Arab Baptist Theological Seminary
كليّة اللاهوت المعمدانيّة العربيّة

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Often, when we have conversations with our students and graduates about their experiences at ABTS, many share that it is the personal relationships they built with faculty and staff that had the most impact on their spiritual and ministerial formation. These past few years, with our programs being delivered predominantly online through our commitment to our strategic direction, we have been purposeful about continuing to build and maintain our relationships with our students and graduates through visits and workshops. During the last week of April, our Academic Dean Walid Zailaa and Registrar Rana Wazir Zailaa had the opportunity to visit our students, graduates, and their churches in one country in North Africa.

Over the past years, the Lord has been growing the Church in this country in an unprecedented way. This has been especially so in the wake of the difficulties and disasters that the region has seen in recent years. So, it is a blessing to be part of the work the Lord is doing in the region, by serving His Church and equipping leaders for effective ministry in North Africa.

During the trip, Rana and Walid were able to visit three different cities and two different churches. Speaking about the shape of the Church in the country, Walid shared:

> *It was inspiring to see how these believers met and worshipped together. The Church doesn't have an official presence in the country, so believers meet in their homes and do their best to avoid attention. The first church we visited, led by a current student, is made up mostly of young adults, and so they had a bigger foreign influence. The worship songs there are in Arabic. The second church, led by two of our graduates, is an older church, so they've had time to adapt their ministry to their context, and their worship songs are in two local dialects to suit the needs of their community. It was also a blessing to hear from them how what they learned at seminary is helping them reach out to their communities effectively.*

Walid & Rana Zailaa during the trip

Throughout the trip, Walid and Rana had the opportunity to spend time in fellowship with our students, graduates, and their churches, and see how theological education has an impact on their lives and ministries. Speaking about this, Rana shared:

At one point, we met with a group of our students and graduates for a time of fellowship where they shared with us about their ministries and how their theological education is helping them serve the Kingdom. Their country recently faced some natural disasters. The students and graduates shared that, because of their theological education, they were equipped when difficulty struck to know how to respond holistically by reaching out to their communities, offering relief aid, and sharing the gospel with those who were impacted. Many of them continue in the relief ministry till today!

We also met with a church pastored by a current student, and we were discussing his education so far. It was very encouraging to hear from the church how our student had been setting an example for them through his journey in the program, and how he was inspiring them to also pursue theological education. Two of the women there said that the growth and maturity they saw in him encouraged them to begin studying through our Certificate in Ministry program!

Toward the end of the trip, Walid held a training workshop for one of the churches on the concept of the covenant in the Old Testament. Talking about the church, Walid shared:

Seeing the ministry in person and talking to the church members was very enlightening for me. Because the church there faces a lot of scrutiny, and because gatherings of more than 20 people can be alarming, the church is very mission oriented. This is why they place a large emphasis on theological education: they want to equip leaders and send them out to start ministries and home groups in different areas of the country. Experiencing how the church is in its context help us to be better equipped to continue providing contextual and dynamic theological education that directly meets the needs of the church.

Through this visit, and through future visits to our students and graduates in their home countries, we hope that we can continue to nurture these relationships, invest further in their lives and the lives of their churches, and learn from them so that our programs remain dynamic and relevant to their ministry needs.

Walid preaching

Non-formal Training: A Workshop on Interpersonal Reconciliation

Conflict, if dealt with in a Christlike way, can become an opportunity for us to build healthier communities and strengthen relationships within the Church so that it might build better relationships with its community. This is why, in mid-April, we held a workshop that presented a biblical and contextual approach to interpersonal peacemaking for Church leaders from various Arab countries, equipping them with biblical skills and knowledge that are relevant to our context to pursue peace and unity within the body of Christ.

The three-day training workshop focused on practical steps for interpersonal reconciliation, helping the participants to understand their conflict resolution styles and the personalities of others before seeking to resolve conflict. The training had attendees look at confrontation, confession, and identifying issues and

confronting "the other" in hopes of restoration. The workshop was attended by 40 Arab Church leaders serving in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Tunisia, and Kuwait. Talking about the training, Director of Peacemaking and Non-Formal Training Bassem Melki shared:

> *In many places, the Church has lost its credibility within its community because it lacks the skills to resolve conflict, which is creating divisions within the Church and conflicts that extend beyond it. Through the workshop, we wanted to encourage every member in the body of Christ to take a courageous step towards resolving conflict and equip them to break the vicious cycle of broken relationships. The purpose is to honor God in our approach to conflict resolution, discover our contribution to conflict, and confess our mistakes to God and to others.*

During the workshop

Speaking about the workshop, Mazen, who pastors the Redeemer Baptist Church in Syria shared:

> *I wish that we had access to this type of education when I went to seminary. Knowing how to understand each other, work with each other, and help each other take on responsibilities and tasks that are appropriate for our talents and personalities are invaluable skills for our ministries.*

Rafed, our 2020 Bachelor of Theology graduate whom God is using to plant a church in Homs, Syria, shared:

> *Peacemaking and reconciliation are vital needs for the Arab Church today, so it is important for us not only to be equipped, but to also take what we are learning and share it with our ministry teams, leaders, and our church members. I was especially glad that the case studies gave us practical examples that I can apply directly in ministry. It was also eye-opening to realize that we are all on this path of healing with Christ, even if we are still a bit hurt.*

During a case study

Noura, from the Baghdad Baptist Church, shared:

> *This training is particularly helpful for us to use in our youth and women's ministries because there are a lot of people in these ministries who have tension with others and with whom we can be agents of peace and reconciliation. Understanding the impact that confession has, not only on resolving conflict but also on helping an individual heal, really enriched my understanding of our peacemaking ministry.*

After the conference, these leaders took the skills and knowledge they gained and are applying them in their contexts and churches. Some of them will come back in September during our Middle East Consultation (MEC 2024) to share their findings and help enrich the body of Christ through a theological discussion on interpersonal peacemaking and reconciliation.

Check out our latest blog posts:

My Journey Using Literary Context to Understand and Teach the Bible

Where can Wisdom be found? Fearing God and Shunning Evil as Transformation

- Pray with Us -

Bachelor of Theology Student

Join me in thanking the Lord for His blessings and all He has done for us. I ask you to pray for the difficult situation here in my country. We have recently been facing water scarcity. Pray for the ministry here, that the Lord blesses our work and that it bears fruit for His Kingdom. Finally, pray for my theological education, that the Lord strengthens me on this journey.

Oussama | Bachelor of Theology Student and Pastor

I ask you to pray for my theological education. Pray for the churches and church groups that my ministry team wants to plant. Pray that we are driven by His will and guidance. Finally, pray that the Lord strengthens me in my walk with Him.

Bachelor of Theology Student

I ask you to pray for my future in ministry, that the Lord guides me according to His will. Pray that He gives me the strength and wisdom to follow Him in my daily life. Pray, finally, for my family, that they come to know Christ as their savior.

Hasnaa | Bachelor of Theology Student Serving through Relief and Youth Ministry

I am going through some personal difficulties that often bring me down and discourage me, and sometimes hinder my theological education, but God is good, and every time I am discouraged, he intervenes and lifts me up. I ask you to pray for these difficulties, that the Lord would strengthen me as I learn to deal with them effectively.

Walid Zailaa | Academic Dean

Pray with us that the church in North Africa continues to grow as it reaches out to its surroundings. Pray that it is active in its community, responding prophetically to the needs in its context. Pray for unity in the church, and that the Lord keeps it through tribulation as it faces difficulty and persecution.

Rana Wazir Zailaa | Registrar

Pray for our students and alumni serving their people. Pray for their ministries and the impact they are having in their communities. The church in the North African country we visited has a real heart for mission and outreach, so pray for the ministry teams that are going out and starting home groups, that the Lord would use them for the growth of His Kingdom.

Bassem Melki | Director of Non-formal Training

As we prepare for this year's Middle East Consultation, pray that the church becomes better aware of the need for and importance of a biblical and contextual approach to conflict resolution and reconciliation. Pray that the leaders trained through the ministry remain excited about peacemaking and dare to go against the grain so that they become Christlike agents of change in their communities.