfeir. Read on to see how God has used his ministry to influence the Sudanese Church and community.

◆ ***Would you share with me about your journey after graduating in 2004?***

After graduating, I returned to my local church in Sudan, the Presbyterian Evangelical Church. A while later, I got an invitation to pastor a small Baptist church in a small neighborhood. There was no church building at first, so we gathered in a small room instead. In August 8, 2008, I was ordained as pastor of that church. Aside from my pastoring responsibilities, I also began to teach theology at Faith Bible Institute.

We began to do outreach ministries within the church area every three months. We would stand outside the church and worship the Lord with praise and prayer. We also had people preaching the gospel. This, of course, drew the attention of passersby and those in the nearby homes. In fact, hundreds of people would gather around us. This work introduced people to our church, and the community began to open up to us. The Lord then provided two land properties, and we were able to build a church building.

In 2014, we started to do social work in our community. For instance, we started a nursery for preschoolers.

◆ ***Would you tell me a bit about your current ministry?***

In addition to pastoring the church, I lead worship in various churches across Sudan. I am currently preparing for a Bible study TV program. We are recording it in Finland with the help of another ABTS graduate called Barnaba, who currently lives there. The program will be called "Chains Were Broken". It will be broadcast on three channels, which are SAT-7, Al Malakoot (The Kingdom) and Al Majd (The Glory).

I also am Head of the Baptist Convention in Sudan. Through the convention, we equip leaders from different denominations for ministry. We have sent many leaders to study at ABTS over the years. Starting from 2017, we began to conduct leadership trainings three times a year. We call this ministry "The Baptist Center for Training Leaders". At the beginning of next year, we will have a conference for 50 participants, mainly Sudanese Church leaders and their spouses.

We also focus on young adults from different denominations; we desire that they know God more and serve Him. We will soon be holding a large conference for

300 to 400 young adults. We also focus on spreading the gospel through our local churches. Moreover, we shepherd around 200 home groups across Sudan with the help of ABTS graduate Assaad.

◆ ***What do you enjoy most about your ministry?***

When I see change in the people, when I see leaders growing in the Spirit, when I see people understanding God's Word, I am most joyful. It is when people truly come to know God, and they form a deep relationship with Him. It always warms my heart when I see people genuinely praying, seeking to do God's will.

◆ ***Do you have a story where you witnessed God's work through your ministry?***

There is a lot of drunkenness and crime

where our church is located, yet our ministry was able to touch so many lives. One middle-aged woman had epilepsy, and there was no one to care for her. Her husband was dead, and her children had abandoned her. Her friend attends our church, so she once told her that the church could come to pray for her. We went to her house and prayed. Today, she says, "If it weren't for the church, I would have died." Her face has recovered its healthy glow, and she serves at church with all her energy. She knows that the Lord is the One who restored her health. It is very touching to see the change God makes in others. Moreover, many people testify that the church has a transformative role in the area. When we first started, things were bad in the area, but we never ceased to pray. It has changed souls and led people to Christ.

Pastor Philemon sharing in chapel

◆ ***What are some of your plans for ministry?***

Currently, we would like to improve our children's ministry at church. Parents usually leave their children at home on Sundays as we have no space for Sunday school. Many of these children grow up, and they find it difficult to have a sense of belonging to church. We are currently talking to the families about the importance of bringing their children to church even though it can pressure us in some ways. We would like to have a hall for Sunday school, so we are currently praying for two land properties near our church, so we can build another hall.

We desire to expand our church space, but of course, we believe that ministry is not confined to a church building. A church should teach people about God, but it also must go out into its community. So join us in prayer for the land and construction, but also, pray that the Lord will use us as we go out into our community in Sudan.

◆ ***This interview was conducted before protests started in December. We ask you to pray for the Church to continue being a lighthouse to the people around it under the current circumstances.***

Our Residential Students Celebrate Christmas

Immanuel, the Incarnate God, the One whom the angels serve and worship has come to us in the appointed time. His worn sandals have tread dusty, alley roads. He went around seeking the lost and healing those who were under the power of the evil one. He walked with them. He listened to them. His beaming face was theirs to behold. Can we ever fathom the depth of this mystery? We stand in awe, remembering the coming of our Lord who "being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:8 NIV)" Not only do we remember, but we strive to have the same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus as He walked this earth (See Philippians 2:5). He made His love manifest in a culturally contextual, practical way. We are then to do the same. Since incarnational ministry is of utmost importance to us, we train our students to lead the Church into becoming missional and incarnational upon graduation. Our students demonstrate such a ministry even during their time here.

This Christmas season has been quite busy for our residential students. Yes, it was a time to share in the communal festivities, but it was also a time to both receive and offer kindness. Our

Students, staff and faculty during the Christmas event

Sudanese worship

students put up a Christmas program for students, faculty and staff on Friday, December 21. Perhaps the highlight of the event was the play. This year's play serves as a sequel to last year's Christmas play where each of our male students acted as the Santa of their countries at an Arab conference. This year, the wife of the Syrian Santa decides that women should have their own conference. While in the past conference, she took her husband's place as he fought at the trenches, this time, she invites the women to her country Syria where peace has begun to take place. They then discuss ways to empower women so peace can spread. According to our student Hiba from Syria, "The main message of the play is that women are an integral part of peacemaking, so they must have an integral role in the Middle Eastern public sphere."

Our students also spent time together on several other occasions during the Christmas holidays. For instance, a group spent New Year's Eve together on campus with a special program followed by dinner. On December 25, our Sudanese students put up a program for the Sudanese diaspora through the Sudanese Community Church, who gather in the Frère School, Sin El Fil. Both Muslims and Christians visit the church as they see that there is no need for religious barriers. The Christmas program, which ran from two to six, consisted of games, songs and a message. The Sudanese Community Church depends on the ministry of our Sudanese students. They are responsible for most of the activity that goes on there.

Our Sudanese student Habil says,

> "The highlight, for me, was our ministry at the Sudanese Community Church. Many from the Sudanese diaspora visit the church as they find in it a haven of acceptance. Recently, six people accepted Christ, and three got baptized on December 23. Our students are regularly following up with them through home visits. On December 25, many Sudanese visited our church, both Christian and Muslim, and they had a good time together, laying aside all ideological differences. What an exciting thing to see! We aim to prepare more events like this where we can promote peace in society."

On a different note, it can get lonely on Christmas if you're away from home. While our students cannot be home for the holidays, several of our staff and faculty members opened their homes to students during the holiday season. Students spent a lovely time full of warmth and joy. Our Sudanese student Wahid says, "Several faculty and staff members invited us to their homes. It was such a beautiful feeling to be welcomed and embraced. We didn't feel like strangers; we didn't feel as if we were away from home." Our students' children also wait for the holiday in anticipation, so our staff and faculty wanted to help the students make it a special time for them. Their children accordingly received items of clothing and a pair of shoes as gifts on Christmas Eve.

In all, the past December has been a wonderful, fruitful time for our residential students. Currently, our first-year students are working on their integrative projects for the Communication module, while our second-and-third-year students work on their integrative projects for the Restored Community modules. Lift them up in prayer as they work hard towards completing the module successfully.

Having lunch all together!

Game time

Do you want *to see God glorified, people reconciled, and communities restored through the Church in the Arab world*?

Help us equip faithful men and women for effective ministry by supporting our online and residential students.

Support a Student

Pray with Us: Prayer Requests From our Sudanese Students

A number of our Sudanese students have shared their concerns and prayer requests for their country. Recent protests began on December 19, 2018 in the northeastern city of Atbara over the price increase of bread, fuel and other economic factors. Very quickly protests spread nationwide and fears of further unrest are accentuated. Join our ABTS community in prayer for Sudan.

◆ **Habil -** The protests in Sudan are ongoing since their start in mid-December. Most of the schools in the country have shut down since then. Everything has become so expensive, and the poor families can no longer tolerate the situation. I also think of the Nuba Mountains and the deteriorating economic and security situation there. You can imagine how difficult things are, so I ask you with all my heart to pray with us for the country.

◆ **Amin -** I ask you to pray for the regime and the government in Sudan that it may be given wisdom to deal with the crisis. I also ask you to pray for the Sudanese Church that there may be no divisions and it may rise above the tyranny of sectarianism. Also, pray for my family in Sudan that the Lord would protect them from all danger.

◆ **Susanna -** May the leaders of the country spread the culture of peace more in the community. I also ask you to pray for the families that can barely find food, for the sick as the sanitary conditions go downhill, and for those who lack the proper clothing, housing or heating.

◆ **Nason -** Life is currently very difficult in Sudan. Please pray for the current state of the country as the people continue to demand a change for the better. Pray also that the Lord would continue to protect the Sudanese Church in the midst of all this commotion. Pray that the leaders of the country would look out for the people.

◆ **Niyazi -** Please pray for the people of Sudan. The security situation in Sudan is very bad. People are over-burdened, and they have reached the brink of suffering. Consequently, they took it to the streets. Then what was supposed to be nonviolent protests quickly escalated causing death and bloodshed. Also, pray for students as schools have been shut down ever since the protests began.

◆ **Abu Kindy -** Please pray for protection over the Church in Sudan amid the dire economic situation and the civil unrest. Also, pray for the government so that its decisions may be for the good of the people.

◆ **Third-year student -** We praise the Lord for preserving His Church in Sudan as the living conditions grow harder. The Sudanese currency continues to lose its value while the industrial and agricultural sectors are almost paralyzed. Please pray that there would be an end to economic corruption and bloodshed. May the Lord grant wisdom to the leaders so that they cooperate with the needs of the people and come up with drastic solutions for the current problems.

◆ **Elia -** Please pray that the Church in Sudan may have a missional role and a prophetic voice during these difficult times, and that its young men and women may have an active presence in society, making known the gospel. Also, pray for the families who lost loved ones that they may be comforted. Finally, pray that the neighboring countries, who are on good terms with Sudan, may intervene diplomatically to help with the current situation.

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THINKING BIBLICALLY ABOUT MUSLIMS, MUHAMMAD & THE QUR'AN:
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- How does our theological understanding of Islam affect the Church's approach to ministry in society?

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