Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانيّة العربيّة

www.abtslebanon.org

October 2023

It is always a blessing for us to come alongside our students in their faith journeys and see how they are growing and maturing as followers and servants of Christ. As they share with us their struggles and successes, we get to see the hand of the Lord work through their lives and shape them. A joyous part of their journeys that we get to experience with them is the graduation ceremony where we get to celebrate with our graduating students the fruit of their dedication and commitment to growing closer to the Lord. The ceremony is an opportunity for them to close out one season of their lives and begin a new one, carrying with them the skills, knowledge, and characters they have developed at Seminary as part of their lifelong journeys of learning.

On September 30th, we celebrated the graduation of 19 of our students: 15 from the Online Certificate in Ministry program, 3 from the Bachelor of Theology, and 1 from the Master of Divinity. Our graduates this year came from Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Egypt. **Talking about what his journey of theological education has meant to him, Daniel Saab, Master of Divinity graduate and valedictorian for the 2022 – 2023 cohort of graduates shared:**

> *Our journey of theological education began out of a vision for a brighter future and desire to have our lives changed by coming to know our Lord more deeply. ABTS was the soil where our dreams were planted and came to fruition. I am grateful to have learned from dedicated teachers and mentors who not only shared their knowledge but also pushed us to seek out a deeper understanding of our faith and our vision, which helped us grow our dreams, our characters, and our understanding.*

Daniel, Master of Divinity Graduate

Before receiving their degrees, **keynote speaker George Sabra, President of the Near East School of Theology, encouraged our students with a message on Joy, saying that:**

> *The fruit of the spirit is joy, not happiness, and while happiness is temporary, joy is to have peace, comfort, and rest amid difficulty. And who is it who has joy? The book says that it is those who walked in darkness and have seen a great light that rejoice as people rejoice at the harvest. The presence of God amid darkness is what brings joy. And you, graduates, are called today to share this joy that transcends difficulty with all the people around us.*

George Sabra, President of the Near East School of Theology

We thank the Lord for our graduates and pray that He continues to guide them on their journeys of ministry and faith.

A Fellowship of Believers: The Annual Two-week Residency

At ABTS, we believe that cognitive learning alone is not enough to prepare effective men and women for contextual ministry in the Arab world. The Bible itself targets not only the cognitive aspect of our lives, but also the emotional, behavioral, and spiritual. Similarly, our approach to theological education goes beyond the cognitive to help our students grow affectively and behaviorally, and our curricula are built around this concept of comprehensive leadership formation. As their characters are formed and their minds sharpened, our students are better able to serve their communities holistically, sharing not only the word of God, but also His love and compassion with those around them. Our annual residency is an important opportunity to build community and work on the transformative elements that help the students grow holistically into more Christlike servants of His Kingdom.

Prayer during Chapel

The annual residency for the 2023 – 2024 academic year lasted from the 2nd till the 13th of October and was attended by 24 students. During the residency, our first-year students went through an induction period that focused on building new skills that prepared them to continue their studies when they are back home immersed in their ministry contexts. Throughout the induction, new students took the *Research Methodology* course, were introduced to theological

In Class

education, studied about spiritual gifts, and learned about the educational philosophy of ABTS. For our continuing students, the residency focused on exposing them to global voices through classes with visiting scholars. They took a course on the impact our cultures have on our faith, focusing on cultures of the Arab world. This course was co-taught by Henning Wrogemann and Yassir Eric. "The course helped us learn how we as new churches can easily wound our people while sharing the gospel" shared Zineb, a fifth-year student. "It was important for us to learn how to contend with our cultures in a Christlike manner while also being faithful to the message of the gospel." During the second week, continuing students took a class on critical thinking by Parush Parushev.

Henning and Yassir during Class

Throughout their residency, students spent a lot of time studying, eating, praying, and worshipping together. They also spent a lot of time outside of the classroom together during the spiritual retreat, the outings, and the meals they shared. This increased contact between the students, faculty, and staff is an important part of community building. **"The residency helps us build community in a capacity that we cannot do online" shared Walid Zailaa, Academic Dean at ABTS. He continued:**

> *Having the students join us for two weeks at ABTS gives them the chance to meet the faculty and staff at ABTS and their fellow students. This way, when they go back to their homes to study, they can study with people they know. It allows us to model Christlikeness and thus helps them grow affectively and behaviorally. Having both new and continuing students at Seminary at the same time allows them to learn from each other, exchange experiences, and gain insights into their own journeys. In this way they are not only learning from us but also from each other. Through all of this, they are being formed holistically into effective disciples who are ready to equip other disciples and contribute to the growth of His Kingdom in the Arab world.*

Parush during Class

"It is nice to finally meet the people I have been studying alongside for all these years!" shared Zineb. "It has been intriguing getting to know the intricacies of my classmates. Online platforms really don't do people justice!"

We thank the Lord for this opportunity to spend so much time with our new and continuing students. Their lives are truly lamps amid the darkness of the world, and seeing how brightly they shine when they are in fellowship is a blessing unlike any other. We pray for our students, that the Lord gives them the strength and perseverance to continue serving His Kingdom amid all the difficulties in the region. We pray that He continues to guide them during their journeys of theological education. Finally, we pray that He keeps us as faithful stewards as we come alongside the Arab Church.

My Peace I Give You: Middle East Consultation 2023

Every year since 2004, ABTS has held annual Consultations that bring together global and regional theologians, practitioners, and church ministry leaders and members in conversation over issues relevant to the needs of the Arab Church. The discussions are often difficult as we dig deep into the challenges, struggles, and failures that we face, both as individuals and as churches, but they are also opportunities for growth, healing, and discovery. This year's MEC was no different.

MEC 2023, held between the 25th and 27th of September, was the first Consultation since the pandemic to be held primarily in-person, with online elements made available through Zoom to those who could not make it to Lebanon for the three-day Consultation. It continued the work started by our Peacemaking team in 2022. Since 2019, our Peacemaking team has been working alongside a collaborative group of pastors to develop a Biblical and contextual approach to peacemaking that applies to Arab culture. The theory they developed was presented during MEC 2022, at the end of which a call was sent out to Arab church leaders who wanted to be trained to apply these theories in their home countries. 13 leaders from Sudan, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gulf answered the call. In February, these 13 leaders came to ABTS where they were trained in the theory and went back home to begin peacemaking initiatives of their own.

In this year's Consultation, these leaders came back with feedback on what worked and what didn't work in the initiatives they started. They shared intimate experiences of hurt and healing and how the Lord worked amid conflict to bring restoration. Their stories guided workshop conversations where participants were able to share their own personal experiences with conflict and struggle. And, with all the difficulties that the region has been experiencing lately – including the war in Sudan and the earthquakes in Syria and Morocco – the Consultation created an opportunity for many to share their hurts, take practical steps towards peace, and begin journeys of healing with the Lord.

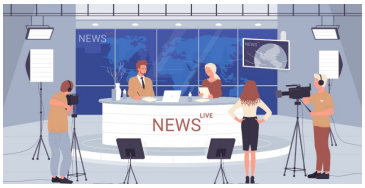
Commenting on the Consultation, ABTS President Elie Haddad shared:

> *This was one of the most difficult Consultations I've attended, not because peacemaking theories are difficult, but because they touch on all the aspects of our lives, reveal our weaknesses, wake up repressed memories, and motivate us to reconcile, pray, and embrace. It is a topic that can change our lives if we give it the attention it deserves.*

The Consultation ended with a synthesis of the discussions that helped us gain further insight into the challenges and possibilities for peacemaking ministries across the globe. We thank the Lord for what He is doing through our Consultation and our peacemaking ministry and pray that He continues to spread a culture of peace in the region through the Arab Church. With what is currently happening in the region, we are reminded for the desperate need for God's peace in a world filled with evil and injustice. Our prayer is that His peace that transcends all understanding fills the hearts of those who seek Him even in the midst of a cruel war.

Check out our latest Blog Posts

Layers of Peace: Highlights from the 2023 Middle East Consultation at ABTS



The Dangerous Role of the Media in Exacerbating Conflict ... and Other Theological Musings

- Pray with Us - Some of the Graduating Students

Yousif Ali | Bachelor of Theology

There are a lot of fears that have been brought up because of the war in Sudan. The future is uncertain, and the war has yet to come to a close, so I ask you to pray for my family as we seek His will for our lives. I ask you to pray as well for the members of the church who have had to leave their homes and belongings and seek refuge elsewhere. With the war, a lot of looting and theft has been going on, so pray for the people who have lost their homes and possessions due to the war. Pray for ministry in Sudan. The Lord is using us through outreach to different areas in the country, and Sudan is in dire need of His hope. Pray for peace, for healing, and for the future of Sudan.

Sanaa | Certificate in Ministry

I ask you to pray for my nuclear family and for my church family. Pray that the Lord blesses us with His protection, wisdom, and guidance. Pray also for Syria. The situation in the country is difficult, and we need intercessory prayer.

Saady | Certificate in Ministry

Amidst the noise of the world, and with the turmoil and conflicts that our people are facing in the Arab world, my prayer is that the Lord fills our hearts with peace and comfort, that He blesses us as we seek to study His word, and that He enlightens our minds and sets us alight with His Holy Spirit. I pray also that the Lord uses our theological education to bring fruit to His Kingdom.

Zahir | Certificate in Ministry

Please pray that the Lord comforts my family, especially my mom, after the passing of my father in July. Pray also that the Lord gives me wisdom to know how to manage my time between my studies, my ministry, and my family, especially as I move on to the Integrated Theology Program in October.

Youssef | Bachelor of Theology

I ask you to pray for my ministry, that the Lord continues to guide me as I seek to fulfill His will. Also, pray that I continue to grow into an effective servant of His Kingdom.

Samar | Certificate in Ministry

Please pray for my family, that the Lord grants them His strength and protection. Pray for the ministry team, that we are impactful wherever the Lord uses us, and that we see the fruit of our ministry. Finally, please pray for the children and teens we serve, that the word of God becomes rooted deeply in their hearts and changes their lives.

Sevin | Certificate in Ministry

I pray that the Lord uses me according to His wisdom and purpose among the people I am serving. Pray with me that we see the light of the Lord shine on the countries that are suffering in the region.

The Lord has taken the ministry of ABTS on a long and blessed journey over the years. Watch this video to hear more about the history of our ministry, its founding in the 1950s, and how the Lord has shaped it over the years!