



Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

www.abtslebanon.org

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A Flexible Solution to a Regional Need

An Interview with our Online Certificate in Ministry Program Lead

With the growth that the Arab Church has seen in the past two decades, there is no doubt about the need for theologically trained and Biblically equipped Church ministry team members and leaders who can help the Church as it seeks to accomplish its Biblical mission. But with so many programs out there that cater to the different needs in the region, including our own [Integrated Theology Program](#) which provides access to contextual theological education to key Church leaders, why is a program like the Online Certificate in Ministry needed? We recently sat with Elia Shehata, our Online Certificate in Ministry Program Lead to find out why.

The impetus for the program emerged over time as we became increasingly aware of a need to make theological education more accessible to ministry team members and leaders of the Arab Church. The program was launched in February of 2015 with an initial cohort of 8 students and grew within its first cycle to provide theological learning opportunities to 21 students. Today, the program provides opportunities for theological education to more than 200 students a year. Since the program was launched, 62 students have graduated with a Certificate in Ministry. Students come from countries like Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Palestine, Jordan, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Tunis, Sudan, South Sudan, and the diaspora, and are active in ministry in their local churches. The program is made up of formal courses and non-formal elements like spiritual and ministerial reflections and mentoring sessions that together provide a holistic learning experience for the student. While a student can complete the degree within a year and a half if they take all courses offered through the program, the degree is designed to be flexible, and students can take up to 6 years to complete the Certificate. This flexibility also allows students who are not looking for a complete degree to only take the courses that are most beneficial to their ministries and contexts.



Elia During a Zoom Session

Speaking about the need for the program, Elia shared:

The Certificate in Ministry program is effective because it meets a very specific need for ministry in the Arab world. The Middle East and North Africa region is known for its instability. Whether it be economic crises, armed conflicts, or difficulties that arise suddenly like the most recent earthquakes, the Arab world seems to never be in want of adventure. And of course, with all these issues come many challenges to both ministry and everyday life. Many of our students are bi-vocational and work multiple shifts to support their families and ministries. Some have shared that they leave their house at 6 A.M. and don't come home before 6 P.M. They also have to care for their families and ministries. Because the Online Certificate in Ministry is designed to be flexible, it allows these leaders to study and grow more effectively in ministry and closer to God while also remaining faithful stewards of the rest of their responsibilities.

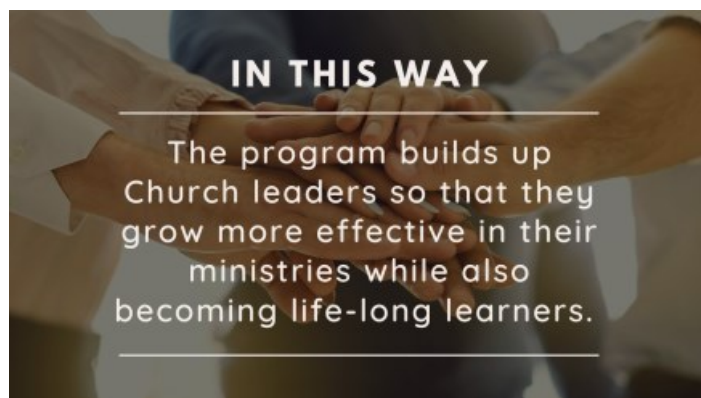


Furthermore, while one of its strengths is its flexibility, the program is designed in a way to provide a holistic approach to leadership formation. Course content always incorporates practical elements, and students are encouraged to apply what they learn in their ministries and contribute to the online forums with new insights. Because the program is fully online, we have integrated communal aspects into the course design. Students participate in three Zoom sessions at the beginning, middle, and end of each of the 11-week courses they take. This way, we are able to nurture a sense of community and help the students participate in theological discussions on a higher level. By emphasizing community, knowledge, and application, we are able to help our students grow spiritually, cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally.

Finally, because the situation in the Arab world is so unstable, our students often have difficulty finding stable and affordable internet connections. This is why the program is tailored in such a way that students can download the content at the start of the study-week, engage with the material offline, and work on the assignments throughout the week as internet connections become available.

Because the program builds up the students' skills incrementally by focusing on the cognitive, behavioral, and affective aspects of education, when they graduate, they are in an excellent position to continue pursuing theological studies through ABTS's Integrated Theology Program. In this way, the program builds up church leaders so that they grow more effective in their ministries while also becoming life-long learners.

Talking about the program's impact on students' lives, Elia shared:



As students work through the program, and as they accumulate knowledge throughout their ministerial and theological journeys, we see them grow into more Christlike leaders through their forum contributions and the stories they share about their experiences in ministry. It is always a blessing to see how their perspectives change as they learn more about their cohort and their contexts, ministries, families, and challenges. One student, for example, joined the program when I was a tutor. Back then, I remember that she had a completely one-track mind. In the early discussion forums for the course I tutored, it was always her way or the highway. She has now been through several of the program's courses and has changed a lot. She reached out to me recently to share how she has grown. She shared that she used to think of things as black or white but now her perspective has completely changed. Being exposed to the different perspectives of her fellow students from across the Arab world helped her change her outlook on life and ministry. Sometimes, as tutors, we don't get to see the fruit of our work, and that is a challenge we have to live with. But when we hear a testimony like "my life has been completely changed, and I am grateful for what the Lord has done in my life through the program", it is an encouragement like no other.



Tonina in Ministry

Tonina, one of our Lebanese students who serves in the North of Lebanon, recently talked to us about how the program has impacted her life, saying that: "my theological education is essential to my ministry. It helped me grow and mature and has enhanced my understanding of the Bible and what it teaches us about Christ."



The Academic and the Accreditation Team Meeting

Tutors, who are available around the clock to serve our students, play a very important role in the holistic development of the students and the growth of the program. We currently have a team of 6 tutors who work alongside Elia to support our students' education. The tutors also work alongside our faculty and academic team to improve the course content. The *Old Testament Survey* course, for example, was recently revised to offer more in-depth readings of the Old Testament that are relevant to ministry in the Arab world today. As we continue to improve our content and delivery method, we can better serve the Arab Church. The tutors' work is vital, especially when students face challenges in their theological education.

Discussing the difficulties that students face, Elia shared:

Because the program is fully online, it requires students to learn how to motivate themselves and organize their time efficiently. Many students find difficulty with that early on in their journeys of theological education. This is why we are intentional in our follow-up with the students. Our team also supports our students during disasters. With the earthquakes, for example, tutors worked hard as they checked in with our students, made sure that they were all safe, and encouraged them as they dealt with the impact that the earthquakes had on their lives and ministries. More recently with the conflict in Sudan, tutors are likewise working hard to support our Sudanese students to make sure they know that they are lifted up in prayer by people across the Arab world.

We are always in awe of how the Lord is at work, amid all the difficulties in the region, to bring people hope in Himself. Today more than ever, the Church is in need of well-equipped men and women who are able to nurture its growth in the Arab world. The Online Certificate in Ministry program helps us meet this need, especially for those who are balancing ministry, family, and work. Pray with us that the Lord continues to prepare Church leaders through the program, for **“the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few”**.

Check out our latest Blog Posts



[The AI Controversy?](#)



[Towards a “Weak” Doctrine of Scripture: A Thought Experiment](#)

- Pray with Us - Some of our Online Certificate in Ministry Students and Tutors

Elia | Program Lead

Let us pray together for peace in the Arab world. Pray that the Lord provides for the needs of our students. Pray for the tutors, that the Lord gives them wisdom and spiritual maturity to encourage and support our students effectively and in a Christlike manner. Finally, pray for me, that the Lord gives me strength and wisdom as I seek to balance between my family, ministry, work, and education as I pursue a Master of Theology.

Zeina | Tutor

Pray that the Lord gives us wisdom and strength in our ministry with the students so that we are able to serve them better. Also, pray for me and my family, that the Lord helps us make it through all the difficulties we face.

Mohamed | Tutor

Please pray for the Sudanese students who have had to suspend their studies because of the conflict in Sudan. Pray for the students, that the Lord strengthens and provides for them as they seek to serve Him, grow in their ministries, and support their families. Finally, pray that He gives us the wisdom and ability to encourage and support as many students as possible.

Mario | Student

I ask you to pray that the Lord gives me wisdom as I continue my studies, especially as I balance between my ministry and my theological education. Also, pray that the Lord use my ministry to bring glory to Him.

Tonina | Student

Thank you for praying for us! I ask you to pray for the ministry I am part of, that we are able to win people for His Kingdom. Pray for my family. My mom recently came to Christ! Pray that she and I together can reach out to our family with the gospel! Pray for my education, that I continue to grow as a minister and follower of Christ. Finally, I ask you to pray that He sends me a husband after His own heart if marriage is in His will for my life.

Zahir | Student

I thank the Lord for what I am learning in the program. Please pray that the Lord gives me strength and passion for learning as I approach the end of my studies for my Certificate degree, and as I look for ways to continue my theological education. Pray that He gives me wisdom as I seek to balance between my responsibility towards my education, ministry, and family. Also, pray for the Church in Algeria, that we come together around the Lord and look to Him in one spirit.