



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

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Is There Hope?

A word from ABTS President Elie Haddad



The conflict in Syria is far from over, and more than half of the country's population is displaced. No one knows when or how the conflict will end. The devastating war in Yemen has turned the country into a humanitarian catastrophe. The political and security situation in Lebanon and the region continues to be unstable, especially with the recent escalation with Iran. Sudan is in turmoil. The economy is collapsing in many countries of the region. Churches are being closed in Algeria, not to mention the Arab-Israeli conflict that continues to destabilize the region.

What about chronic and deep-rooted corruption? Restrictions on religious freedom and criminalization of conversion? Authoritarian and unjust regimes?

The security situation, political situation, economic situation, social and religious situation, all unstable. What hope is there? Do we blame those who want to emigrate, leaving a volatile region to look for a better life elsewhere? What about the church community? It is not immune to the ailments of our societies. On the contrary, many within church communities feel they are a persecuted minority. Are members of these communities not allowed or expected to seek that better life outside? What about church leaders? They frequently feel specifically targeted. Many of them have connections and easy access to the outside world. Why would they stay?

It is easy for us, as a Church, to curse the darkness. We forget that we are called to be light, and that our light, no matter how dim or insignificant we think it is, shines best in the dark. We get frustrated with corruption and injustice. We forget that we are called to be salt, and that the salt needs to be scattered around

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to have an effect. We are afraid of hardship and persecution. We forget that our calling and fate are often connected with that of our Master. God did not stay aloof in heaven keeping peace far removed from our messed-up world. Instead, He came among us, into our mess, into our sinful and violent world, and lived among the very people that rebelled against Him, in order to redeem and restore. Peacekeepers avoid conflict, stay away from trouble, and flee from violence. Peacemakers, on the other hand, step into trouble, go where there is no peace, into the conflict, to bring healing and restoration. It is the peacemakers who are called the children of God in Matthews 5:9.

When Jesus was calling upon the disciples to be salt and light, according to the witness of the evangelist Matthew, He used the emphatic "you". This can be stated as "You yourselves are the salt of the earth... You yourselves are the light of the world." I can imagine Jesus pointing His finger at the disciples as He addressed them. It is as if Jesus was singling out the disciples for this incredible responsibility. There is darkness in the world, and I want "you" to be the light; there is corruption in the world, and I want "you" to be the salt. I can hear Jesus repeating the same call for us today. He is choosing us, His Church, the most unlikely people, to accomplish this critical task.

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Kingdom values, and to exhibit to the world the marks of the reign of God.

This is the kind of Church that is needed in the Arab world at a time like this. Thankfully, God is growing, maturing, and transforming churches all over the Arab world. We are witnessing many examples of church communities that are bold but filled with love, passionate about God and His mission, and passionate about the people of the region.

We, at ABTS, are humbled and thrilled to be called by God to serve such a Church. We come alongside the Church in many capacities. First, we invest in developing missional leaders for the Church. We work on developing leaders who are critical thinkers, with a strong spiritual character and competence in ministry skills, in addition to a pronounced missional impulse. Our region is starving for leaders. Our churches are facing a crisis of leadership. Equipping enough leaders to meet the needs of the Church in the Middle East and North Africa today seems like a daunting task. Nevertheless, God is raising faithful witnesses for Him every day. We have the privilege of working alongside a few of them in their journey of ministry preparation.

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ABTS also serves the Church by providing educational and ministry resources. The most obvious need is the publication of quality books of serious content. It is impossible to shape thoughtful leaders without building their intellectual capacity.

Another important dimension of the ministry of ABTS is its Institute of Middle East Studies ([IMES](#)). IMES has an educational component. This includes a [Master of Religion](#) degree, delivered in English and targeting the global leader who is preparing to engage the realities of the Middle East and North Africa. It is a unique and innovative multidisciplinary distance-learning program. Another component is the annual [Middle East Consultation](#) that attracts global participants who are interested in ministry in our context.

In addition to the educational component, IMES serves the regional Church in ways that are not typical for a seminary. IMES is heavily involved in multi-faith activities, Christian-Muslim dialogue, and various peacebuilding initiatives that bring communities together and promote the common good. The purpose of all these initiatives is to explore new ways that the Church can engage societies in our context. IMES has become a

safe place for testing pioneering ideas and initiatives. Ultimately, the purpose is to equip and mobilize the churches in engaging their communities using these new ideas and initiatives. ABTS has become a breeding ground for innovative ideas in education and missional encounters, and God has been providing the creative and passionate people that can make it happen. It is very thrilling and exciting to be serving God in such an environment alongside such people.

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The astonishing reality of the ministry of ABTS is that we get to work with churches and leaders all over the Middle East and North Africa to empower them for ministry, yet we have very limited resources of our own. This proves that we serve an amazing God. We get to experience the provisions of God on a daily basis. God brings into this web of ministry global partners who empower us, enable us, and join us in this mission. What an encouragement it is to be part of God’s global network coming together to accomplish His mission.

Is there hope? Absolutely! God is raising His Church to be His witness in the most unlikely place at the most unlikely time. To Him be all glory, honor, and praise!



Graduation Ceremony 2019

“He Will Complete”: June 2019 Graduation Ceremony



Graduates and faculty praying before the graduation ceremony

We held our graduation ceremony on June 23 for eight fulltime theology students, thirteen online students and three Master of Religion students whom God has entrusted with a message to tell of His wondrous love. As they begin to walk the unpaved, thorny road, His Spirit will prove to be a steady help. Our graduates desire to devote their lives to the One they chose to follow, so we pray that they faithfully take on the role God appointed for each of them as they serve their communities.

During our ceremony, Karen Shaw, Student Affairs Team member and Associate Professor of Cross-Cultural Ministry,

delivered the graduation address. She spoke about an unusual school – the school of failure. Failure is an inevitable part of lifelong learning, although it is something our students would like to evade in their ministries. Karen shared,

In 2014, we asked our students at the annual retreat what they fear most, and the first answer was “failure”. On this day of your big success, I expect that some of you fear you will blow it. I have bad news for you. You are going to fail in ministry – not in everything – but you will experience moments, days, months and even years of failures, big and small.

She then moved on to her own experience of God’s work in her and in her husband as they both failed at the start of their ministry. God had restored them and led them unto greater things. Isn’t it the case with many heroes of faith? Our students will be learning from their failures, too, always rising back up to serve their Churches and their communities, and to be a voice to the voiceless. Our Master of Divinity student from Sudan, who was the speaker on behalf of our theology students, shared,

At first, we came here to fill our minds with grand intellect and theology so we can take pride before our churches and communities. Instead, we discovered that theology boasts in its weakness and humble service, to both young and old, to the educated and the uneducated. [...] We learned that true theology is to give others preference, to love them and to deny ourselves in the process – following His example.

Our Master of Religion (MRel) in Middle Eastern and North African Studies student speaker, Donnie, also shared how the program prepared students for practical ministry. Through the program, they listened to authentic voices from the Middle East. They learned so much from the guest lecturers and day trips to mosques, monasteries and NGO’s. “Genuine listening can be quite difficult,” Donnie shares, “yet it is the only way to be a peacemaker.” As we close, we will leave you with the final words of Karen Shaw’s speech:

Whenever you hear the crowing of a rooster at anytime, anywhere in the world, I want you to remember that in Jesus, failure is never final. “He who began a good work in you will complete it in Christ Jesus,” just as He did with Peter.



Our 16th Middle East Consultation



During its sixteenth year, MEC 2019 was a fruitful week indeed! Read some highlights from this year's Middle East Consultation [here](#).

The Institute of Middle East Studies addresses subjects significant to the MENA region prophetically, sensitively and in a non-partisan manner in its weekly blog posts. Check our [IMES Blog here](#).

New Building Updates!



While our engineers continue to work on the architectural design of [the building](#), we recently completed geotechnical tests on the soil in preparation for the building permit request. Pray for God's favor throughout this process.

Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from Our Alumni

Andrea from Sudan | 2017 Graduate

Because of the continuous unrest in Sudan, people are open to the gospel. Pray for my ministry in my city and for more opportunities to share the gospel. Pray also for the ones who have already accepted Christ that their families will also follow.

Maher from Egypt | 2017 Graduate

Please pray for God's blessing upon our ministry. We trust that He will finish what He began. Pray for us as we disciple new believers and lead Bible studies.

Daoud from Sudan | 2018 Graduate

As part of his ministry, Daoud trains Sudanese leaders through a Bible school that he started at the beginning of this year.

Pray that God may be glorified through the Bible school with each new day. Pray also for our students, who are mostly working adults, that they may have a desire to study, to show up to class and to

finish their assignments on time.

Sabet from Sudan | 2018 Graduate

Pray with me for my life as I need to find a balance between work and ministry. Pray for the church, for the youths, and for the Sunday School leaders. Pray also for the situation in Sudan, because the political and security issues affect our ministry.

Couple from North Africa | 2014 Graduates

The need for Christ is great in our region. Many thirst for Him, so pray with us that our reach extends across our country. We are a new, growing church; at first, our focus was mainly on the inner circle of our members. Now, five years after we first started, we understand that the church cannot exist for the sake of itself. God purposed it for its community.

Ali from North Africa | 2019 Online Graduate

Please pray for more ministry workers and a blessing upon those who are currently

serving with me. Pray for North African church leaders to have a hunger for studying God's Word.

Shiyar from Syria living in Canada | 2019 Online Graduate

Please pray that God uses me as a witness to the Arabs and Kurds living in the nearby cities, so they may see Christ in me and come to Him.

Pray for ABTS Leadership

- *To be led by His spirit*
- *To be aligned with His will*
- *To be obedient to His voice*

You can always visit our [Prayer Requests webpage](#) and join us in prayer!