



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

December 2021



The end of a calendar year is a good time to look back, to evaluate and assess accomplishments based on the plans and objectives initially set. Although we regularly do this at ABTS, seldom have the outcomes been commensurate with the plans. Our plans are usually based on what we anticipate God wants us to do during the year. We plan for growth, but not much for surprises. God, however, always surprises us. Things happen during the year that we did not anticipate or plan for. Every year, we get the feeling that God has taken us on a journey that is much farther than we had predicted.

We had written about the year 2020 being a miracle year. It started with intense challenges that seemed unsurmountable and ended with God breathing new life into ABTS, ushering us into a new season of ministry that is quite different from the season before. We have been documenting our [change in direction](#). We concluded 2020 with a solid launching pad for this new season to continue and flourish.

We were wondering at the start of 2021, with the increasing political, economic, and social turmoil in Lebanon, whether the new direction could be sustained. As usual, God took us on an amazing journey of exploring new depths of His sovereignty and provision. The year that we thought we would hardly get by ended up becoming another year of growth in ministry, in impact, and in institutional preparedness. The following are some highlights of what 2021 looked like.



ABTS Faculty Meeting

Subscribe to our weekly blog to read theological reflections by ABTS voices about pressing matters of faith and witness in the Middle East and beyond.



Formal Programs

The fully online [*Certificate in Ministry*](#) continues to serve the Church in the region. We are seeing a growing student body with more diversity in nationality, ministry location, and religious background. This certificate is equivalent to a full year of full-time studies and provides high accessibility and flexibility for all Arabic-speaking Christ followers who are serious about serving God through their churches.

The new hybrid [*Integrated Theology Program*](#), which is an adaptation of the earlier residential program, continues to equip the students who transitioned from the residential program and has now accepted a second cohort of new students. Having this core vocational program delivered in a hybrid format has allowed more students from more countries around the Arab world to enroll and be equipped for ministry. This program is designed for key Church leaders who are immersed in ministry yet are able and willing to dedicate enough hours every week to be trained for more effective ministry. We are delighted that many of our *Certificate in Ministry* graduates have joined this new hybrid degree through a bridging program specially designed for them.

Our plan for this program is to have our students come to Beirut for two weeks every year and for our faculty to travel to our students and work with them within their ministry contexts. This has not been possible yet due to the prevailing travel restrictions. Instead, we have been using our new Zoom Rooms to accomplish these objectives virtually.

The hybrid [*Master of Religion in Middle Eastern and North African Studies*](#) is our only degree that is taught in English. It continues as before, except that we have temporarily replaced the physical residencies in Beirut with virtual residencies. We are hoping that the in-person residencies can resume starting mid 2022.

We are currently developing two new programs. The first is a *Master of Theology in Research*. The objective of this new degree is to prepare serious Arab scholars to publish high-

quality academic and theological books in Arabic as well as to prepare them for further studies. We are planning to launch this program in fall 2022. The second is a theological PhD program in the context of the Middle East, developed in collaboration with two other seminaries in the region. The program will meet the need for an accessible, contextually rooted, quality doctoral program oriented toward the Church in the Middle East. We are expecting to launch this new program by 2023.

Non-formal Programs

The peacemaking program has taken a new direction. While maintaining an [*interfaith youth initiative*](#), the crux of the peacemaking work is now grounded within the local churches. This work has been growing fast and is opening the door for growth in non-formal training. Our desire is to meet the various educational needs of the churches.



Our annual [*Middle East Consultation*](#) is also transforming. Due to the inability to hold large in-person gatherings for the last two years, we have held our consultations in virtual form. Our plan for 2022 is a hybrid consultation that will conduct an exploratory study of Christian peacemaking in a Middle Eastern context.

During 2021, the [*ABTS blog*](#) was transformed to become the voice of the faculty, commenting on many contemporary issues of local, regional, and global concern. We invite you to follow our blog and to join the conversations that are taking place on this platform.

Institutional Preparedness

In addition to the programs, we are going through a major shift in our facilities and services. We have been investing heavily in educational technologies that support our new modes of delivery. For example, we had the opportunity to upgrade two of our classrooms to become smart classrooms. This was an essential step to support the online and hybrid programs.

We have started constructing a new library and research center.

We plan to move our library to the new building during the second half of 2022. This is an essential step in preparation for the new graduate programs. However, with the hybrid programs, a physical library is not enough. Consequently, we are also developing a new Arabic digital library that our students can access. This digital library, through MENATE (Middle East and North Africa Association for Theological Education), will be available to all the Arabic-speaking seminaries in the region in early 2022.



New Library & Research Center

We are grateful for the way our facilities are growing with us. However, our most valuable resources are our people not our facilities. God has blessed us with an amazing group of faculty and staff who are passionate about God and about His Church in the region. Our team continues to be strengthened through new people joining regularly. Although Lebanon is experiencing a major emigration crisis, all staff at ABTS are thrilled to be part of what God is doing here.

2021 was indeed another miracle year of experiencing growth, reshaping ministry, and preparing for the future amid the many crises that Lebanon is battling. We cannot look back to see all that has transpired during the year, against all odds, without standing in awe of the One in whom all things hold together. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.

ABTS Extended Family Gathering

We serve as one big family at ABTS, bound by the same mission of serving the Church and submitting to God’s will in the region. Each one of our staff and faculty is aware of how they fit into that mission and how their work contributes to God’s call to us. And despite the difficulties we all face in Lebanon, as a family, we remind one another of the hope we have in Christ and the mission we are on. This Christmas season, we wished to meet the families of our ABTS staff, offer encouragement, and introduce them to our work and reason for hope. So, on December 16, we invited them for a time of gathering and fellowship at our Moore Conference Center.

After Dean of Faculty Bassem Melki lifted us with an opening prayer and invited everyone to introduce themselves, the worship team led us in celebrating Christ’s birth. ABTS President Elie Haddad then spoke on the reason Christ came to earth. When Luke documents the beginning of Jesus’s ministry, He tells of how Jesus decides to leave Capernaum and go to other towns, although He had a successful ministry there. The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords yields, in utmost obedience, to the will of the Father. Repeatedly across the gospel, the Lord asserts that He came to do the will of the Father. Just as the Father sent the Son, Elie shared, the Son is commissioning us to do the will of the Father and to plant hope in others.

Following Elie’s message, Loulwa El Maalouf, our Director of Partnerships, introduced the families to our vision and mission, our degree programs, our peacemaking endeavors, our Middle East Consultation and our weekly blog. An onlooker may not fully comprehend the extent of God’s work in the Arab world, because in



various parts of the region, the Church is in hiding. Once we take a closer look, however, we can see an amazing network of faithful Arab followers, including our students and graduates, tirelessly reaching out to their communities with the gospel. Loulwa offered the families a glimpse of this reality and expressed how humbled we are to be part of God's work in the region.

We are thankful for each of our staff and faculty members, and we pray that God continues to use them plentifully at ABTS, in their communities and amid their families.



Pray with Us: Peace Across the Arab world



Karima, Certificate in Ministry student | Algeria

Please pray for security across the country. We are hearing of murders and kidnappings more often lately and of many who are desperately trying to escape to European countries through illegal means due to the challenging economic situation. I also ask you to pray for the Algerian Church. Churches are still closed, and Christ followers are finding it increasingly difficult to share their faith openly.

Ara, 2012 Master of Divinity graduate | Iraq

Please pray that security and stability return to my beloved country, and that the Iraqi Church remains unwavering in reflecting Christ's love to all.

Male Certificate in Ministry student | Yemen

Though believers in Yemen may have different views about some things, they all live with the hope that God will intervene powerfully and restore Yemen to what it once was and that these present times are but pangs followed by the awaited birth. I wish to see God touching the hearts of Yemenis and showing them His light, so I ask you to pray for that, and pray that the war in Yemen ceases and peace abounds here instead.

Samir, Bachelor of Theology student | Syria

Please pray for the extremely difficult economic situation in Syria. The people of Syria are stumbling in the darkness of harsh living conditions, and many families are struggling with disintegration brought about by the war. I ask you to pray for these families as well.

Female Bachelor of Theology student | Morocco

Pray that the Church in Morocco is unified and not divided, and that all believers work hand in hand. May Moroccan believers come to know the significance of the Church and of building up one another. Pray for the sick at church and for those who are not yet deeply rooted in the Lord so that they may take firm steps of obedience.

Elsadig, Bachelor of Theology student | Sudan

Our country needs much prayer. We have had grave economic and political problems since the recent coup. Those living in Sudan sometimes cannot afford their daily bread. We ask you to pray that God intervenes in the country and calms the current billows that are tossing it about.

Merry Christmas from our Family to Yours!
May our Lord bless you as you prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior.