Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

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"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

- Ephesians 2:10 NIV

We have a reason to rejoice! We are the Almighty's handiwork, created in Christ, and we indeed have a purpose! Let us keep that in mind while we maneuver our way through life remembering that the end is His glory.

For ABTS, we are constantly reminded about that. "When I look back, I see how the Lord had been preparing us gradually for such a time. We now have most of the pieces of the puzzle; we need God's wisdom and guidance to put them together!" These are the words of Walid Zailaa who is leading the design team of our renewed Bachelor of Theology. Last month, you read about the new strategic direction. This month, I invite you to read about this high-level design on our website, and next month, we will share about the holistic formation elements of this modified program. I also invite you to continue reading below to learn about recent events at ABTS, and join us in prayer with our online students.

Loulwa El Maalouf, Development and Partner Relations Manager

Beyond the Classroom Setting

Our Residential Students Take Their Online Courses During Lockdown

Sharaf from Egypt is an early riser. At sunrise, he has his coffee and plans for a productive day while Egypt is yet asleep. Lately, with winds of COVID-19 sweeping over the country, Sharaf has been doing most of his work online while in lockdown.

He continues his theological training online while taking English lessons with a friend in Turkey. He helps with an online Bible study of 40 Arabs living in different parts of the world including Iraq, Dubai, Turkey, Finland and the US. He posts reflections on five Facebook pages that target seekers of Christ. Sharaf is happy that he can manage his time between ministry and education.

The adjustment wasn't easy for all our students when the online courses began on April 8. Now that they finished their first set of online module courses on June 24 and have begun to take the last module courses for this academic year, they are thankful for the opportunity to study during lockdown and for the flexibility online learning provides.

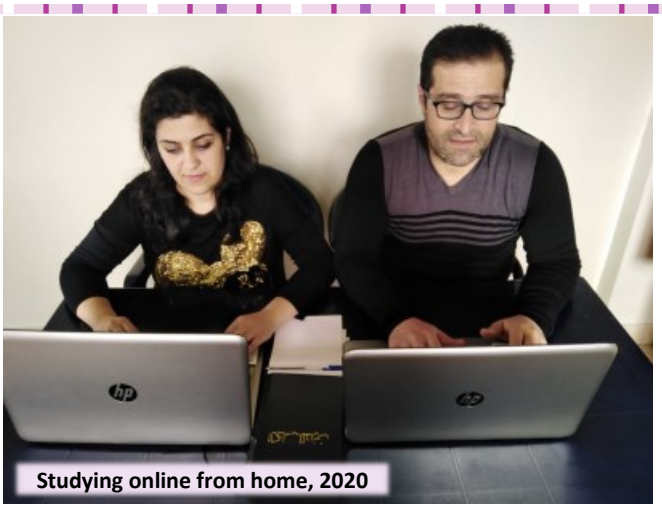
Each course is made up of ten week-long units. Every Wednesday morning, the unit material is made available on Moodle for our students to use for the rest of the week before they submit their assignments, which include readings, case studies and participating in the forum. The course then ends with a practical writing assignment that is related to the context of their ministry.

Noha from Sudan has been on campus all throughout the pandemic while travel restrictions were still enforced. While struggling with concerns of having to return to online learning, she shared about her experience with the online courses. She said of the *Biblical Theology* course,

> The *Biblical Theology* course was an eye opener. I was delighted to see how the Bible is one whole story. I had heard it too many times before, but through this course, I got to fully comprehend what it means. This made me feel closer to the Bible so that I no longer separated myself from God's people in the Old Testament or the people of the early Church. We are part of what happened in the Bible.

The *Biblical Theology* course taught by Walid Zailaa helps students communicate biblical foundations effectively to those inside and outside the church. Students see the story of redemption played out in the Bible from Creation to Revelation. It motivates them to be Kingdom driven as an anguished world cries out for hope today.

Studying in the classroom, 2019


Studying online from home, 2020

In Sudan, Noha leads the discipleship ministry at her local church, which makes this course vital to her ministry. (In addition to the *Biblical Theology* course, first-year students took the course *History of Christianity* taught by Abed El Kareem Zien El Dine.) Noha said of online courses, "The courses made me ask many practical questions that are related to the context of my own ministry. They are difficult questions yet very important. This is what I came for in the first place – to apply what I learn here in my Sudanese context."

Susanna from Sudan learned to take the needed precautions while on campus. She was in tears when the airports first closed, but now she sees God's hand in it all. Unlike Noha, who has already experienced online education while studying for her Certificate in Ministry, Susanna had to start anew, but she soon understood its workings. A second-year student, she took the *Stewardship* course taught by Elie Haddad and the *Leadership* course by Bassem Melki. Susanna shared her experience studying the *Stewardship* course,

> The knowledge that God has made us stewards over everything we have was life changing. My husband and I came to regret all the time that had gone to waste, but in this revelation and conviction, we saw the hope of a new start – of learning to manage our time well so as not to lose any opportunity to be faithful stewards.
>
> COVID-19 has been a time for me to rethink and reset life. As a wife, I came to love and care for my husband in new ways. I learned to find time to read God's Word rather than drifting to social media. I learned to use social media for what is constructive.

For instance, she and her husband Youssef have been counseling a group of Sudanese married couples online. They hold virtual meetings on how couples can overcome hard times together and help them privately through Facebook Messenger chat. They openly share their own experiences to which others can relate. This is uncommon in Sudan, as marital concerns are usually kept private, so Youssef and Susanna hope to focus more on counseling couples when they return home.

Susanna from Sudan

The *Stewardship* course aims to help the Arab Church, both individuals and groups, to be faithful stewards to God as they imitate Christ and glorify God. It includes practical and pastoral application for students to be faithful stewards over God's creation and partners with Him in advancing His will in the world today.

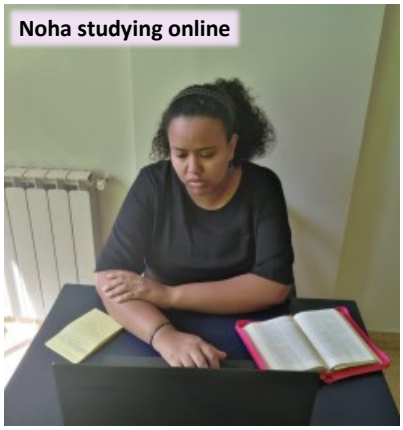
Of course, online learning hasn't always been smooth for students. Third-year student Awad made it back to South Sudan. Because he does not have an internet connection at home, he often goes for a week without checking in. In spite of this, when online learning started in April 8, he found a way to connect with us, receive his learning material, join in forums, and upload his homework.

Second-year student Elissar from Lebanon is currently staying with her parents. They neither have ongoing electricity nor internet at home. Sometimes she sleeps over at

her friend's house for several days in a row just to study online.

Demyana and her husband Awney have made it back to Egypt, but they feel their return is premature. They have not yet been able to find a house of their own or a job, so they stay with Demyana's parents, complete their academic journey online and wait for churches to reopen to see where God will lead them. These students decided to hold on to their callings despite the fluctuating circumstances.

To our continuing students and to others who are in full-time ministry, a new distance learning program is the answer for theological training in this new global reality. It pains us to let go of the fulltime residential program we held dear for many years, but we move ahead to where God is leading us and reach out to many more Arab Church leaders in the region and beyond.


Noha studying online

Do you feel called to take part in God's work in the Middle East and North Africa?

We invite you to partner with us in training and equipping leaders for the Church in the Arab World.

Contact Loulwa, our Partnerships Manager

A Dynamic Response to Modern Difficulties: MEC 2020

Thursday, June 18 was a hectic day at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS). All day long you could see staff members rushing in and out of offices, moving furniture, laying down Ethernet cables, and turning the second-floor conference room into an online "control" room. It was a big day because that afternoon, we launched our first Middle East Conversations 2020 webinar.

"Over the past 16 years, the Middle East Consultation established a tradition of bringing people together in Lebanon during the third week of June to facilitate conversations on important topics and bring together voices and perspectives from the Middle East and North Africa region and beyond," says Brent Hamoud, Programs Coordinator for the Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES) at ABTS. "We had already developed this year's Consultation when the pandemic hit in late February, so we had to rethink our entire concept. The question for us was: can we still provide a platform for discussion while featuring regional voices on important global discourse? We are attempting to answer this question by moving from the physical weeklong Consultation to virtual Conversations via a series of online webinars on current global and regional discourses while engaging the audience and speakers in a dynamic way."

"The purpose of these conversations is to lend Middle Eastern voices to the global discourse on urgent matters of faith and

The control room during the webinar

witness" said ABTS President Elie Haddad in his opening note on the 18th. The webinar, titled *A Dynamic Pause: Reflections on Simplicity, Purpose, and Transformation in this Time of Pandemic,* was the first of several more to come over the next few months and set up the conversation on how we should respond to the changes to our means of life in the post pandemic world. The webinar was facilitated by ABTS Assistant Professor Abed El Kareem Zien El Dien and featured Rima Nasrallah, Professor of Practical Theology at the Near East School of Theology, Gary Nelson, President of Tyndale University, and Martin Accad, Chief Academic Officer at ABTS,

who gave their thoughts on how we can lead a purposeful life as we emerge into the post-pandemic world.

Martin Accad during the first webinar

Talking from the standpoint of a theologian now invested in distance-based education, keynote speaker Accad highlighted that it is necessary for us to think transformatively and come to terms with persistent habits and assumptions about church and ministry. “The Church has to think again about the reason for its existence; how do we return to the fundamental meaning of a church, and how do we work towards a new and globally sustainable conception of the church?” Accad asked us to think through the current crises through the metaphor of the cocoon going through metamorphosis; “If we do not transform ourselves using the lessons we learn during these crises, we will not be able to rise to the challenges of the post-pandemic world.”

Nasrallah answered and said, “The crises have been like a metal foundry; they have shown us the flaws in our society and have given us the opportunity to improve ourselves. Our call today is to point out these difficulties and work towards bettering ourselves and our communities, but my hesitation is that we are overestimating our trust in humanity being able to achieve this change and forget that we live in a cycle of sin. We have to depend on God so that we are to reach what He wants us to reach.”

In turn, Nelson shared, “Much of the language in North America is framed around the idea that we have been moved into a new normal; I want to suggest that this new normal has been a reality that we have been facing for a long time […] The challenge before us is the nurturing of some kind of ability to negotiate this world with courage and resilience.”

“I think this was a very timely and needed topic during the unfolding ‘crises’,” said Nasrallah. “I believe it was a good solution in light of the current circumstances. It was more environmentally friendly than a physical consultation and allowed for a wider range of people to participate. However, it was a pity that we could not make direct contact. I would have liked to see everyone and hear their voices. I pray that the Lord shows us new ways to bear witness and care for His creation in a responsible and just manner.”

“I learned a lot from this webinar,” shared an attendee from Egypt. “We cannot go back to the way we used to act before the pandemic, so what the speakers highlighted about being wise with resources and centering our conception of the church on the people felt extremely relevant to the situation here. As we adapt to the pandemic and the post-pandemic world, it is vital that we transform these new methods into a lifestyle. The webinar felt very productive as it helped me think through these concepts, and I am looking forward to what I will learn from next month’s webinar.”

Read more about the details of the June Conversation here!

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

Register Now!

Pray with Us: Prayer Requests from Some of Our Online Students

Sudanese living in Saudi Arabia

Pray for my ministry in Saudi Arabia. I praise the Lord that the ministry is constantly growing, but as it grows, dangers and difficulties increase. Pray for more opportunities to witness of Christ and for the wisdom and courage needed to do that.

Iraqi living in Finland

I want others to find the joy that I found in Christ. Pray that my mother, my two sisters and my four brothers come to Christ and get saved.

Rana | Syrian living in Syria

The situation in Syria is heartbreaking. Famine has spread across its lands. The people are despairing as prices continue to skyrocket. To top it off, the coronavirus spread has accelerated. Prayer movements across the country call for the disappearance of the virus and the healing of our land. Pray along with us, and pray for me and for the women with whom I serve. We have much work to do in the Lord's field. Pray that we share the gospel as we visit the sick and see to the needs of people.

Walid | Syrian living in Lebanon

I serve with True Vine Church in Zahle at the relief ministry center for refugees. The living conditions of Syrian families in refugee camps are heartbreaking in light of the worsening economic situation. Words fail to describe the tragic sight. My prayers go out to them, and I ask you to join me in prayer.

Nadim | Lebanese living in Lebanon

Pray for the Church in Lebanon and its gospel mission. Pray for my local Baptist church in Tripoli, that has served many. Pray for those whom the church has discipled, baptized and trained for ministry to be rooted in the faith and dedicated to their calling.

Dalia | Lebanese living in Lebanon

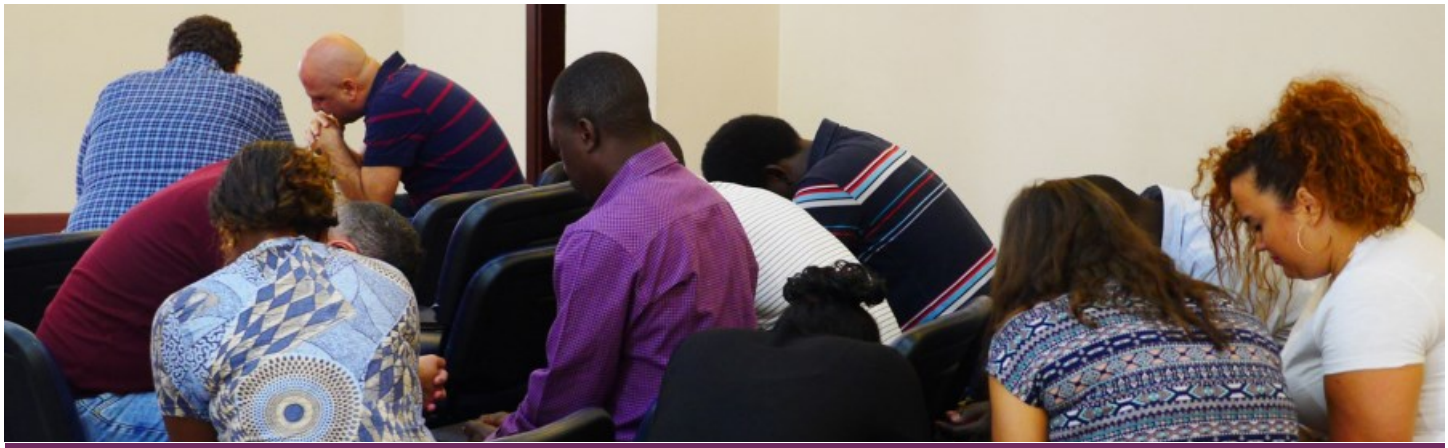
Please pray for my local church that we find a good piece of land for a church building. Pray for us as we help those in need through providing food packages and medicine. Pray for more workers alongside us and for protection as we venture into unsafe places.

Syrian living in Syria

Sometimes churches in Syria tend to work as separate entities, to look down on, or even ignore other churches. Pray for churches in Syria to work in solidarity as one body so that the Church may shine bright in the country. Also, pray that the Lord directs those who are writing the laws of the constitution that will soon be put in place.

Moroccan Student

My husband, who is a residential student, and I are still on ABTS campus awaiting our return home once the airports reopen. Please pray for us as we resettle in Morocco and for our upcoming ministry there. Aside from our ministry with our home church, we would like to start a media ministry, as it is my husband's area of expertise. We would also like to focus on children's ministry.

"The Middle East and North Africa region is perhaps the least-reached region in the world. As we transition our curriculum to suit today's changing needs and adjust our approach to leadership formation accordingly, please pray for fresh expressions of church and witness that will be fruitful for discipleship and the multiplication of vibrant communities of Jesus followers."

– W.W., Assistant Professor of Missiology