

Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

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At a time when God has rendered foolish the wisdom of the world, let us keep our eyes on the cross of Christ, and let us continue running the race!

Since ABTS was founded 60 years ago, God has blessed us and entrusted us with a ministry to serve His Church in the Arab world. What a privilege it is that we can train local leaders who have a heart to serve their communities and make Christ known among their people. In a world with a new season of challenges and change, we seek to obey faithfully God's calling to continue this mission.

After an intensive period of reflection and action among ABTS faculty and leadership, we received the green light from our Board of Trustees to move forward with a new strategic direction. Our main residential theology program delivery method will now be modified to suit the 21st century Church in the Arab world. You can read more about this new direction as written by Elie Haddad on our website [here](#). I also invite you to continue reading to see how God is at work during this time of crises.

Loulwa El Maalouf, Development and Partner Relations Manager

A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GOSPEL

The story of our Online Graduate Karim

At 25, Karim fled his childhood memories and hometown in Mount Lebanon having lost his mother in a car crash. He turned to Jesus in Beirut, and Jesus turned him from an ordinary sales representative to a representative of the Gospel. In 2013, God called Karim to serve in the Bekaa so he left his job and moved there with his wife. Recently we interviewed Karim, who shared an encouraging glimpse of his ministry in Lebanon.

Jesus is What Matters

Since 2016, Karim's ministry team had been reaching a thousand kids at a certain area of the Bekaa – 800 kids at a school they served and supported and 200 kids at refugee camps. Three years later, many kids – and parents – had already come to the Lord. Consequently, after having received several complaints of them "turning children into Christians", the area officials asked Karim and the team to leave altogether. They also threatened the camp residents against welcoming ministry workers again.

This doesn't sound encouraging, you might say, but Jesus never promised the road would be smooth. However, we rest in the knowledge that He is still in control even when the road gets bumpy.

Karim shares,

We are bound to face setbacks in ministry. We had been planting seeds for five years at the school and the camps, but suddenly everything stopped. Other than the resistance we face, the need of volunteers can also be a challenge in a big ministry, but it isn't an insurmountable one. We often find out that God sends the needed people for the work. We never say, "We are waiting for the volunteers so we can start." We start.



Karim with Syrian refugee kids

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Karim's ministry is with NEO Leaders in partnership with Jesus Prince of Peace Church

Then God sends the people. So, if asked what encourages me most about the ministry, I would simply say Jesus. Jesus encourages me most whether there is or there isn't work. The way He deals with people encourages me – the way He gently pursues those who first reject Him. Seeing the fruit of the second birth in others encourages me. I am excited to see people fervently serving God as they mature in Him daily – as I mature in Him daily.

during the pandemic, their passion for the Lord is inspiring.

The Stories of Two ABTS Online Students

Karim shared the stories of two young men at his young adult group. The first is from a non-Christian background. Almost three years ago, he had just arrived from Syria and came to their church looking for relief aid. Karim began to visit him and his wife. He soon came to the Lord wholeheartedly and became a committed follower. Today, he shares the Gospel with his people. He recently got baptized and is studying theology online with ABTS. The second person is also currently an ABTS Online student. He grew up in a believing family and heard it all, but the Lord used Karim to guide him from a life of head knowledge to a life of true surrender to God.

Starting Over

Faithful to his calling, God continued to use Karim strongly in the Bekaa. In August 2019, he started from scratch with a refugee camp of 50 families. In partnership with other ministries, the ministry team has been taking the families through literacy programs and distributing food packages and gifts for kids while telling them about Jesus.

In addition to this, they currently work with almost 40 Kurdish families living in the neighboring towns. Karim focuses on the adults while the rest of the ministry team focuses on the children. While they have home groups, Karim prepares Bible studies for the men while others prepare Bible studies for the women. Around 200 kids from the previous camps come to their local church for a weekly children's program. Aside from his ministry with refugees, Karim leads the young adult ministry of his church. He shares,

We have fifteen young adults. They all came to Jesus in the past couple of years, and I followed up with each of them individually. They are making such a difference now, and I can rely on them to continue the work. Even



Ministry During Lockdown



In these circumstances, God is using Karim in new ways. They have been reaching out to Lebanese families as the country goes through tough times. They pass by briefly, offer them food packages and tell them about Jesus. Since they moved the Bible studies and the follow-ups online, they have been meeting new people who wouldn't have joined their ministry otherwise. They cannot gather the children in the Bekaa currently, so they send them 5-10 minute videos of Bible stories. Both the kids and the parents have been reciting the stories to them whenever they briefly meet them.

We can't do much to stop the pandemic, but we can pray. The more we pray and read God's Word, the more we experience God. This is what we see in people's lives. We hear many stories of families on the brink of financial collapse, but they find the answer at their doorstep as soon as they pray. You see, God often manifests Himself in the dark.

The Impact of Theological Training

Karim intends to join the Bachelor of Theology distance-learning program because he finds it easier to study in the evening. He tried to study for the residential Bachelor of Theology after he graduated with a Certificate in Ministry in 2017, but with his daughter diagnosed with autism, he couldn't commit to spending most of his day on campus as he needed to focus on her. He says,

I am glad for the academic training I received at ABTS. I had courses on church planting and on Islam, which matured the way I do ministry. Much of what I studied is applicable because it is the outcome of years of experience in the ministry field. ABTS made a huge difference. That is why I constantly ask about the start date of the Bachelor of Theology distance-learning program.

I always ask for prayer for two things. The first concerns my daughter Daniella. The Lord has promised me several things concerning her. May He continue His work in her. The second concerns souls. May God use the Bekaa ministry team to save souls and to touch the hearts of many.

We are thankful that our online program caters to ministry workers, such as Karim, who cannot put their ministry on hold and spend up to three years on campus. Many of our Certificate in Ministry students and graduates have expressed the desire to join our Bachelor of Theology blended program as soon as it is launched, so we are excited for the new chapter that awaits us. Please pray for God's wisdom and guidance as we develop this program.

Peacebuilding in Cyber Space: Khebz w Meleh Online

Jad Tabet meets with the KwM team over Zoom

Jimmy: Hello? Can you hear me?

Me: Yes, we can hear you.

Arsho: But *I* can't hear **you**. The internet is lagging a lot today.

Me: Let's try turning off our video feeds; maybe that'll make it easier to connect.

Jimmy: Ah! It's working now. Okay, down to business...



Jimmy leading a KwM Online session

This is how my conversation started with Jimmy and Arsho, our youth interfaith forum implementers, on the 29th of May 2020. We were meeting over Zoom to discuss the latest developments with the Institute of Middle East Studies' (IMES) Khebz w Meleh





Arsho leading a KwM Online session

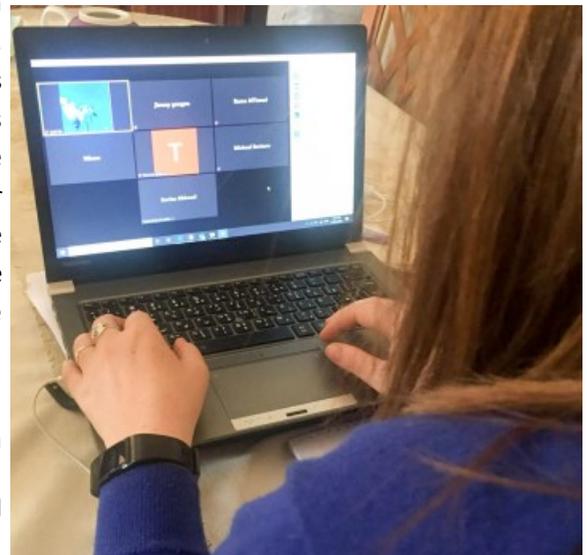
(Bread and Salt – KwM) peacebuilding initiative. KwM is a curriculum-based youth interfaith peacebuilding initiative that brings together Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian Christian and Muslim youths in Lebanon to share meals, openly discuss their faith, and act for the common good of their local communities. The program brings these youths together in eight sessions during which they learn to communicate peacefully, work to overcome prejudices, and cooperate in shared social action.

When the pandemic hit in late February/early March, the KwM team had just transitioned into their busy season; they had already finished conducting sessions for one group, were almost done with another, and were just starting with a third. The pandemic and the restrictions it brought with it forced the team to suspend physical sessions and focus on restructuring the initiative’s curriculum to meet current needs. “For a month after the lockdown was announced, we researched, conducted data analysis, and studied the projections health organizations had made for the pandemic for the near future. We found that the most efficient way for us to continue carrying out the initiative is to transition the program online” shares Arsho, our Peacebuilding Logistics Coordinator.

“Part of the curriculum’s identity is that it is highly adaptable so that it can benefit different people differently based on their social, cultural, and religious contexts. This gave us flexibility in how we adapted the program for an online setting since we had to contend with new difficulties created by the pandemic and older difficulties with the country’s infrastructure” shares Jimmy, our Peacebuilding Field Coordinator and Project Lead for KwM. “So, we chose to double down on the essential points that make up the identity of the program. We increased our emphasis on discussion and on auditory and visual elements and reduced the number of participants per group. This helped us maintain engagement throughout the sessions. We also reduced the amount of time the participants had to spend in Zoom calls by reducing the number and length of sessions they had to attend. This helped us contend with difficulties like power outages and weak internet connections.”

The team is conducting sessions for four new groups under the online format and is finding it more successful than expected. “At first, I thought it would be difficult to bring such diverse people together in an online video conference session, but as soon as we started with the groups, communication felt very organic,” shares Arsho. One of the participants shares, “Now that I know my neighbors better, my opinion of them has changed, and I feel that I can begin to love them and make friends with the ones I met through KwM.” Another group participant shares, “I never imagined that Christians would be this open-minded and loving towards the other. I am impressed to see how we share many virtues and values.” The team is looking forward to conducting as many groups as possible over the coming months.

Ever since the start of the demonstrations over the economic crisis, and with the increase in clashes between members of different parties, sectarian tensions have been on the rise. As such, peacebuilding continues to be a need for the betterment of the Lebanese society today. We pray that the Lord guides our actions as we seek to be conduits of peace in Lebanon and beyond.



Youth Participants from KwM Online

Middle East Conversations 2020

Our first MEC2020 webinar is only 3 days away!
Thursday, June 18 at 4:00pm Beirut Time (GMT +3)

Contributions by:

Martin Accad



Rima Nasrallah



Gary Nelson



Register Now!

Our second webinar will take place on
Thursday, July 16 at 4:00pm Beirut Time (GMT+3)

Webinar Topic: *COVID-19 and Theological Education in the Middle Eastern Context: Between Mounting Challenges and Emerging Opportunities*

Registration will open on June 24!

Stay tuned and visit our MEC page:
Abtslebanon.org/MEC2020

Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from Residential Students

Hiba and Rafed | Syria

Now that this is our final academic year, we will be soon returning to Syria to start a new ministry there. We would like to plant a church, but we wait for God's guidance. We need much prayer as we return to our war-torn country after having been away for five years. Pray that the Lord gives us wisdom and prepares the way before us. Pray for us to be faithful servants who walk in His will and extend His Kingdom in Syria.

Awney and Demyana | Egypt

We returned to Egypt sooner than expected due to the pandemic; we haven't exactly settled in as a married couple yet, so we ask you to pray that we establish ourselves in Egypt and that the Lord directs our steps as we serve Him here.

Abukanidy | Sudan

I can't wait to see my wife and kids again. I will be reuniting with them as soon as the airports open since this is my last academic year. As I await this moment, please pray for protection over my wife and kids as the virus continues to spread. Pray also that I finish this year well.

Student from Palestine

My plan is to return to my home country as soon as the airports open as this is my final year. However, there are certain complications in my paperwork that might impede my swift return. So pray that the paper work procedure goes faster so that I return home to serve my people.

Eilia | Sudan

Please pray that my obedience, faithfulness and commitment to

the ministry continues to grow in the Lord. Pray for my new ministry in Sudan in light of the current circumstances, and pray that the airport opens so I can return there. Because of the pandemic, I am not sure where and how to start, and my preset plans seem to no longer apply, but I am certain of the One who called me to partner with Him in His work. Pray for the Sudanese Church, and pray that I might humbly transmit to my local church what I learned here in the past three years.

John | Egypt

Please pray that I may be given wisdom and direction in this next phase in my life as I am launched into ministry and as the lockdown begins to loosen. I also need prayer because I am soon to be engaged.

Student from Egypt

We are going through a difficult time in Egypt, so we pray that ministries thrive again there and the virus spread stops. I am thankful for the opportunity to reach many online through our online meetings and written contributions.

Waheed | Sudan

My prayer is that I always remain pliable clay in the hands of the Potter so that I am shaped into His likeness. As He called me to leave my job and everything else behind to study theology in Lebanon, pray that He continues what He began in me so that I serve my community after graduation and reach out to those who are far away from God. Please pray for people who aid my spiritual maturity and serve alongside me in Sudan – so that we share our abilities and resources for the extension of the Gospel.