

Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

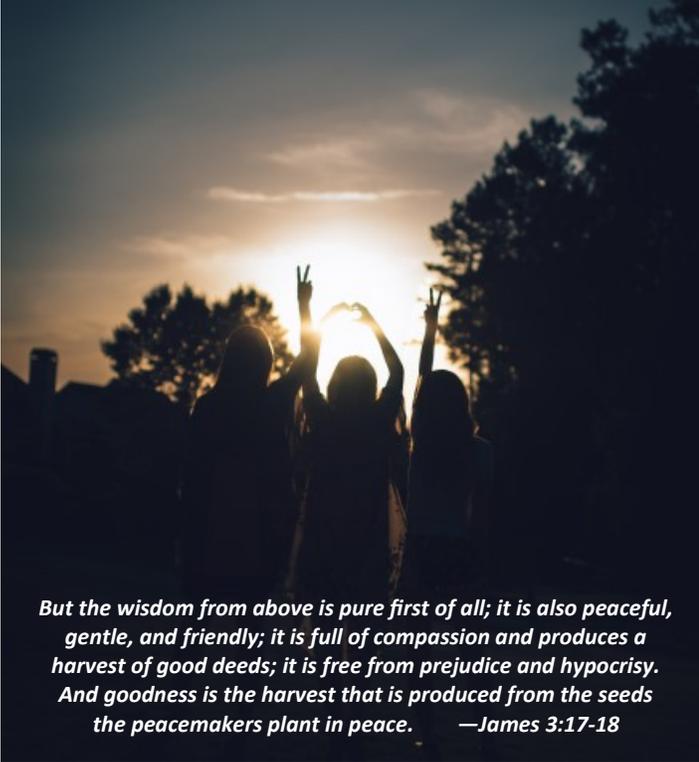
كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

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In Pursuit of Peace

Khebz w Meleh Peacebuilding Initiative



But the wisdom from above is pure first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy. And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace. —James 3:17-18

In 2016 and after a two-year testing period, the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary's (ABTS) Institute of Middle East Studies team launched Khebz w Meleh (KwM, meaning bread and salt), an interfaith peacebuilding initiative that aims to create interreligious friendships through dialogue and shared action. Through engaging in conversations that focus on the common good, young people begin to form insights into different religions and form lasting friendships, all while serving their communities through social actions. The social actions are practical activities that help the youths learn how to work together. They identify an issue in their community, determine its root cause, and plan and execute a social action that seeks to remedy the problem. The motivation behind KwM is our vision of seeing God glorified, people reconciled, and communities

restored through the Church in the Arab world.

The KwM program is highly adaptable as it seeks to help youths establish diverse friendships in their communities that are solidified through practical application. The program is held in groups of twelve Muslim and Christian youth. Each group has two facilitators, one from each religion, who are trained and assisted by the Peacebuilding Field Coordinator. The groups follow a curriculum of eight sessions: four for interfaith discussion, two for planning the social action, one for performing the social action, and one for evaluation. The facilitators manage conversations by making sure the attendees adhere to the [eleven guidelines](#) for dialogue as adapted from The Feast, UK.

In Lebanon, groups are led by KwM team members in areas of religious diversity. Lebanon has a tumultuous history that is rife with religious conflict, and its political structure is sectarian in form. This has turned religion into an ideo-political tool that divides the populace, and when tensions and anxieties are high, apathy and separation become more prominent. This issue has plagued Lebanon since before the beginning of the Civil War in 1975 and well beyond the official peace treaty of 1990. In response to this divide, our team is seeking reconciliation and is finding that a lot of the groups and communities they work with share the desire for reconciliation.



Baysour - Haret Hreik team during their social action activity

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With the recent group in Baysour, the KwM team was met by great enthusiasm from parents and community leaders. The group had decided on raising awareness about children’s rights, and the municipality helped them install a metal flower with the different children’s rights as the petals in the local park, overlooking the area where the community holds many of its activities.

In 2018, we held an international peacebuilding conference that was centered around creating more opportunities for interfaith dialogue. Out of this conference, the opportunity came about to launch an adaptation of KwM in other Arab countries. Some of our students who attended the conference and decided to adapt the program to Sudan’s needs were trained to be facilitators. Since then, the Lord has allowed for sixteen different initiatives to be launched through five different facilitators.

When they got back home, our Sudanese students contextualized and adapted the KwM program to their culture and their country’s needs, and the program took on the more culturally appropriate name of Lokma w Meleh - lokma being the Sudanese equivalent of bread. In Sudan, it is common to have religiously intertwined families where one branch is Christian and the other is Muslim. This has created a society that is religiously diverse, which has allowed for various opportunities for interreligious conversation. Recently, our Sudanese students have been sharing with us encouraging stories of their experiences, and we would like to share some of these stories with you, so that you may be blessed and encouraged by them as we have been.

Sabet and Daoud share: We started out by having alternating meetings in Atbara and Port Sudan. Our groups started out very modestly. We would meet in an old school with no air conditioning and bad plumbing, but the Lord is good, and our

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 \$800 can provide one student with a laptop and Office software.

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meetings were very productive. By acknowledging differences and similarities, and by talking positively about one’s own beliefs while making sure not to talk negatively about the other’s beliefs (two of the eleven guidelines), we were able to correct misconceptions and bring together different points of view. This helped us reach out and influence the society around us, and because of it, Muslim and Christian religious leaders began to speak positively about each other and about the Lokma w Meleh initiative. People who had never before interacted with different people were exposed firsthand to their cultures and beliefs. In Atbara, our social action was to renovate the bathroom of the school where we were meeting, and to clean the streets of the village. The initiative was so successful that it was recognized by our local government (The River Nile State government) and the one ministry grew into two separate ministries, one dedicated for each city. In Port Sudan, our social action was to distribute bags, books, and stationary to the students of the school we met in. The mother of one of the Muslim students, astonished by the



KwM team during one of their sessions

act of kindness, came up to us and started asking us about Christianity. Up until that point, she had only heard negative comments about Christianity, but her opinion changed when she saw that Christians shared her concerns and morals!

Habil shares: It was difficult at first to reconcile the differences in our group as some of the members held on tightly to their opinions. There was sometimes some pridefulness that got in the way of us reaching consensus. Because the group members came from different tribes that each has its own way of dealing with conflict, and that they wished to keep private, communication would sometimes stall. The lack of communication between different religions and different cultures also made it difficult, as a lot of the members would come in with presumptions about the other. However, by adhering to the eleven dialogue guidelines, we were able to overcome this difficulty to a certain degree. The respect that the members treated each other with and the honesty they communicated with turned the interactions from conflict to disagreement. This allowed people to contribute opinions that helped bridge the gap between opinion and belief. The group members understood each other much more, however, through the social action, and thankfully, we were able to influence the community around us as well. When the discussion turned to practical application, the conversations became more focused and mature. We chose to clean the streets of our neighborhood, Rawda East (Omdurman city, Khortoum state). When we started to work, some of neighborhood youths came out to join our efforts. On the next day, a group of youths from the neighborhood decided to go out and imitate what we had done! Later, religious leaders from both sides congratulated and commended the initiative and the group members.

Nabila shares: The Lokma w Meleh initiative helped me share empowering concepts with women who have spent their entire lives interacting with one tribe, one culture, and one religion. In my women’s group, we had a girl who was twenty-five years old and who had up until this point not interacted with anyone outside of her family! At first, it was difficult to bring these people to communicate comfortably, but by reminding the attendees to listen to what others have to say and to let go of assumptions (two of the eleven guidelines), the women in my group were able to start communicating effectively. We could see this because at our first meeting, the women had their reservations about sharing their opinions, but they grew more comfortable the more we shared. The commonness of our social action further brought these women together. We chose to spend a day with children who were getting treatment at a local hospital. Through entertaining and serving the children, we were able to reach their parents, who were overjoyed with our social action! The group was culturally diverse as well, and the interaction with these cultures alleviated some of the preconceptions that the girls might have had. Mei, one of the group members who had rarely ever talked to people outside of her tribe, said that “the open-mindedness that we were encouraged to adopt and the cordiality of the conversations we had, encouraged me to adopt the same style of conversation.” The women were eventually comfortable with sharing intimate stories about their lives, and the emotionality of sharing their private lives with each other helped break down barriers even further and create strong friendships.



Lokma w Meleh in action—Sudan



ABTS Students being trained as facilitators

Participating in the women’s group empowered these women to be able to break through cultural barriers and participate more in the society around them.

This initiative falls under what we call “kerygmatic peacebuilding”; by proclaiming the Word without attacking the religious other, we create the possibility of reconciliation and understanding. Kerygmatic peacebuilding is Christ-centered and as such works through the person of Christ rather than through the traditions and customs of Christianity, which allows for a more authentic conversation and better common ground.

We continue to hold Khebz w Meleh groups all around Lebanon. For the coming year, the Sudanese initiatives will be renewed with three of our facilitators while others work towards further training and specialization.

Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from Faculty and Staff Members

Rana Wazir Zailaa | Registrar

Pray with us as we start another academic year. Our returning students resumed their education at the start of last week, while our new students are still getting their visas to join us in October. Pray for the visa process, as it can be difficult for married couples and their children. Moreover, our Master of Religion (MRel) students and our returning students will start a new module in October, and our online students will start a new term. We will also have our accreditation visit then, so pray for this busy coming month!

Alexandra Abou Rjeily Bridi | Administration and HR Manager

We pray that all our newly accepted students will be granted visas. Pray for staff that they may be given strength at the start of this academic year. Our accounting team is also in the middle of the fiscal year-end closing process, so pray for them as they work hard, and pray for God's provision for yet another year. We also have a vacant position, so pray for the right person to fill it.

Marcelle Saad | Student Affairs Assistant

Please pray that our new students will not have a hard time phasing in as the academic year starts, and pray that their visa process will go smoothly without any complications.

Chaden Hani | Researcher in Peacebuilding Affairs

Pray for our new students' safe arrival to Lebanon and a readiness to learn and to change into Christ's image. Pray also for our various peacebuilding activities throughout the year. We pray that more of our students get involved in our work so it extends to different Arab countries. There is a need for peacebuilding all over the region.

Jimmy Geagea | Peacebuilding Field Coordinator

At the end of this month, we will have the Khebz w Meleh Celebration Day. This event will gather groups from different regions in Lebanon. The youth will share the outcome of their work during the trainings and the lessons learned for future relationship building, so pray with us that the event will nurture strong relationships.

Roula El Azzi | Executive Assistant

Please pray for our new building construction that everything goes smoothly without any major complications.

Abed El Kareem Zien El Dien | Lecturer in Communication Studies

In light of the clash that took place in the South of Lebanon at the beginning of this month, pray for political stability and peace in Lebanon as students arrive.

Brent Hammoud | Master of Religion (MRel) Administrator

I will be taking on the responsibilities of MRel administrator, so pray for my transition into my new position as part of the IMES team. Pray for the new MRel module that will start in October.

Caleb Hutcherson | Lecturer in Historical Theology and Faculty Development Lead

Please pray that I would be able to focus and be productive in order to make significant progress on my dissertation this year.

Pray for the Church in Algeria



In recent weeks, the Protestant Church of Algeria (EPA) has recorded a series of closures of its places of worship in Algeria, especially in the Kabyle area. Several churches (including those that aren't under the EPA) have

received written orders to stop all their activities, and a number of them were shut down.

One of our graduates' church faced attempts of closure at the end of August, but by God's grace, these attempts failed. She, in addition to other Algerian graduates, asked us to pray for the closed churches and the removal of the opposition that the Algerian Church is experiencing. She says, "Pray that God turns around the situation and sends more defenders of the Church. 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18 ESV).' We hold on to this truth with the assurance that God allowed us to endure this so He might show His glory."

In light of these events, let us lift our hearts together in prayer knowing that our Deliverer is able to help the Algerian Church withstand in the face of opposition and tribulation as it shines the light of Christ to the people.